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THE
SUFİ MESSAGE
OF HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN

Volume IX

The Unity of Religious Ideals



THE SUFI MESSAGE OF HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN

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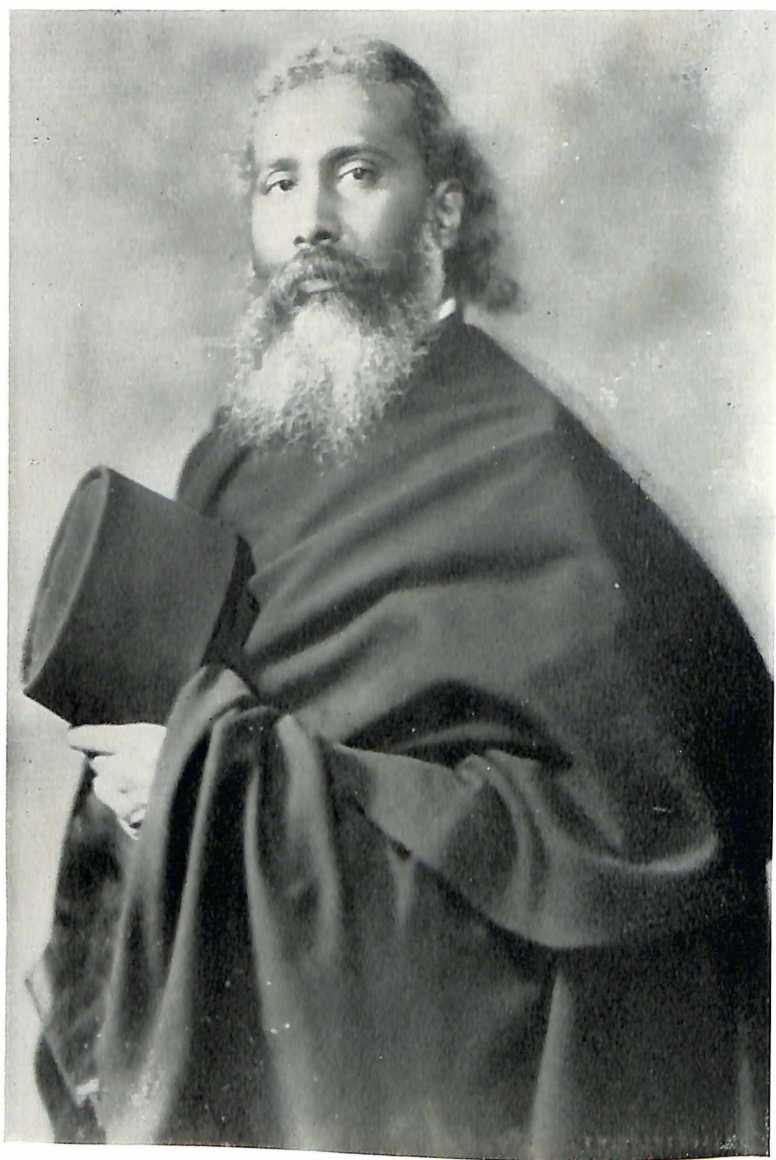


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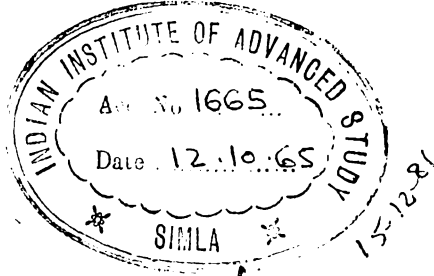
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OF
HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN

VOLUME IX
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PREFACE

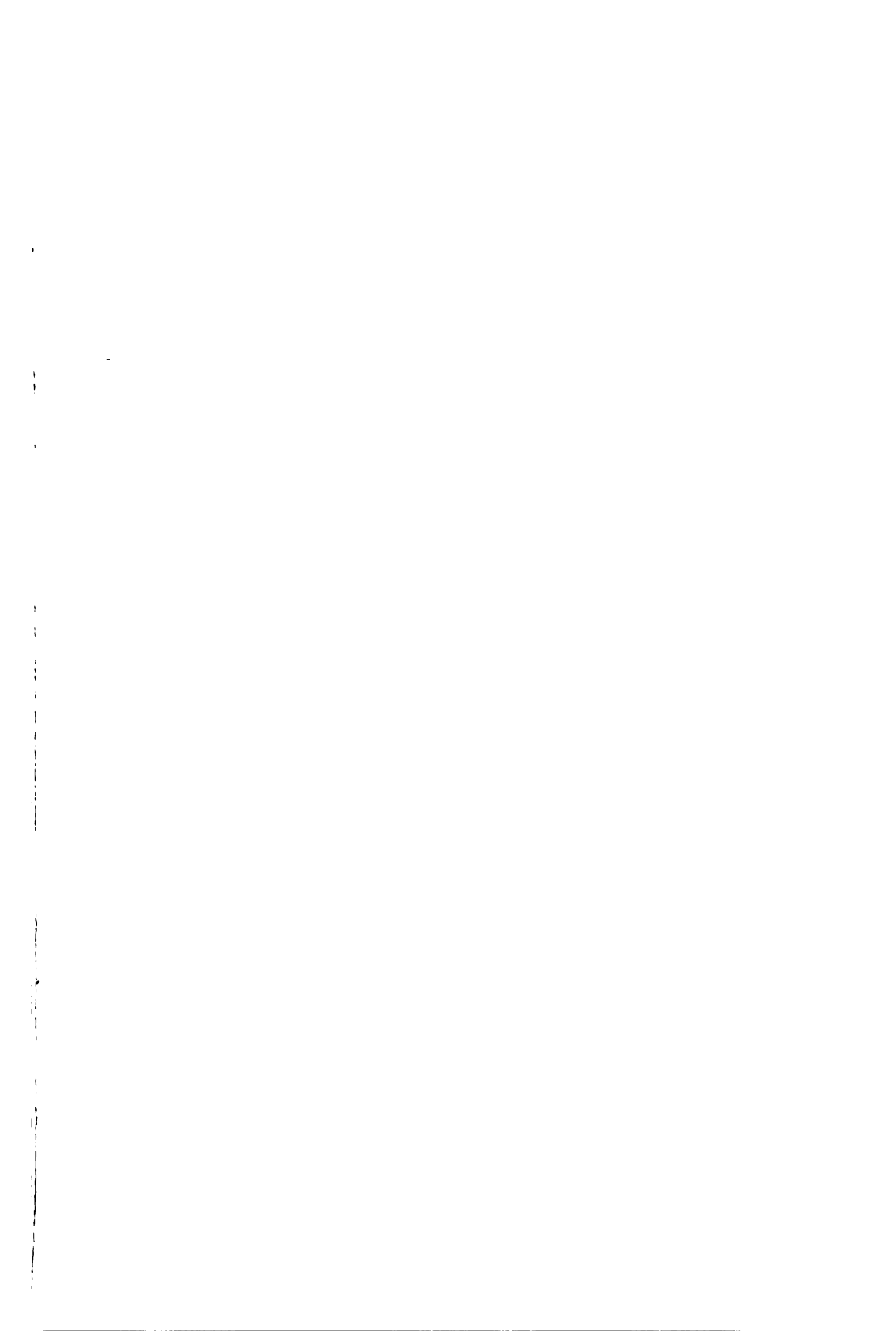
ALL RELIGIONS are essentially one; since there is only one God and one truth it cannot be otherwise. This is one of the principal tenets of Sufism, and is also perhaps the most important element of Hazrat Inayat Khan's message. According to the great Sufi mystic it is in the understanding and respecting of other people's religious ideas, in trying to look for resemblance and unity in every aspect of life instead of for the countless differences and distinctions, that the remedy for most of the world's ills is to be found. Thus the theme of unity recurs in many of the lectures and lessons which he gave during the sixteen years he travelled and taught in the West, delivering the message of Sufism which he often called the Message of Unity.

When *The Unity of Religious Ideals* appeared for the first time in 1927, shortly after Hazrat Inayat Khan's death, it was welcomed as a comprehensive survey of the religious aspects of Sufism, and for many years this book has served as a guide for those who, being interested in Sufism, wished to know more about the Sufi's attitude towards his own or other religions. In it they found a wealth of information concerning the essence and history of religion, the place of religion in our daily life, the lives of the prophets, the symbology of the scriptures, the Sufi Message and Movement, and other related subjects.

This present edition, the third, forms the ninth volume of *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*. It has been much enlarged, and its contents more systematically arranged.



PART I



UNITY AND UNIFORMITY

WE OFTEN confuse unity with uniformity. In reality it is the spirit of unity which creates uniformity for the sake of its beauty and the protection it gives. Throughout all ages both have existed: unity as the inner nature of every soul and the only purpose of life, and uniformity to help to fulfil that purpose. Unity is the goal and uniformity the means to reach that goal, but often the means has obscured the purpose. All through the ages the different religions which have been given to man for his spiritual development with the sole idea of unity, have gradually become a kind of community or nationality. Many people who belong to a Church accept its dogmas, claim a certain name for their religion, and consider all other children of God as separate; by doing so they lose the very seed of wisdom for whose development that religion was given. This error has existed from the beginning, so that instead of touching the true spirit, people have lost reality by seeking a false objective.

Religious differences have caused endless wars and disasters for the human race. The reason of this is that the spirit of unity has not been recognized, while undue regard has been paid to uniformity. In the present age, when the spirit of religion is at its lowest ebb and only the uniformity remains, divisions of classes and discords of all kinds spring up; one party, one class against another, the spirit of rivalry, jealousy, and destruction everywhere. The effect of this has been to keep man away from the consciousness of God. Very few indeed recognize Him; all humanity is labouring under a great unrest; and yet man thinks he is progressing while all the time he only progresses towards still greater unrest.

There can never be true progress when nations and kingdoms and peoples are divided; for when the races are divided then subdivisions come, and classes and parties also become divided. The same spirit of destruction is at work all the time, and even families become separated. Unity seems to be rooted out from

the hearts of men. Examples are not necessary; those who will notice it can see this state of humanity, this condition of life, all over the world.

When we seek a reason for this we find a right principle wrongly worked out. Uniformity is not a fault, indeed it is a great virtue; there is nothing wrong, for instance, in a uniform desire to help, to give service in time of need; but when the God-ideal is removed then it remains as a body without a soul, a corpse, and in the end it decays and causes foulness. However alive and prosperous the world may seem, life belongs only to the living, and when the living being is forgotten it is like a light under a bushel. Man becomes so absorbed in the pursuit of money that he becomes intoxicated and regardless of the harmony and happiness of others, and even of the harmony of his own being; and then he causes destruction. We have only to think of the wars humanity has gone through, and of this latest horror, to see the truth. It all proves that progress is in the wrong direction, and that everywhere unity is lacking. The scriptures given to the Jews, the Muslims, Parsis, Hindus, Buddhists, all have as their central truth the message of unity, but man has been so interested and absorbed in the poetry of these scriptures that he has forgotten their inner voice.

If only we would recognize the inner voice, we would see that the different scriptures all contain words spoken by one and the same voice. Some hear the voice, others only hear the words, just as in nature some see only the branches and others the roots of the tree; but all these different scriptures and ways of worship and of contemplating God are given for one purpose: the realization of unity. In unity reside the happiness and illumination of man, and his guidance in life. We all know unity by name, but most of us think of it as uniformity. The Vedanta for thousands of years in all its prayers and mantrams voiced this central theme: unity, the oneness of all. The Qur'an with all its warnings expresses in one essential sura the Being of God: that not only in the unseen, but in all that is seen there is one underlying current; and the Bible says that we live and move and have our being in God.

Of all the millions of believers in God perhaps only one makes

God a reality, and that is because the picture man makes of God is as limited as himself. The knowledge of God is beyond man's reason. Man only perceives things he is capable of perceiving. He cannot raise his imagination above what he is used to, and he cannot reach beyond his imagination to where the being of God is. The secret of God is hidden in the knowledge of unity. Man thinks, 'What can unity give me? Can it bring me happiness? What is there in it?' He can get the answer by observing and studying life more closely. See what an atmosphere the harmony of ten people can create; the power of love and the influence created by ten people is much greater than that created by one. Think then what would be the blessing for humanity if nations, races, and communities were united!

No doubt uniformity can teach the lesson of unity, but its purpose must not be for worldly gain; then it is destructive. The wise in all ages have dived deep into life in order to attain unity in themselves, and in order to spread unity. In the life of the world every man has some complaint to make, he lacks something, he is troubled by something; but this is only the external reason, the real truth is that he is not in unity with his own soul, for when there is disharmony in ourselves how can we spread harmony? When mind and body are at war the soul wants something else, and soul and mind are pulled by the body, or the body and mind by the soul; and so there is disharmony. When a man is in harmony with himself, he is in harmony with all; he produces harmony and gives harmony to all, he gives it out all the time.

This is a question that can be answered by understanding our relationship with God. The innermost being of man is the real being of God; man is always linked with God. If he could only realize it, it is by finding harmony in his own soul that he finds communion with God. All meditation and contemplation are taught with this purpose: to harmonize one's innermost being with God, so that He is seeing, hearing, thinking through us, and our being is a ray of His light; in that way we are even closer to God than the fishes are to the ocean in which they have their being. It is mostly interest in worldly things that unites one man with another in order that they can make more profit. How great would be this power if man would unite in true brotherhood!

As long as this teaching is hidden under a bushel the methods of uniformity cannot be beneficial; they have no life. The world, in spite of any success it may seem to have today, is suffering from the wrong application of a right principle.

True life cannot be ours until unity is achieved. It is the work of religion to promote the spirit of unity, in the knowledge and love of God to whom all devotion belongs. Man often seeks for psychic, occult, and magnetic powers. This is not the purpose of religion; these developments come of themselves. Where there is life and love, there is magnetism; love itself is the healing power and the remedy for all pain. All occult powers belong to the divine life, but man should live a natural life and realize the nature of God. The only studies which are worth accomplishing are those which lead to the realization of God, and of unity first with God and then with the self, and so with all. It is not necessary for us to be told that we have progressed; we ourselves will know when our heart goes forward; and by loving, forgiving, and serving, our whole life becomes one single vision of the sublime beauty of God.

RELIGION

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IN LIFE everybody follows either the way of free choice of action, or the way of Dharma, of duty. For example we may take a child which sees the fire, wants to touch it, and does so; this action will produce a certain disagreeable result which teaches the child something. This same teaching might also have come to the child as a warning from the parents, telling it that the result of its action would be painful. The child may thus refrain from a certain action because it accepts the warning of the parents before burning its hand.

Every child is born a pupil, one who is willing to learn and willing to believe. As the Prophet Mohammad has said, every soul is born on earth a believer, and it is only later that a man turns into an unbeliever. If he had not been born a believer he would never have learned the language of his country, for if someone had tried to teach him the words and he had refused to accept the teaching as true, he would never have learned the names and characteristics of beings and things. A child is born with the tendency to believe and to learn what it is taught.

The divine life has the ability to give life; and it gives this life as teaching to the children of the earth; it is this teaching that is Dharma, which means both duty and religion. Religions are many and differ from each other, but only in form, like water which is always the same element and formless: it only takes the shape of the channel or vessel that holds it and that it uses for its accommodation. Thus the water changes its name to river, lake, sea, stream, or pond; and it is the same with religion: the essential truth is one, but its aspects are different. Those who fight about external forms will always continue to fight, but those who recognize the inner truth will not disagree and will thus be able to harmonize the people of all religions.

Dharma has been given from time to time to the world, sometimes quietly and unobtrusively and sometimes in a loud voice;

but always it is a continual outpouring of the inner knowledge, of life, and of divine blessing. Those who stick to the old forms, closing their eyes to the inner truth, paralyse their Dharma by holding on to an old form and refusing the present stream which is sent. In so far as life is the source of activity, such people lose their activity; they remain where they stand as if dead. And when a man has been thus paralysed and shut out from further spiritual progress, he clings to outer forms which do not help him to progress. There was a time when the message was given while the people were waiting for a messenger to come, as happened in the time of Jesus Christ, when there were thousands and thousands waiting for a messenger from above. The Master came, and gave his service to the world, and left again. Some realized what had happened then, and some are still waiting. But the one who claimed to be Alpha and Omega is never absent; sometimes he shows himself, sometimes he keeps in the background.

When directed by the new spiritual inspiration, all aspects of life such as law, morals, and education come to new life; but if the spiritual current is lacking then there is no further progress in the different forms of life. People mostly think that the spiritual message must be something concrete and definite in the way of doctrines and principles; but that is a human tendency and does not belong to the divine nature, which is unlimited and is life itself. The divine message is the answer to the cry of souls, individually and collectively; the divine message is life and it is light. The sun does not teach anything, but in its light we learn to know all things. The sun does not cultivate the soil nor does it sow seed, but it helps the plants to grow, to flower, and to bear fruit.

The Sufi message, in its utter infancy, strikes the note of the day, and promises the fulfilment of the purpose for which now and then the blessing descends from above, the purpose of spreading love and peace on earth and among mankind.

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A person may belong to the best religion in the world: he does not live it, perhaps, but merely belongs to it. He says that he is a Muslim, or a Christian, or a Jew. He is sure it is the best religion, but at the same time he does not care to live it; he just belongs to it and thinks that belonging to a certain accepted religion is all that is needed. And people of all the different religions have made this appear to be so, owing to their enthusiasm and forced by their mission in life. For they have made facilities for those who belong to their particular religion, saying that by the very fact of their belonging to it they will be saved on the Day of Judgment, while the others, with all their good actions, will not be saved because they do not belong to that particular faith.

This is a man-made idea, not God-made. God is not the Father of one sect; God is the Father of the whole world, and all are entitled to be called His children, whether worthy or unworthy. In fact it is man's attitude towards God and truth which can bring him closer to God, who is the ideal of every soul. And if this attitude is not developed, then whatever a man's religion be he has failed to live it. Therefore what is important in life is to try and live the religion to which one belongs, or that one esteems, or that one believes to be one's religion.

But one should always keep in mind that religion has both a body and a soul. Whatever body of religion one may touch, one touches the soul; and if one touches the soul, one touches all its bodies, which are like its organs. All the organs constitute one body, and this is the body of the one religion, the religion of Alpha and Omega, which was and which is and which always will be. Therefore on the path of religion the dispute about who is right and who is wrong is not necessary. We do not know what is in the heart of a man. If outwardly he seems to be a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, or a Buddhist, we cannot be the judge of his religion, for every soul has a religion peculiar to itself, and no one else is entitled to judge it. There may be a person in a very humble garb, without any appearance of belief in God, or of piety or orthodoxy, and he may have a religion hidden in his heart which not everybody can understand. And there may be

another person who is highly evolved, and yet his outward conduct, which alone manifests to people's view, may appear to be altogether contrary to their own way of looking at things; and they may accuse him of being a materialist or an unbeliever, or someone who is far from God and truth. And yet we do not know; sometimes appearances are merely illusions; behind them there may be hidden the deepest religious devotion or the highest ideal, of which we know very little.

For the Sufi, therefore, the best thing is to respect a man's belief, his idea, his way of looking at life, whatever it may be, even if it is quite different from his own way of looking at it. It is this spirit of tolerance which, when developed, will bring about the brotherhood which is the essence of religion and the need of the present day.

To say, 'You are different and I am different, your religion is different and my religion is different, your belief is different and my belief is different', will not unite, it will only divide humanity. Those who, with the excuse of their great faith in their own religion, hurt the feelings of another and divide humanity which has the same source and goal, abuse religion, whatever be their faith. The message, at whatever period it came to the world, did not come just to a certain section of humanity; it did not come to raise only some few people who perhaps accepted the faith, the message, or a particular organized Church. No, all these things came afterwards. The rain does not fall in a certain land only; the sun does not shine only upon a particular country. All that comes from God is for all souls. If they are worthy, they deserve it; it is their reward; if they are unworthy, they are the more entitled to it. Verily, blessing is for every soul; for every soul, whatever be his faith or belief, belongs to God.

THE RELIGION OF THE HEART

IF ANYBODY asks what Sufism is, what kind of religion is it, the answer is that Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which the thing of primary importance is to seek God in the heart of mankind.

There are three ways of seeking God in the human heart. The first way is to recognize the divine in everyone and to be considerate towards every person with whom we come in contact, in our thought, speech, and action. Human personality is very delicate. The more living the heart, the more sensitive it is; but that which causes sensitiveness is the love-element in the heart, and love is God. The person whose heart is not sensitive is without feeling; his heart is not living, it is dead. In that case the divine Spirit is buried in his heart. A person who is always concerned with his own feelings, is so absorbed in himself that he has no time to think of another. His whole attention is taken up with his own feelings. He pities himself, he worries about his own pain, and is never open to sympathize with others. He who takes notice of the feelings of another person with whom he comes in contact, practises the first essential moral of Sufism.

The next way of practising this religion is to think of the feelings of someone who is not with one at the moment. One may feel for those who are present, but one often neglects to feel for someone who is out of sight. One speaks well of someone to his face, but it is better to speak well of him when he is absent. One sympathizes with the trouble of someone who is with one at the moment, but it is more praiseworthy to sympathize with one who is far away.

The third way of realizing the Sufi principle is to recognize in one's own feeling the feeling of God, to realize every impulse of love that rises in one's heart as a direction from God, to realize that love is a divine spark in one's heart, to blow that spark until a flame may rise to illuminate the path of one's life.

The symbol of the Sufi Movement, which is a heart with

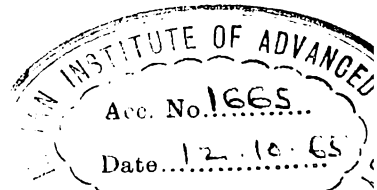
wings, denotes its ideal. The heart is both earthly and heavenly. The heart is a receptacle on earth of the divine Spirit, and when it holds the divine Spirit, it soars heavenward; the wings picture its rising. The crescent in the heart symbolizes responsiveness. It is the heart that responds to the spirit of God which rises. The crescent is a symbol of responsiveness because it grows fuller as the moon grows fuller by responding more and more to the sun as it progresses. The light one sees in the crescent is the light of the sun. As it gets more light with its increasing response, so it becomes fuller of the light of the sun. The star in the heart of the crescent represents the divine spark which is reflected in the human heart as love, and which helps the crescent towards its fullness.

The Sufi message is the message of the day. It does not bring theories or doctrines to add to those already existing and which puzzle the human mind. What the world needs today is the message of love, harmony, and beauty, the absence of which is the only tragedy of life. The Sufi message does not give a new law; it awakens in humanity the spirit of brotherhood, with tolerance on the part of each for the religion of the other, with forgiveness from each for the fault of the other. It teaches thoughtfulness and consideration, so as to create and maintain harmony in life; it teaches service and usefulness, which alone can make life in the world fruitful, and in this lies the satisfaction of every soul.

THE COMING WORLD RELIGION

THERE ARE many prophecies and several beliefs concerning this subject, but what is most needed is to understand what religion means. The present religion, the coming religion, or the past religion, is for those who divide the truth, which is one, into many. In point of fact what was is, and what is will be. Was this idea not supported by Jesus Christ, who said, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil'? If Jesus Christ said this, who else can come forth and say, 'I will give you a new religion'? There cannot be a new religion; one might as well say, 'I wish to teach you a new wisdom.' There cannot be a new wisdom; wisdom is the same, which was and is and always will be.

One may ask what, then, is this variety of religions which has engaged humanity for years in conflict with one another, so that most of the wars and battles were fought in the cause of religion. This only shows the childish character of human nature. Religion, which was given for unity, for harmony, for brotherhood, was used by childish human beings in order to fight and dispute and engage themselves in battles for years and years. And to a thoughtful person the most curious thing is to see how in the past men have given a most sacred character to war, calling it a sacred or holy war. And the same tendency of making war against one another, which began with religion, persisted in the time of materialism; the same tendency turned into war between nations. Yet the differences and distinctions between the different faiths and beliefs still remain, and the prejudices and differences and bigotry between nations still exist to a greater or lesser degree. What does this show? It shows that the meaning of true religion has not been understood by the majority, and therefore that mission which religion has to fulfil in connection with humanity still remains to be fulfilled. Jesus Christ hinted at that fulfilment when he said that he had come to fulfil the law, not to give a new law.



Religion can be considered from five different points of view. The first is the aspect of religion which is known to us as certain dogmas, laws, or teachings. And when we think of the conditions prevailing in the world today we see that the law is now given by the nation; every nation is now responsible for the order and peace of its people.

The second aspect of religion is the church and the form of the service. In this there are differences, and there will always be differences; it is a matter of temperament, of tendency, and it also depends upon the customs and beliefs of the people who have inherited that tendency from their ancestors. Some have in their house of prayer different forms and ceremonies which help them to feel elevated; others have a simple service since that appeals to them more.

No doubt the world is evolving towards uniformity, and just as now we see no very great difference between the forms of everything, of different customs of greeting, of dressing, and many other things, so people too are coming to a certain uniformity. At the same time, when we look at it from a different point of view, we shall find that uniformity very often takes away the beauty of life. In the countries which are civilized and advanced, where the architecture and houses are all on the same plan, where all are dressed in the same way, one becomes so tired of them that one likes to go to a different country and see houses which are different one from the other, and people also.

The method of writing music and the form of notation is the same for the whole Western world, but the distinction between the music of the French, Italians, Germans, and Russians gives a stimulus to the lover of music; and so it is with the distinctions of all forms. To want to make all people live alike and act alike means to turn all people into the same form and give them the same face, and what would happen then? The world would become very uninteresting. It would be like tuning all the keys of the piano to the same note. It is not necessary to change the notes of the piano; what is necessary is to understand harmony, to know how to create harmony among the different notes.

The third aspect of religion is the religious ideal, the Lord and Master of religion, the Lord and Master that a soul esteems as

its ideal. It is something which cannot be discussed, something about which one cannot argue. The less it is spoken of, the better it is. It is the outcome of the devotion of a sincere heart which gives birth to an ideal too sacred to mention, an ideal which cannot be compared or explained. And when the followers of different religions come to this question and dispute over their ideals, the sacred ideals which they have not known but have only heard about, and wish to prove one better than the other, they merely waste time and they destroy that sacred sentiment which can only be preserved in the heart.

The religious ideal is the medium by which one rises towards perfection. Whatever name a person gives to his ideal, that name is for him, and is most sacred to him. But this does not mean that giving it a name limits the ideal. There is only one ideal: the divine ideal. Call this Christ if we will, and let the same Christ be known by different names, given to him by various communities. For instance a person who has a great devotion, a great love and attachment for his friend, may speak about friendship in lofty words, and say what a sacred thing it is to become friends; but then there is another one who says, 'O, I know your friend and what he is; he is no better than anybody else.'

The true answer in such a case is given by Majnun, in the story told by the ancients. When someone said to Majnun, 'Leila, your beloved, is not so beautiful as you think,' he said, 'My Leila must be seen with my eyes. If you wish to see how beautiful Leila is, you must borrow my eyes.' Therefore if we wish to regard the object of devotion of whatever faith, of whatever community, of whatever people, we have to borrow their eyes, we have to borrow their heart. It is no use disputing over each historical tradition; they have often sprung from prejudice. Devotion is a matter of the heart, and is offered by the devotee.

The fourth aspect of religion is the idea of God. There will always be fights and discussions about this, as people are wont to say, 'The God of our family is one, and the God of your family is another.' In ancient times there was a dispute between the people who said that the God of Ben Israel was a special God; and so every community and every Church made its God a special God. If there is a special God, it is not only a special

God of a community, but a God of every individual. For man has to make his own God before he realizes the real God, but that God which man makes within himself becomes in the end the door by which he enters the shrine of his innermost being, the real God who is in the heart of man. And then one begins to realize that God is not a God of a certain community or people, but that God is the God of the whole Being.

Next we come to the aspect of religion which is not the law or the ceremony or the divine ideal or God, but which is apart from all these four. It is something living in the soul, in the mind, and in the heart of man; its absence keeps man as dead, and its presence gives him life. If there is any religion, it is this. And what is it? The Hindus have called it *Dharma*, which in the ordinary meaning of the word is duty. But it is something much greater than what we regard as duty in our everyday life. It is life itself. When a person is thoughtful and considerate, when he feels his obligations towards his fellow-man, towards his friend, towards his father or mother, or in whatever relation he may stand to others, it is something living, it is like water which gives the sense of living to the soul. It is this living soul which really makes a person alive. And the person who is not conscious of this, this tenderness, this sacredness of life, may be alive, but his soul is in the grave. One does not need to ask a man who is conscious of this what his religion or his belief is, for he is living it; life itself is his religion, and this is the true religion. The man conscious of honour, the man who has a sense of shame, a feeling of sincerity, whose sympathy and devotion are alive, that man is living, that man is religious.

This is the religion which has been the religion of the past and will be the religion of the future. All religion taught by Christ or any other of the great ones, was intended to awaken in man that sense which is awakened when religion is living. It does not matter then into which building one goes to pray, for every moment of one's life has become religion—not a religion in which one believes, but a religion which one lives.

What is the message of Sufism? Sufism is the message of digging out that water-like life which has been buried by the impressions of this material life. There is an English phrase: a

lost soul. But the soul is not lost; the soul is only buried. When it is dug out, then the divine life breaks forth like a spring of water. And the question is, what is digging? What does one dig in oneself? Is it not true, is it not said in the scriptures that God is love? Then where is God to be found? Is He to be found in the seventh heaven or is He to be found in the heart of man? He is to be found in the heart of man, which is his shrine. But if this heart is buried, if it has lost that light, that life, that warmth, what does this heart become? It becomes like a grave. In a popular English song there is a beautiful line which says, 'The light of a whole life dies when love is done.' That living thing in the heart is love. It may come forth as kindness, as friendship, as sympathy, as tolerance, as forgiveness, but in whatever form this living water rises from the heart, it proves the heart to be a divine spring. And when once this spring is open and is rising, then everything that a man does in action, in word, or in feeling is all religion; that man becomes truly religious.

If there is any new religion to come, it will be this religion, the religion of the heart. After all the suffering that has been brought to humanity by the recent war, man is beginning to open his eyes. And as time passes he will open his eyes and know and understand that true religion lies in opening the heart, in widening the outlook, and in living that religion which is the one religion.

SEEKING FOR THE IDEAL

RELIGION IS a need of the human soul. In all periods and at every stage of the evolution of humanity there has been a religion which people followed, for at every period the need for religion has been felt; and the reason is that the soul of man has several deep desires, and these desires are answered by religion.

The first desire is the search for the ideal. There comes a time when man seeks for a more complete justice than he finds among men, and when he seeks for someone on whom he can rely more surely than he can on his friends in the world. There comes a time when man feels a desire to open his heart to a Being who is above human beings and who can understand his heart. Man naturally desires to meet someone who is greater than himself, and when he has sought his ideal in the world of mortality, he is naturally inclined to turn towards someone who is higher than man, since the human soul cannot come up to his ideal. He wants to feel that there is someone who comes to his aid, someone who is near him in his loneliness. He feels the need of asking forgiveness of someone who is above human pettiness, and of seeking refuge under someone stronger than he. And to all these natural human tendencies there is an answer which is given by religion, and that answer is God.

Every living being on earth loves life above all else. The smallest insect, whose life lasts only an instant, tries to escape from any danger in order to live a moment longer. And the desire to live is most developed in man. As intelligence awakens in man, he begins to wonder whether life is merely transitory, and if after this life all is ended. To him the thought that after his short life the world will continue is more terrible than death. And if life had not an intoxicating effect, this thought would kill many people. The man who thinks that after this life there is nothing more, cannot dwell very long on that thought. Dwelling on this thought and meditating upon it gives the same feeling as standing on a great height and looking down: it terrifies a man.

The belief that our life will continue after we have gone through death is a most comforting idea for every soul. The man who has not received the reward of his efforts, of his goodness, who has not met in his life with an answer to his sense of justice, who has not found complete satisfaction, and who has not been able to attain his desire in life, his hope is in what will come after: and this is what religion promises him.

Thus the desire to live, if not on the earth then in the hereafter, exists in every person. And the one who looks at it with pessimism and argues against the possibility of the hereafter, does so only to establish in his mind a conviction that there is a hereafter. He will not admit it, for he thinks it is intelligent to deny it; but he is not willing to die, he is not willing to deny that there is a continual life.

The mission of devotion, of religion, of spirituality has been to bring to man that conviction which intellectual reasoning denies, but belief and faith alone can give. Is there one person in this world who would like his existence to cease for good? Not one. But everyone, whether he seems to be doing so or not, is in pursuit of some thread, some link, in order to be sure that there is a life in the hereafter. It is not true that there is no proof of the hereafter; only, those who want a proof look for that proof in the wrong direction. How can a proof of immortality be found in mortal existence? The proof of immortality is immortality itself. As life has no experience, it has no proof. If there is a proof, it is life itself. Coming to immortality from the limited conception of mortality is just like awakening from unconsciousness and becoming conscious. Has not every religion tried in its own way, by some means or another, to bring man to the realization that there is a life in the hereafter?

It is the present age which objects to believing something which can only be understood in its culmination; and thus it refuses to believe it at all. Belief when developed is faith, and it is in that faith that one will find a seal: through opening it, there comes a revelation of the continuity of life. No one but one's own self can convince one of the life in the hereafter; but if one can give oneself a belief to begin with the conviction will come by itself. Many have applied wrong methods in order to convince man

of the hereafter; and by trying to play with phenomena, instead of giving a new belief they have taken away the belief of the intelligent people and built a wrong belief in the simple ones.

The work of the Sufi message, therefore, is to use any of the different methods, devotional, religious, spiritual, which will suit the particular grade of a person's evolution, in order to prepare his heart for that conviction which is called the life immortal.

Man also has a desire for exaltation, the exaltation that is afforded him by cleanliness of body and purity of mind. Man longs to feel exalted both by the power of words and by his surroundings, and strives for exaltation by thought, by action, and by feeling. The nature of life in the world is such that it constantly drags man towards the earth. His senses, and the crudeness of human nature which jars continually, draw man towards the earth, bearing constantly the heavy burden of human responsibilities, and realizing in the end that these responsibilities are not of great importance. And the only change he can bring about to rid himself of material responsibilities is achieved by praying, either alone or joining with others in religious rites and ceremonies that afford him the means of exaltation in answer to his desire.

With the maturity of his soul, a man desires to probe the depths of life. He desires to discover the power latent within him, he longs to know the sources and goal of his life, he yearns to understand the aim and meaning of life, he wishes to understand the inner significance of things, and he wants to uncover all that is covered by form and name. He seeks for insight into cause and effect, he wants to touch the mystery of time and space, and he wishes to find the missing link between God and man—where man ends, where God begins. And this desire also finds its fulfilment in contact with the spirit that religion gives.

Finally it is a most natural desire of the human soul to seek for happiness and comfort. Man desires principles to guide his life, and he wishes for a moral standard to regulate the life of the community. He wishes for a balance of activity and repose; he desires union with the one whom he loves; he wishes for the security of all that belongs to him, a settled reciprocity, a fixed

give-and-take, and all things which bring about happiness and peace at home and in the nation.

In the world today many people think that one can do without religion, and that they themselves have outgrown religion by reason of their evolution. Many have no religious belief, and therefore the world has never been in a more chaotic condition. No doubt one finds in tradition and in history that in the name of religion the selfishness and ignorance of mankind have been given free reign; and this is the reason why man, revolting against this state of things, has forsaken religion and forgotten that spirit which, in the name of religion, has also played its part in the world. And now, in the absence of religious influence, the selfishness and ignorance which in the name of religion played a part in history, continue to do so under the name of modernism. In spite of the separation that man tries to make between himself and others, he has always felt something lacking in himself, even at home and in his own country. This can be seen today among materialists, who would not for one moment allow themselves to have a religious belief, but who yet are not satisfied. And the reason is that they lack something very great and important, something which they cannot attain to because they have built a wall around themselves.

LAW

‘THINK NOT that I am come to destroy the law. . . . I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil’, said Christ. This suggests two things. One is that to give a law is one of the principal objects of the coming of the messenger. In the traditions of the past we see that it was the divine law as it is called which governed the nations. And even now the law is necessarily based on a religious principle, which shows us that in earthly things also the divine guidance has always been considered most essential. The worldly wise do not know about spiritual things, whereas the spiritually wise are wise in earthly things also. And Christ, whose life was free from every earthly thought, and who was even withdrawn from the world, nevertheless gave to the people of his time the divine law. Krishna, with all his philosophical and mystical ideas, speaks of the law of worldly life. Today a Muslim follows most respectfully the law given by his Prophet, and recognizes with pride that his Prophet in his life experienced military service and political responsibilities, and that his Prophet was at the same time a man of the world and a man of God.

To whatever extent the world may evolve, a thoughtful man will never be able to deny the fact that it is not for everyone, for every mind, to touch the depths of thought. Whether there is aristocracy or democracy, there will always be a few souls who will have influence over many. We see that all men are different; each has his own way to follow, and each his own purpose in life, and no one can fill the place of another. If it happens in worldly affairs that there is what is called the man of the moment, then even in spiritual affairs there may be the soul of the age. The messengers who have brought the law have been the messengers of their time, but since man today only knows about earthly affairs, he concerns himself little with the affairs of the soul. He is therefore largely unaware of what happens in spiritual conditions; nevertheless the work of God and of creation pursues its course just the same. The Spirit which is

called Alpha and Omega is always present and is always doing its work, recognized or unrecognized.

There are five principal aspects of the law. Firstly, the institution of marriage and of divorce is most important for the peace of the world. This law is necessary to safeguard the rights of woman, whose position is more delicate than that of man. The recognition given to marriage by the law makes an impression upon the two people involved, pointing out that they are united by law and by religion. Divorce, which is sometimes necessary to put an end to the captivity of two persons who cannot agree in living together, is also a part of the law. If there were not a religious influence, if one had not the impression that one's marriage was made before God, it would very much lessen the seriousness with which marriage is regarded. For instance today there is a way of marrying which has nothing to do with religion, and then marriage often becomes simply a matter of the law-courts. One can imagine how man considers this question when it is something that can be settled in the court. Nothing in the world can take the place in marriage of what religion gives to it.

The second aspect is the division of property and the manner of safeguarding property. The law of religion, with the justice of God, teaches man to regard the rights of others as well as his own rights. Besides, religion teaches what one may rightfully call one's own, and what ought not to belong to one. It teaches also how one should earn money, and how one should spend it. The serious aspect of religion, the thought of God and truth which is behind all this, creates that spirit of honesty in life which religion is meant to create.

Thirdly, there is birth and there is death. When a child is born, a foundation for its spiritual development is laid if the family, to welcome it on earth, keeps in mind the thought of illumination in one form or another. They should also feel that it has come as a gift from God, and remember that they, the parents, are not the only ones responsible for this child's life, but that behind them there is God who shares their responsibility.

At the death of a person, the performing of a religious ceremony gives strength to the one who is passing from this world into another world, and it is also a consolation to those who think

of him with love. For it brings the thought that the one who has died is called towards the source whence he came. And added to the thought which comes with death, the religious ceremony creates also in the minds of those present the thought that they are not here permanently, that life is like a caravan, and that all have to go along the same road; one goes first, the others follow in their turn. Think what benefit this thought brings! It makes pale the face of this illusory world, which yet keeps so many engaged day and night in its pursuit. It offers man an opportunity to be still for a moment and consider life, man who is always absorbed in the affairs of this world of illusion.

The fourth aspect of the law of religion concerns social life. For people meeting in a church, at a service or a religious ceremony, there is naturally the opportunity of joining together in the thought of God and of religion. Places of pilgrimage and sacred places all unite humanity in the love of God and in the feeling of unity. Think of people gathered together at an exhibition, a fair; the feeling that animates them all is only gain: to get the best of the bargain. What an incomparable difference when one meets in sacred and religious thought!

The fifth aspect is political and comprises all that concerns the community or the country; it is a law which with divine justice concerns itself with the affairs of the community and the affairs of the country. A problem which cannot be solved otherwise, can be solved by spiritual enlightenment. Man is naturally selfish, and justice cannot exist in the heart in which there is the thought of self. Only he can look at things from a just point of view whose heart reflects God absolutely, God who is above nation, race, caste, creed, or religion.

No doubt, where there is truth there is also untruth, where there is day there is also night. It is natural that the religious authorities should often have abused the law. When a spiritual man concerns himself with the things of the world, it is extremely difficult for him not to allow them to throw their shadow on his heart. Men, revolted by the abuse of religion, have often given up religion itself, and it is this that has made man ignorant of the divine source of the law that rules the affairs of the world.

Today man thinks that it is the work of intellectual people to

make laws. This brings constant disappointments both to nations and to communities. The lack of order and peace throughout the world today may be said to be caused by the want of that law which must come from God, from the divine source. Man is too small to be able to find the solution to the problems of this world. That is the work of the perfect wisdom which is found in a Personality without limitations, and with which the human personality cannot be compared, just as one cannot compare a drop with the ocean.

P R A Y E R

i

THE FIRST aspect of prayer is giving thanks to God for all the numberless blessings that are bestowed upon us at every moment of the day and night, and of which we are mostly unconscious.

The second aspect of prayer is laying our shortcomings before the unlimited perfection of the divine Being, and asking His forgiveness. This makes man conscious of his smallness, of his limitation, and therefore makes him humble before his God. And by humbling himself before God man does not lose any virtue. God alone has the right to demand complete humility.

There is another side to this question: although humility is painful to the pride of man, the joy of humility is never known by the proud. The effect produced upon a man's own feeling is as if, by his very humility, he had opened the doors of the shrine of God which is in the heart of man. He who asks forgiveness of his friend, feels a joy that the friend does not know. And it must not be forgotten that it is not pride that gives joy, but humility which gives a special joy. It is told that a Maharana of Udhaipur was mourning for the death of his mother, and for a long time his grief was so great that he could not overcome it. His ministers and friends tried to console him, telling him how fortunate he was, how great was his influence and power. He answered, 'Yes, it is true. But one thing grieves me. I have everyone to bow before me, to give way to me, to salute me, to obey; but there was one, when I came into the palace, before whom I could be humble. My mother was the one before whom I could humble myself, and I cannot tell you the joy that was to me!'

Humility has several forms, and these are observed according to the customs of different peoples. There exist all kinds of forms of respect, towards parents, teachers or masters; but after examining and studying life keenly, one finds that it is to God alone that all forms of respect are addressed. It is this lesson that the various

religions have taught to different peoples according to their needs.

The third aspect of prayer is to tell God one's difficulties and troubles, and to ask Him for what one needs and wants. And who else deserves this trust but God? It is true that we have relations and friends who love us and wish to help us; but they are only human beings, travelling in the same boat on the same sea, subject to all the same difficulties and limitations. Man can only be helped by man to a certain extent. The more one studies human nature, the more one feels inclined to bring one's troubles, difficulties, and sorrows, before God alone, and this is a part of what is taught in the form of prayer.

The fourth aspect of prayer is like the call of the lover to the beloved. No doubt this is a higher form; and to be able to pray in this manner man must rise above the ordinary level of life. Just as it is difficult for a human being to love man, whom he sees, so it is more difficult to love God, whom one has never seen. Loving one's fellow-man, yes; but not everyone is capable of loving the formless, the God-ideal, and of evolving by the lesson of love. For in this love there is no disappointment, and only the love of God can fulfil the desire of the human soul, and all other forms of love are only steps that lead to the love of God. But who can explain the love of God to one who has never felt it? God is the perfect ideal, His love is the perfect love. There is the love of the mate, of parents, of friends, of children, but in the love of God all is found combined. Therefore its joy is perfect. The love of God is living and everlasting and is the love of the true Beloved.

The fifth aspect of prayer is to know God, and in this way to draw nearer to God; this is the real meaning of the expression at-one-ment, which means complete union. It cannot be learned; it is a natural tendency; it is the attraction of the soul to God; it is like the negative pole of the electric wire which is attracted to the positive. It means that the happiness of man depends on his nearness to God, and this too has been taught in the form of prayer.

It is these five aspects of prayer which constitute the form of religious worship. Every religion, at whatever time and in whatever country, has given prayer as its method. But man has

always shown his childish nature. He has always fought with his neighbour because he does not pray in the same way. Man has taken the outer form of prayer. He has used the outer form to satisfy his vanity, and the consequence has been that, revolted by this state of things, he has given up prayer. For instance Protestantism is among other things a sort of protest against the Catholic form of prayer. Many people, between the two, have given up prayer; and giving it up is not satisfactory, for nothing can take its place.

The chaotic conditions at the present time are caused by the lack of religion. Man's soul needs religion, but his mind fights against it. We find that most wars in history have been caused by disputes about religion. In the East no one dares to say that he does not believe in God, whereas in the West there are people who are proud of not believing in God. They say that a force, or forces, are the origin of life. It is the greatest tragedy if man deprives himself of God, because there cannot be any other means of rising to a higher consciousness.

But an enquiring mind will ask, 'If God is within man, then all our troubles and difficulties, our feelings and our attitude towards Him, and also our faults, are known to Him, so what need is there to express them in prayer?' It is like saying, 'Because I love a certain person, why should I show it?' Expression is the nature of life. When every part of man's mind and body expresses his feeling, his thought, his aspiration, then it produces its full effect. And there is no doubt that the fact of meeting together for prayer makes the effect still greater. The blessing that one can receive through prayer is multiplied a thousandfold when received by a few united in the same thought and praying together. And as to the psychological effect, the world can be described as a dome in which every word that is uttered resounds; through the resonance in this dome an echo is produced, and what comes, comes as the answer of God.

The question whether God has time to give attention to our prayer is answered by the mystic, who says that it is through the medium of man himself that God hears his prayer. In the East the head of man is called the dome of God, which means that it contains the greatest secret, and is also the highest place; for

outwardly it is the head which represents the eternal abode. As it is said in the scriptures, God has created man in His own image.

ii

Prayer has been taught by all religions in different forms: by bowing, by prostrations, by recitation or chant. As soon as man begins to feel the immanence of God in nature, he begins to prostrate himself before that Being, calling his limited self helpless before Him, bowing before Him, worshipping Him.

Although in the Christian religion man kneels before God, and in Czarist Russia one could still see both rich and poor prostrating themselves even before the Czar, today men's pride has grown so much that many think, 'Why should I pray, why should I prostrate myself before anybody?'

Worship is a resignation, an acknowledgement, a recognition; worship has many meanings. By worshipping we acquaint ourselves with a certain power. Acquaintance is understanding; and understanding is a great thing. We often suffer because we do not understand; many conditions and many people are difficult to tolerate because we do not understand them, but once we understand we can tolerate almost anything.

When Brahmins worship by putting rice at the feet of the deity, this means that they would like to spread in the world all the love and light that they receive from the deity as the seed is sown on the farm.

One might ask what effect prayers can have upon the soul, which is pure and aloof from everything. The soul, when it sees the external self bowing before God, rejoices and is glad. Prayer gives nobility to whoever prays, be he rich or poor. The attitude of a prayerful person towards God is that of a lover towards his beloved, of a child towards its parents, of a servant towards his master, of a pupil towards his teacher, of a soldier towards his commander.

If one asks why God should create beings in order that they should sing His own praise, the answer is that God does not wish to receive praise; the praise of God is a prescription for man, in order that by this prescription man can come to that

understanding which brings him nearer to God. In other words, by praising God man completes the action in which lies the fulfilment of the soul's purpose in coming on earth.

The meaning of the word *Nirva* is the repetition of thankfulness and bringing one's own vision to one's soul; and the voice echoes again before God who is within ourselves. That is why the singing of a prayer is more powerful than only reciting the prayer in thought. It is the same difference as there is between thinking a song and singing it. By singing a song one obtains a satisfaction which one does not get by only thinking of it.

It is said in the Qur'an, 'If We had not made thee, Mohammad, We would not have created the whole world'. One might think that this is meant as a partial compliment to Mohammad, but it is not Mohammad the personal individual being that is meant. It means, 'If We had not made the seer, the admirer of our Being, We would not have created the world.'

The divine Being sees to it that each person admires one particular being; he singles out one part of the whole, admires and praises it, and calls it his own. By this he learns to put his trust in God, and he learns resignation when he prays the second kind of prayer, the petition, because if his desire is not granted, if he is left in misery, he learns to accept that this is God's will.

After this comes the prayer of realization. This is the prayer of the dervishes and the saints. They are ashamed of asking God for anything; they are contented with whatever comes. If they have food, whatever it is, it is all right. If they have no food it is all right too. If they have nothing to cover themselves with it is all right. By this contentment they become greater than kings. Sitting under a tree in rags they are greater than the richest who own all the earth and yet are needy, for they have the kingdom of God. But about what they see their lips are closed. They do not speak of it. They never tell.

At the present time people say, 'I see such and such things; this colour and that light; I hear that sound,' in order to excite curiosity and wonder, and to gain notoriety. They make a trade out of spirituality. It is a very great misfortune, and if this goes on even spirituality, the knowledge of God which is the purest knowledge there is, will be debased and lost.

Is a person, then, who communicates with God for many hours a day, nearer to Him than the one who is mostly concerned with earthly things? One must fulfil one's duties, keep to one's religion, and yet find a means of communicating with God in everyday life. If the Sufi message has to bring anything to the world it is this. The meditations and concentrations given to those wishing to advance on the spiritual path are not meant to be the only means of communicating with God. They are a way, a way that one can develop in order to learn how one should communicate with God. Every moment should be devoted to this.

There are many virtues, but there is one principal virtue. Every moment passed outside the presence of God is sin, and every moment in His presence is virtue. The whole object of the Sufi, after learning this way of communicating, is to arrive at a stage where every moment of our life passes in communion with God, and where our every action is done as if God were before us. Is that within everyone's reach? We are meant to be so. Just think of a person who is in love: when he eats or drinks, whatever he does, the image of the beloved is there. In the same way, when the love of God has come, it is natural to think of God in everything we do.

What makes some people unable to pray is the reflection of the mineral kingdom, denseness. For instance, when the sky is thickly clouded the light of the sun does not reach the earth, and it is the same with the soul which is divine and which is all light, but which sometimes may be clouded.

The difference between the diamond and an ordinary stone is one of denseness. The diamond reflects the light which falls upon it, but the stone is so dense that it will not allow the light of the sun to be reflected in it.

There are three kinds of people among those who offer prayer. One person in praying feels he is fulfilling a certain duty which he considers to be one among the other duties of life. He does not know to whom he is praying; he thinks it is to some God. If he is in a congregation he feels obliged to do as the others do. He is like one of a flock of sheep which goes on not knowing where and why. Praying, to him, is something that he must do because he is in a situation where he cannot help it. In order to fall in

with the custom of the family or community, and in order to respect those around him, he does it like everybody else. His prayer is mechanical, and if it has any effect it is very little.

The second kind of person who offers prayers is the one who prays because he has been taught to do so, and yet is uncertain as to whether there is any God and whether his prayers are really heard. He may be praying, and yet at the same time his mind may be full of uncertainty, so that he wonders whether he is doing right or wrong. If he is a busy man, he may think, 'Am I giving my time to something really profitable, or am I wasting it? I see no one before me. I hear no answer to my prayer.' He does it because he was taught by someone to do it, or because it might perhaps benefit him in some way. His prayer is a prayer in the dark. The heart which should be opened to God is closed in by his own doubt, and if he prayed in this way for a thousand years, it would never be heard. It is this kind of soul who loses his faith, in the end, especially when he meets with a disappointment. He prays, and if his prayer is not answered that puts an end to his belief.

Then there is a third person who has imagination which is strengthened by faith. He not only prays to God, but he prays before God, in the presence of God. Once imagination has helped a man to bring the presence of God before him, God is awakened in his own heart. Then before he utters a word it is heard by God; when he is praying in a room, he is not alone, he is there with God; then to him God is not in the highest heaven but close to him, before him, in him; then to him heaven is on earth and earth is heaven; no one is then so living, so intelligible as God; and all names and forms disappear before Him. Then every word of prayer he utters is a living word. It not only brings blessing to him, but to all those around him. This manner of prayer is the only right way of praying, and in this way the object that is to be fulfilled by prayer is accomplished.

iii

Not only belief, but faith too is necessary. Belief is a thing, but faith is a living being. We rise by treading the path of faith. Some day we shall realize what God is, but that only comes

after the first lesson has been learned. Faith is the abc of the revelation of God, and the way to faith is begun by prayer.

There are several kinds of prayer. One prayer is thanksgiving to God for His great goodness, for all that we receive in our life; asking God for His mercy and favour and forgiveness; asking God to grant our desires and wishes. This is the first lesson that man has to learn; the other kinds of prayer can only be used as man develops.

In thanking God for all that He has given us, we develop the very thankfulness which man usually forgets. If we could only reflect upon the many things in our life for which we should be thankful and appreciative! But we scarcely ever think about them, whereas we so often think about what we have not got, and thus we keep ourselves continually unhappy when we might be thankful to have even a few pennies in our purse. Instead of that we think we should have a few shillings! The consequence is that man forgets to develop thankfulness in his nature; he is ungrateful to everyone, and whatever is done for him he remains ungrateful.

It is the same with all the troubles and struggles that there are in the world. It is his neglect of all that is done for him that causes the spread of ingratitude. Having forgotten the prayer of thanking God, how can he thank man?

It is a great pity that the beautiful custom of saying grace before meals is disappearing. This custom is no longer to be found at fashionable tables, only in simple homes; for when fashion comes the things that are helpful, moral, and spiritual are forgotten. But what a beautiful thought it is to say grace before even a humble dinner! When thanks have been given to God, however simple the dinner may be it becomes delicious because of the feeling of thankfulness, the feeling that this is a gift that has been bestowed upon us.

When Sa'di was travelling to Persia, footsore because he had to walk with bare feet in the hot sun, it was so painful that he was thinking there could be no one in the world as wretched and miserable as himself. But two minutes later he came across a person whose feet were both useless, so that he was crawling along the ground and only progressing with great difficulty.

This caused a prayer to rise in Sa'di's heart, and he became thankful he was not afflicted like that. He realized that though he had no shoes, at least his feet were healthy and sound.

It is when we are only aware of our own difficulties or unhappiness, and blind to the goodness, kindness, sympathy, service, and help which our fellow-men give to us, that we become discontented. There is so much to be seen in our lives to arouse the feeling of thankfulness in us.

Then there is the mystical meaning of thankfulness. The one who is always grudging is so much the more in need of prayer. If he prays he will prepare influences which will remove the miseries and wretchedness in his mind, for all this misery is created by his mind during the act of grumbling and while he nurses a grudge. The person who is thankful and contented, and appreciative of all that befalls him in life, develops the sense of goodness. The more appreciative he is, the more thankful he becomes and the more he receives. Thankfulness and appreciation inevitably attract more of their like to themselves; all that we give is also given to us. But grumbling and grudging also attract their like. If the person to whom we give a reward or gift receives it grudgingly and grumblingly, will we give him more? Indeed, the fact that we do not give him more gives him still more to grumble about. But when a person is glad and thankful and appreciative of what is done for him, we at once feel that he is good. It gives us such a feeling of happiness to see him happy and appreciative and contented that it encourages us to do more, and it also encourages others to do good.

Besides thankfulness there is the request for forgiveness and mercy. The effects of this are also be seen in our daily life. A servant or child or young man who is rude, will push into us and never say he is sorry. But another person says, 'I am sorry', and at once we have forgotten the harm that he has inadvertently done to us. That is the effect which his request for forgiveness has produced.

A person who does wrong and prides himself on having done so is stubborn, foolish, and ignorant. There is no way for him to develop, to progress, if he is not sorry for what he has done. His finer senses become blunted by doing wrong, and so he loses

something of his own conscience by the continual impression of wrongdoing. Because there is something bad in him, although he may be walking on the earth and living in the sun, that life which gives a fuller experience and joy is gone.

As well as other people being hard on him, the wrongdoer already has his own wrong as his worst enemy; from the conditions, the circumstances, the people he meets, from every side he will sooner or later receive trouble and hate. Besides, these people may be making a mistake; they do not know what is hidden behind a person's action; and therefore should be tolerant and forgiving. We have no right to judge unless we have become spectators; it is only then that we begin to learn how to judge, but as long as we are in the centre of the struggle we cannot.

The one who always does right need not be here. This is the place in which to do both wrong and right. But the one who does wrong and repents, who wants to do better next time, his conscience is sharpened by every wrong he has committed. Perhaps the wrong has done him more good than if he had done right; he has become more awakened to the right, and yet he has been humbled in his conscience. Therefore repentance is a privilege, and to be able to be sorry for all that one thinks was not right makes one live and feel more fully; it awakens justice in the heart of man.

To tell another person of one's wrong only means to extend the wrong vibrations still further. One gets nothing out of it but the contempt of the other. The one who offers his repentance to God, in whom he sees perfection and justice, and who goes with his sorrow to Him who is love itself, who is forgiveness itself, will experience a phenomenon and see the wonderful results coming from it—an upliftment, an unfoldment; something breaks in one. It is the wrong which is broken, and something comes into the heart of man that is the love of God, the forgiveness of God. One feels fortified and uplifted and more capable of avoiding the same mistake another time.

When we have hurt someone there comes a reaction, and this reaction is that we feel sorry and wonder why we did it. A conscientious man, after having done some harm, has a strong desire to ask forgiveness. Forgiveness will bring him a great relief

and comfort, and as long as he has not asked it he will always feel uncomfortable. If we only knew how amply we are provided with good things that even money cannot pay for! Everything we do may seem wrong in the eyes of the Creator, but His favour is such that we cannot repent enough of our follies and mistakes. But apart from our mistakes towards the Creator, there are those around us with whom we are connected outwardly, to whom every moment of the day we do something that is not right, something we might have done better. The more conscientious we are, the finer our feelings, the more we realize that we are full of follies and mistakes in regard to all those who surround us.

The natural way of consoling ourselves or of bringing comfort to ourselves is therefore to ask forgiveness. And the one who most deserves to be asked is God. It breaks a congestion in the heart and in the spirit, and it brings great comfort. The more we ask forgiveness, the better we begin to feel and think; and we are guided in this if we continue to ask forgiveness. Sa'di says in the first couplet of his great poem, the *Gulistan*, 'Lord, I have made many mistakes and I have many shortcomings, but let them not be known to mankind but only to Thee who art so compassionate.' It is the beauty of human nature to repent.

In some countries and among some people, for instance in France, there is a custom that when a person meets another at the door or on the stairs he takes off his hat and says, 'Pardon.' There is no reason why he should do so except that he chanced to meet him, and he thinks that perhaps he should be forgiven. We find that the sensitiveness of man's heart is so delicate that even the presence of a stranger jars on him. But by saying, 'Pardon', that uncomfortable feeling is at once removed, and in its place the good feeling of friendship is introduced. However great a fault may be, if the one who has committed it only comes and says, 'I am very sorry; I will never do it again; pray forgive me,' the friendship will be restored at once. On the other hand, however trivial and slight the fault may have been, if pride prevents the man from asking forgiveness and pardon, perhaps he will lose that friendship for the rest of his life. His pride prevents him from asking pardon. The fault may have been very

small and he may pretend not to care about it, and yet the friendship is broken. How many there are who would be ready to forgive if only the person came and said, 'I am sorry.' But it is not everybody who will do it; people do not like to admit they have been at fault.

To ask forgiveness of another produces a proper sense of justice in one's mind. A man recognizes the need for asking God to pardon his faults. When he asks for forgiveness, that forgiveness develops in his own nature too, and he becomes ready to forgive others. Christ says in His prayer, 'Forgive us . . . as we forgive those that trespass against us.' The virtue, the secret, is in that. By asking forgiveness of God, we give up the desire to demand that our fellow-man should ask our forgiveness, and instead we want to forgive him. We see this with the Arabs and Bedouins in Mecca and in the desert. They are forever ready to fight one another and kill each other. They may be fighting and actually have their knives drawn to kill one another, and yet if a third person comes and says, 'Forgive, for the sake of God and the Prophet!' as soon as they hear these words they both throw away their knives and shake hands, and the hand-shake is the seal of friendship. Though the Bedouin has no education, yet he has such devotion to God and His Prophet that no sooner does he hear these words than he at once offers his hand, and from that day there is no spite nor evil thought in his heart.

If we only had that spirit! With all our education and learning, with all our claims to civilization, we are not as good as this. We retain the bitterness in our hearts. We never consider what a poison it is. The very person who would shudder at the idea of having something in his body that is decayed and offensive, something that should not be there but should be cut out or removed, will tolerate that poison of bitterness in his mind, he will not remove it; he will foster it. Had he not lacked the sense of forgiveness, and had he not neglected to cultivate the habit of asking forgiveness, he would have become ready to forgive and forget.

Have you ever had the joy of seeing two friends who have quarrelled asking forgiveness of one another? It is as if there were no more possibility of ill-feeling. It is the most delightful experience. It feels as if the doors of heaven were opened for

both. When the bitterness has gone, it is as if a mountain had gone, and the heart was free again.

iv

Another kind of prayer is to ask for help in need. This is a delicate thing, and yet it is a great virtue. What a beautiful nature it is that will refrain from asking relief from trouble, from difficulty and suffering, except from the one Friend! This is a virtue and not pride. The door of faith is kept open for that Friend whom we can call upon and ask and obtain ease from. 'There is One to whom I can go in my trouble and distress and despair. Thou art the One, the only One. Thou art He from whom nothing is hidden. If I desire to unburden myself of this trouble, Thou, O Lord, art He to whom I will go.'

Often people argue, saying, 'If God does not know our needs, then how can He be God? And if He knows our needs, it is foolish on our part to mention them to Him. To mankind we speak about our needs because they do not know what is in our heart, but as God knows what is in our heart, there is no necessity to speak of our needs.' And then there are others who think that if God knows our needs and still does not satisfy them, this shows great cruelty on the part of God. Many have given up their belief for this reason.

The answer to this question is that indeed there is nothing in this world that is not known to God; only, it is known to Him in the way that we know it, in the way that another person knows it, and in the way that He knows it Himself. Our needs are known to us as we see them, but to God they are known as we see them, as someone else sees them, and as God Himself sees them. God can see in all the different ways, but we cannot see or understand in the way God does.

Nevertheless, perfection is the desire of every soul: there is a continual yearning to reach perfection in every form. What are lacks and needs in life? They are all limitations, imperfections; and to desire perfection is the birthright of every soul. A man is not to be blamed if he prays to God to give him what he feels to be his present need. It is not an infant's fault if it cries for food. The mother knows when the infant should be fed and

when not; but it is no fault on the part of an infant to cry when it is hungry. Nor is it a fault on the part of a grown-up person if he asks for something that he is lacking. His asking influences the conditions of his life; in a way it is creative. And when the asking is given the form of a prayer, it is the best and noblest way of asking; for then he asks it of nobody but God.

What a great thing this is! What a sense of honour it is that causes a man to refrain from telling his suffering to anyone but God, believing that He will help more than anyone can help. Perhaps another man could help, but it will not bring the satisfaction that comes when it is God that has given the help. What a great pleasure, what a great honour God has done to give him help! This is what happens when some problem such as comes into the life of every noble person, everyone with tender feelings, with inherited good and religious sentiments, has been solved by deciding that there is no one of whom he will ask help in his poverty and trouble and need but only God.

There is a story of a king who was travelling and hunting in the woods, and the king was hungry and stopped at the house of a peasant, who did not recognize him but treated him very kindly and shared his simple meal with him. When the king was leaving this peasant, he was so touched with his kindness that, without telling him that he was a king, he said to him, 'Take this ring, and if ever you are in difficulty, come to me in the city, and I will see what I can do for you.' After a time there was a famine. The peasant was in great trouble, and his wife and child were dying; and he set out to go and find this man. When he showed the ring, he was brought to the king. On entering the room he saw the king absorbed in prayer; and when the king approached him, he asked, 'What were you doing?' 'Praying for peace and love and happiness among my subjects,' said the king. 'So there is one greater than you,' said the peasant, 'to whom you must go for what you seek? Then I will go to him who is greater and on whom even your destiny depends!' He would accept no help; but, unknown to him, the king sent what was needed to his home, with the message that it was sent by the King of kings.

What honour, what a spirit it brings when a man fixes his trust on Him, who is almighty. Rumi says, 'Though fire, air, earth, and water all seem dead things and only elements, yet they are God's servants; they work for Him, and they always obey Him!' And he goes on to say in another part of his *Masnavi*, 'Man, when he becomes intelligent, begins to see causes. But it is the superman who sees the cause of causes, the source of causes.' God is the Cause of causes, the primal cause. One who looks at the primal cause sees in time the cause of all. A person may study causes all his life, and yet never come to understand the cause of causes. All causes before that cause become effects. That Cause is the same as that which is called the Word which then became light. 'When the Word was spoken,' says the Qur'an, 'all things came into existence,' 'Without Him', says St. John, 'was not anything made that was made.'

What is this Cause? It is that inner divine impulse which has made itself active in every direction, and has accomplished whatever was its purpose. It is that which has accomplished all things. The one cause behind all things is the cause which we call the Power of God.

v

When people have evolved further they begin to use a still higher form of prayer. That prayer is the adoration of the immanence of God in the sublimity of nature. If we read the lives of the prophets and teachers from Krishna to Buddha, Moses to Mohammad, Abraham to Christ, we see how they dwelt in the jungles, and went into the forests, sat beneath trees, and there recognized the divine immanence in all around them. It is a prayer, not to a God in heaven, but to a God living both in heaven and on earth.

What does praise of God, praise of His creation, praise of His nature, develop in man? It develops in him such an art that nothing can compare with it, a sense of music with which no music can be compared. He begins to see how natures are attracted to one another, and how they harmonize; he sees how inharmonies are produced. The causes of all such things become clear to him, when once he begins to see into nature, to admire

the beauty of its construction, its life, its growth; when he begins to study nature and its causes.

Those who have praised nature through their art appeal directly to man's heart. Those who praise nature in their music become artists in music, and those who have expressed their praise in poetry and verse are acknowledged as great poets. All of them appeal to the heart of man because they have seen God. They have seen Him in nature and in everything on earth. They have turned earth into heaven. That is the next, the higher step.

Zoroaster has said, 'Look at the sun when you pray, at the moon when you pray, at the fire when you pray.' People therefore call his followers sun-worshippers or fire-worshippers, when all the time this worship was merely a way of directing man's attention to the witnesses of God which express His nature. The one who cannot see any trace of God anywhere else, can see Him by looking at all these beautiful things, and observing their harmonious working.

From beginning to end, the Qur'an points to nature, showing how in the sun that rises in the morning, in the moon that appears in the evening, and in the whole of nature there is God. Why does the Qur'an always express it this way? If one wishes to have some proof of God one should look at nature and see how wisely it is made. Man with his learning becomes so proud that he thinks there is nothing else worthy of attention. He does not know that there is a perfection of wisdom before which he is not even like a drop in the ocean. Man looks at the surface of the ocean, yet he is so small that he cannot even be compared with one of its drops, limited as he is in intellect and knowledge. He seeks to find out about the whole of creation, whereas those who have touched it have bowed before God, forgetting their limited selves. After that God remained with them, and spoke through them. These are the only beings who have been able to give any truth to the world.

As Amir says, 'He who has lost his limited self, he it is who has attained the High Presence.' Do we not forget ourselves when we behold the vision of beauty? If we are blind to beauty we cannot see it, and then we cannot forget ourselves in the beauty and sublimity of the vision. But when we perceive the beauty of

nature, we bow our head in love and admiration. As a poet said of nature, 'I cannot study you, for you are too great, you are too beautiful. The only thing left for me to do is to bow my head in prostration at your feet.'

If we could only see this perfect beauty around us, if we only had our eyes opened to it, we should first bow our heads in all humility before ever attempting to make a study of it. No pride could find a place in our heart. Without any doubt we should bow our heads before this beauty, this wisdom of the Creator, the art of the Creator, and His skill which is apparent in the flowers, plants and leaves, in the construction of man—his birth, and all other things in life.

It would suffice did we but once ask how all these things have come. 'Where there are no teeth, milk is given. When the teeth come, the food suitable for teeth comes also,' the poet says. The eyes are delicate, and so an eyelid is formed for them, to cover them and protect them. How well all the organs of man's body are fitted and suited for the purpose for which they are made! With all this there is also the beauty of the art with which everything is created, and the height of beauty is attained in the skill shown in the making of mankind.

Whoever has seen beauty, has found that beauty cannot exist without wisdom. Wisdom is behind all creation. The one life which has created the rocks, trees, plants, animals, birds and all things, is both one life and one wisdom. The flower, the leaf, the fruit, and the branches all come from one root, even though they have different names. It is all one. It might be called *he* or *she*; yet it is both. When we see that life with wisdom is both *he* and *she*, we realize that wisdom which is behind all things that we see; and then we find that what is behind all things is a Person whom we call God.

vi

There is another kind of prayer which is greater still. It is the way followed by philosophers and mystics. Advancement on this spiritual path is gradual. One cannot use this way without first having practised the other kinds of prayer. This way is that of invocation of the nature of God, of the truth of His Being.

These are symbolic names, and in their meaning there is a subtlety. God's nature is explained in this form of prayer; He is analysed. The benefit of this prayer is perceived when a person has arrived on this plane, and the benefit is that he has passed from being a human being (as in the prayers of thanksgiving, for forgiveness, and for one's needs), through being a holy being (as in the prayer by which one praises God), to become a God-conscious man. Why? Because this kind of prayer is meant to bring man still closer to God. Not only does this prayer draw him closer to God, but it makes him forget his limited self until it is entirely forgotten in the end, leaving only the Self of God; and this has been the only ideal and aim of all teachers. Man can not arrive at his ideal goal until he has used prayer to help him to this stage.

By this prayer he tries to get near to God, to become one with God, and to forget his false personality, in other words to deny his false identity and to establish the identity of God in its place. This prayer is a miracle. It can turn a bubble into a sea; it is this prayer which brings perfection to the imperfect one.

It is the work of the teacher, the guide on the spiritual path, to give people a certain prayer to repeat. But there have also been prayers belonging to each of the prophetic cycles. Thus when Moses or Christ or Mohammad or Krishna gave a prayer, that prayer was intended for humanity collectively at that particular time. Saying that prayer lifted the souls up and gave them all that was needed during that particular cycle. But it is of course not the scrupulous repetition of prayer but the faith and devotion that one puts into it that counts.

There was a preacher who addressed some peasants, and he told them about a wonderful prayer which, when one repeated it, gave one the power to walk on the water. One of the peasants was very interested in this prayer, and after saying it he walked across the river and back again, and he was very happy. So he went to this preacher and asked him in all humility to come and dine with him, he was so grateful for what the preacher had given him. The preacher accepted. And when he went to dine with the peasant there was a river to cross. The preacher said, 'Where is the boat?' The man said, 'I have listened to your lesson, and since then I have not used my boat any more. We shall say the

prayer and walk on the water. Since you told me of it, that is what I have done.' The preacher watched him doing it and felt ashamed. He had only talked about it; but now he realized that it is not knowing but believing that counts.

A thousand people may say the same prayer; but one person's prayer said with such faith and belief is equal to the prayers of a thousand people, because that prayer is not mechanical. Man is mechanical, and he generally says his prayers mechanically too. If he is genuine and if he has faith and belief and devotion, all he says has an effect; and that effect will perform miracles.

When we look at things from a mystical point of view we shall find that there is one single straight line, which is called aim. That line represents the line of the life of any being; the upper end is God, the lower end is man. The line is one. Though that line is one to the mystic and the philosopher in the realization of the truth, yet the line is unlimited at the upper end, and limited at the other. One end is immortality, the other is mortality.

The innermost yearning of life is to see the ends brought together. It is this prayer which draws the end which is man near to the end which is God. When he invokes the names of God man forgets his limitations and impresses his soul with the thought of the Unlimited, which brings him to the ideal of limitlessness. This is the secret of life's attainment.

Man is the picture or reflection of his imagination. He is as large as he thinks himself, as great as he thinks himself, as small as he thinks himself to be. If he thinks he is incapable, he remains incapable; if he thinks himself foolish, he will be foolish and will remain foolish; if he thinks himself wise, he will be wise and become wiser every moment; if he thinks himself mighty, he will be mighty. Those who have proved themselves to be the greatest warriors, where did their might come from? It was from their thought, their feeling: 'I am mighty.' The idea of might was impressed on their soul, and the soul became might. The poet had poetry impressed on his soul, and so the soul became a poet. Whatever is impressed on man's soul, with that the soul becomes endowed, and that the soul will become. If the devil impresses himself on a man's soul, he will become a devil; if God impresses Himself on a man's soul, he will turn into God.

BELIEF

WHEN BELIEF culminates it turns into faith, but before that happens there are different stages through which belief develops, and when a person says that he has no belief this does not mean that he is not capable of believing. Belief is something with which a person is born; it is something which one acquires when coming on earth. There is a saying of the Prophet that every person is born a believer and only becomes an unbeliever when on earth. For instance, when a child begins to learn to speak, the mother says, 'This is called water', so it repeats, 'Yes, that is water'. The mother says, 'This is light', so it says, 'Yes, that is light'. Every word the mother teaches, the child learns; it never refuses to learn. But when a person is grown-up, then he has preconceived ideas; he has learnt something by reason, logic, or experience. And if he meets someone who has more knowledge, and he cannot reach him through his own way of looking at things, he says, 'I do not believe it'. This means that although he was born with belief, he has now arrived at a point where he cannot believe, because his belief clashes with that reason which he has made for himself.

To believe in God is easier for some than others, but at the same time it is a natural thing. If he had not believed, Columbus could not have discovered America. Every soul is born with the tendency to believe. It is by believing that a child learns to speak; it is only afterwards that disbelief comes as a reaction.

Man need not believe in God because it is a virtue; he should believe in God because it is of his seeking. He may not know it, yet his perfect satisfaction lies only in the God-ideal. Nanak, the first Guru of the Sikhs, gives a very beautiful example of this. In describing a mill with which women grind the corn, he says 'The grains which take refuge in the centre of this mill are saved.'

Once when I was sailing in a boat, a sailor gave me some interesting advice. I asked him if he knew any remedy against seasickness, and he said, 'No, they have tried for a long time to

find something, but nothing is any good. You must fix your eyes on the horizon, that will keep you from being seasick.' I was greatly benefited by that advice, and it was a stimulus to my imagination, showing that the wider the outlook, the less are our troubles in life. If we fix our eyes on the horizon, as far as we can see, then we are saved from the little things which make our life unhappy. God is the horizon, as far as we can see and even further, for we can neither touch the horizon nor can we touch God.

Some people say, 'I do not believe in a soul, I have always heard about it but I have never seen it.' All that touches his senses a man can believe by touching, feeling, or seeing it; but with something he cannot touch or feel or see he says, 'It is not within my reach. What is not intelligible does not exist for me.' In other words man acquires his own knowledge first and all that comes afterwards he wants to fit in with his own knowledge.

Often, when people have asked my opinion about something and have noticed that it was different from what they thought, it was as if immediately a wall was raised, for it is the nature of man to hold on to his knowledge. His knowledge may be of false or of true experiences. He may believe that on such and such a mountain a fairy descended on a certain night, that beautiful colours appeared and that one should go there in order to become illuminated; or he may believe that in the heart of Tibet, in remote places, people sit with closed eyes perhaps for a hundred years, and that when a person goes there he will be exalted. Or he may have heard that near Persia is a country where there are martyrs' tombs and that that is the best place in which to become illuminated. It is only as he believes; whether higher or lower, it is belief all the same, and if a person has formed a certain belief in himself he cannot easily change it.

There are many others who are bigoted in regard to their own belief. They stand on a certain belief, and instead of keeping it in their head they keep it under their feet. They stand there; their belief has nailed them to a certain spot, and they cannot progress because of that belief.

Belief is like a staircase; it is made in order to go upward, but if one remains standing on one step then there is no progress.

One belief after another comes to a person as he goes further on the path of spiritual progress, each one greater or higher than the last, and therefore the wise, the illuminated ones, go from one belief to another until they reach the ultimate belief. The further a person goes on the path of belief the more tolerant and compassionate he becomes. The one who says 'I am advanced, I cannot believe in your limited belief; it is too narrow,' in that way prevents his own progress. He does not know that belief does not depend on saying that one has a greater or a higher belief, but that it depends on realizing and living that belief.

Very often people dispute over their beliefs, and generally none of them is convinced. Each has his own point of view and they dispute in vain. Besides a person does not always argue because he knows; more often the reason is that he does not know. If a person knows he does not need to dispute; he can hear a hundred things said against his belief and yet remain convinced and happy.

There are four stages of belief. The first stage is the belief of the follower. This belief reminds one of sheep: where one goes, all the others follow, and that is the belief of most people. If a person stays in the middle of the street looking at the sky, in ten minutes' time a hundred people are also looking at the sky. Four people will attract four hundred, and four hundred will attract four thousand. That is why the number of believers at this stage is so great; there is no limit to it. Whether it is a right or a wrong belief, they are only attracted by someone else and they all follow.

The second stage of belief is faith in authority. A person believes because it is written in such and such a book, or said by such and such a person. This is a slightly better belief, because if a man of this kind is not sure of himself, he is at any rate sure of some personality, of a certain sacred book or scripture. It is a more intelligent belief, and the one who refuses to believe in this way makes a great mistake, for it is the second step on the path of belief. If one cannot believe in someone who is better acquainted with certain things one will never learn anything. And no doubt belief in a person is greater than belief in a book. Very often a man says, 'How wonderful! I have read it in a book so I

believe it'. He believes it to such a degree that even if someone else says that it is not so, he will still remain convinced that what is written in the book is true.

The third belief is that of reasoning, which means that everything one believes one reasons out within oneself. This is a still greater belief; but how few there are who reason it out! There are also many who begin to reason before arriving at this third stage, and then they cannot progress as they should because two stages are left out. Some begin to reason in childhood, and if they have no proper guidance reason will lead them astray. It is a great problem today how to bring up children. Parents think nowadays that by giving the children the belief that has been held in the family they may make them narrow, yet at the same time they have no substitute, no other belief to give them in its place. In this way children grow up without belief and to believe later on is very difficult.

During my travels in Europe and elsewhere I have seen the great difficulty of this question, for there are many who say, 'We were not taught any particular belief, we have not been taken to church, we have not got any direction in that line; and now we begin to feel a longing to have some belief, but we do not know how to believe. We are too old now to take to a belief.'

Belief should be sown in the heart in childhood. It is just like a person who only starts playing the violin at thirty years of age. If he had begun at five years of age, in twelve years' time he would perhaps have developed the faculty of music, whereas now it is too late.

When a person has reached the age of thirty or forty and has already made an ego for himself, when he has learning and knowledge and has become centred on material thought, it is too late to begin to believe in something. By that time he should have gone from one belief to another in order to arrive at a high belief. No doubt for a person who really wants to seek for truth it is never too late, yet loss of time is a great loss; no other loss can be compared with it. Life is an opportunity, and if this opportunity is lost it is a great pity.

Now the difficulty with the belief of a reasoning person is this, that if reason leads and belief follows, belief will never have a

chance to take root. Reason will always crush it. But if belief leads and reason follows, then the belief will be purified and carried very far because reason supports it. Thus reason can either crush belief or support it, and if reason supports belief it becomes a great belief; no one can change it. But if reason crushes it then belief cannot exist. This is why it is the custom among the Arabs to give belief to a child even before it knows how to speak. Then later reason springs up and crushes undesirable elements in the belief and raises it to a higher grade of knowledge.

But there is another stage of belief, the fourth stage, in which one's belief may be called conviction. It cannot be changed when it has culminated in conviction. Where does this belief come from? It comes from the divine element in man known both as love and as intelligence. It is known in these two different aspects but in reality they are one in their essence. If there is no intelligence there is no love; if there is no love there is no intelligence. Love springs from intelligence and intelligence lives in love; and thus they are two aspects of the same thing. Unbelief comes from lack of intelligence and lack of love. A person has belief in accordance with the extent to which he shows these two aspects.

A sympathetic person is inclined to believe what one says and to trust; an unsympathetic person is inclined to disbelieve and distrust. In order to trust there must be sympathy. It might be that a person is sympathetic and not intelligent, but intelligence will be there just the same, although it may be hidden by what one sees, because in reality these two things are one.

Taking these four stages of belief: the man who has the first kind of belief like the sheep will say, 'Yes, I believe in a soul because they say there is a soul; I believe in God, and I believe in a hereafter because people say that when they die they will go on living somewhere.'

The man who has the second kind of belief will say, 'I believe in a soul because it is written in the book; I believe in a hereafter because the Master has said that there is a hereafter; I believe in God because the Prophet has taught us to worship and to pray to the Father in heaven.'

believe it'. He believes it to such a degree that even if someone else says that it is not so, he will still remain convinced that what is written in the book is true.

The third belief is that of reasoning, which means that everything one believes one reasons out within oneself. This is a still greater belief; but how few there are who reason it out! There are also many who begin to reason before arriving at this third stage, and then they cannot progress as they should because two stages are left out. Some begin to reason in childhood, and if they have no proper guidance reason will lead them astray. It is a great problem today how to bring up children. Parents think nowadays that by giving the children the belief that has been held in the family they may make them narrow, yet at the same time they have no substitute, no other belief to give them in its place. In this way children grow up without belief and to believe later on is very difficult.

During my travels in Europe and elsewhere I have seen the great difficulty of this question, for there are many who say, 'We were not taught any particular belief, we have not been taken to church, we have not got any direction in that line; and now we begin to feel a longing to have some belief, but we do not know how to believe. We are too old now to take to a belief.'

Belief should be sown in the heart in childhood. It is just like a person who only starts playing the violin at thirty years of age. If he had begun at five years of age, in twelve years' time he would perhaps have developed the faculty of music, whereas now it is too late.

When a person has reached the age of thirty or forty and has already made an ego for himself, when he has learning and knowledge and has become centred on material thought, it is too late to begin to believe in something. By that time he should have gone from one belief to another in order to arrive at a high belief. No doubt for a person who really wants to seek for truth it is never too late, yet loss of time is a great loss; no other loss can be compared with it. Life is an opportunity, and if this opportunity is lost it is a great pity.

Now the difficulty with the belief of a reasoning person is this, that if reason leads and belief follows, belief will never have a

chance to take root. Reason will always crush it. But if belief leads and reason follows, then the belief will be purified and carried very far because reason supports it. Thus reason can either crush belief or support it, and if reason supports belief it becomes a great belief; no one can change it. But if reason crushes it then belief cannot exist. This is why it is the custom among the Arabs to give belief to a child even before it knows how to speak. Then later reason springs up and crushes undesirable elements in the belief and raises it to a higher grade of knowledge.

But there is another stage of belief, the fourth stage, in which one's belief may be called conviction. It cannot be changed when it has culminated in conviction. Where does this belief come from? It comes from the divine element in man known both as love and as intelligence. It is known in these two different aspects but in reality they are one in their essence. If there is no intelligence there is no love; if there is no love there is no intelligence. Love springs from intelligence and intelligence lives in love; and thus they are two aspects of the same thing. Unbelief comes from lack of intelligence and lack of love. A person has belief in accordance with the extent to which he shows these two aspects.

A sympathetic person is inclined to believe what one says and to trust; an unsympathetic person is inclined to disbelieve and distrust. In order to trust there must be sympathy. It might be that a person is sympathetic and not intelligent, but intelligence will be there just the same, although it may be hidden by what one sees, because in reality these two things are one.

Taking these four stages of belief: the man who has the first kind of belief like the sheep will say, 'Yes, I believe in a soul because they say there is a soul; I believe in God, and I believe in a hereafter because people say that when they die they will go on living somewhere.'

The man who has the second kind of belief will say, 'I believe in a soul because it is written in the book; I believe in a hereafter because the Master has said that there is a hereafter; I believe in God because the Prophet has taught us to worship and to pray to the Father in heaven.'

When the third person is asked, 'How can you believe in the soul?' he says, 'Nothing comes out of nothing. There must be something for something to emerge. If my individuality is only a body, then where has it sprung from, where is its source? Do not sense, intelligence, consciousness, all show that I am not only an earthly being but that I am something different, something larger and greater and higher than matter? I have been told of a being which is unseen, which is called the soul. Just as the eyes cannot see themselves but others can see them, so it is with the soul. The soul cannot see itself; as the eyes can see everything but themselves, so the soul sees all things but not itself.' And if one asks him, 'But do you believe in the hereafter?', he will say, 'I cannot have been non-existent before coming on earth. It is only the existent which can exist. As I have existed before, then afterwards too I shall exist. This is only a phase, a phase we call life. An individual is known by a certain name when in a certain form, a form in which he has perhaps followed some profession. But at the same time I must have existed before; I cannot be born only for a certain time, and cease to exist when I die. That is why I think there is a life in the hereafter.' And if a person asks him, 'Do you believe in God?', he says, 'Certainly. There are different parts of one's being: hands, feet, and head. They each function, yet they are all called myself; it is one being. If this is true, then the whole universe is nothing but particles of God's life and the Absolute is one Being. God therefore is all, and all is God. All comes from God and all returns to God, who is the source and goal of all things. God is the ideal towards which I direct my concentration. I am trying to reach perfection by means of that perfect ideal which I call God.'

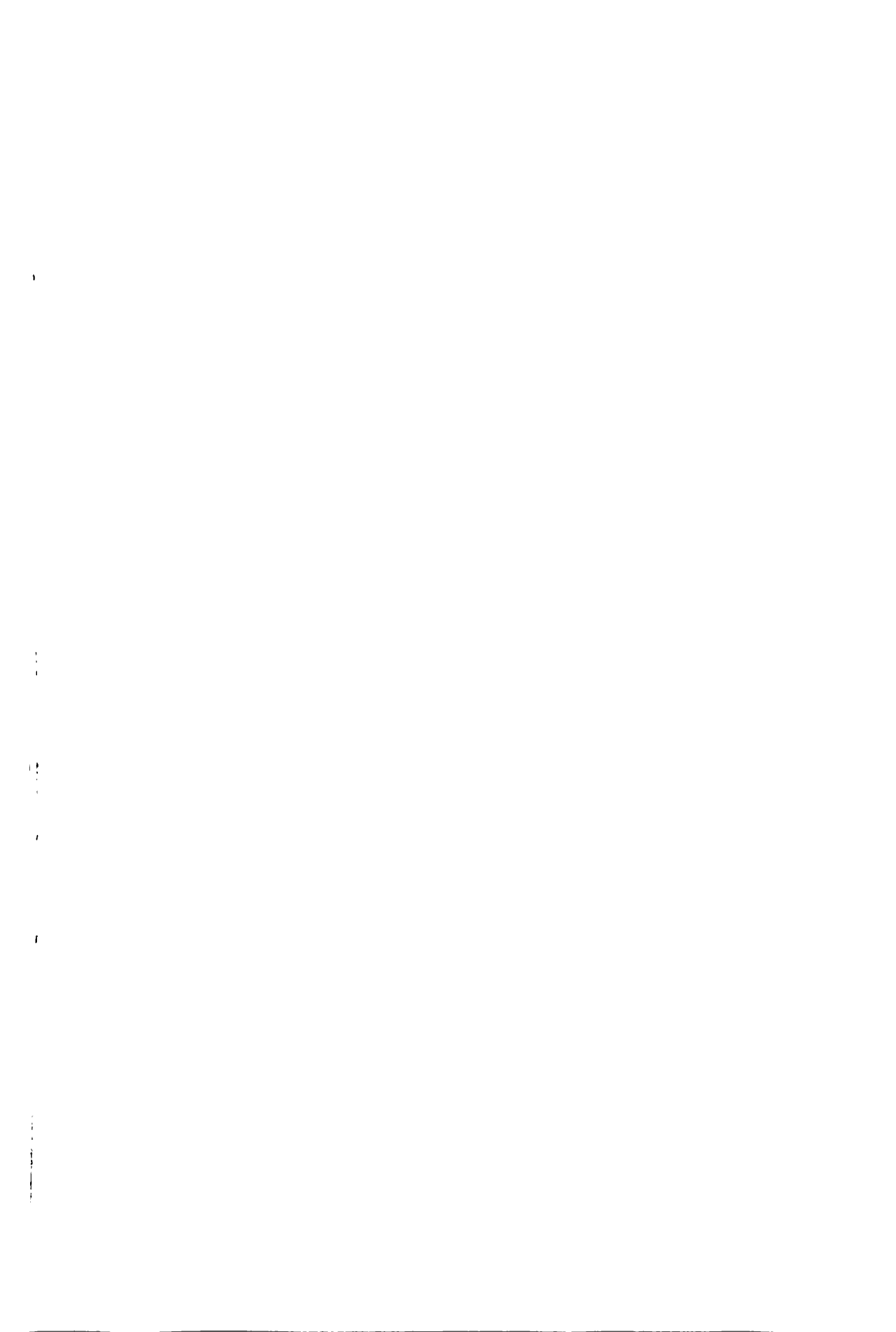
But when we come to the man who has reached the fourth belief, which is faith and conviction, not everyone can understand his language. If one asks, 'Have you a soul?', he says, 'I am the soul, God is only my cover.' If one asks, 'Do you believe in a hereafter', he says, 'The hereafter I see here; it is not afterwards. I see the past and present and future all at the same moment.'

That man lives in eternity. His language cannot be understood by everyone, reason cannot perceive it because it is beyond reason, The past is for those who cannot see it, but the one who lives in

eternity, when he looks back he looks forward. The future to him is another past, a past which is eternal. And if one asks him, 'Do you believe in God?' he will answer, 'Do not ask me about my conception of God. I live in God, I am in God, and more than that I cannot say.'



PART II



THE GOD-IDEAL

i

GOD AND the God-ideal may be explained as the sun and the light. As there are times when the sun becomes covered by clouds, so there are times when the God-ideal becomes covered by materialism. But if for a moment the cloud covers the sun, that does not mean that the sun is lost; and so the God-ideal may seem to have disappeared in the reign of materialism, yet God is there just the same. The condition of the world is like the ever rising and falling of waves. Sometimes it seems to rise and sometimes to fall, but as with every rising and falling wave the sea is the same, so, with all its changes, life is the same.

We find that during the past few years all over the world we have come to a phase when the God-ideal has seemed entirely forgotten. It does not mean that the Churches have disappeared, it does not mean that God does not exist, but that a light that was once there has been covered and has ceased to illuminate us; yet as night follows day, so these changes of condition come in life—light and darkness.

In this age of science on the one side and materialism on the other and commercialism on top, man seems to have blinded himself in acquiring wealth and power, and sees nothing else. It is not that there is no search for light; it is the nature of every soul to search for light; but the great question is, how can the light come when nation is against nation, race against race, the followers of one religion against the followers of another; how can there be peace and how can there be light?

The sign of day is that all things are clear, and the sign of night is that nothing can be found or seen; there are clouds. The most dreadful nightmare the world has ever seen has just passed away; but although that wave, that nightmare, seems to have gone, its effect is still here, and the effect that is left is worse than the cause, for prejudice is worse than bloodshed. When a man thirsts for the blood of his fellow-man, how can we say that there is light?

If a man can eat joyfully at his table when his neighbour is dying of hunger, where is the light? That is the condition of humanity today. And what is the cause? It is that the light, the God-ideal, is not there.

I was once struck by a very simple answer from a maid when someone came to the door and knocked, and the maid was not free to go at once; when at last she came, the man was very angry because she had not opened the door quickly enough. I asked the maid, 'What do you think was the reason that he was so angry?' And she said, with her innocent expression, 'Because there is no God with him.'

The word of Christ is that God is love; and if God is love, then we, every one of us, can prove God in us by expressing God in our life. According to the external customs of the different religions, one goes to church, one to the mosque, one to the synagogue, and another to the temple. The inner church, however, is in none of these, but in the heart of man, where God abides and which is the habitation of Christ. With this divine element lighted in man's heart he will go to the house of prayer, and then his prayer will be heard.

There is a well-known story in India of a girl crossing a place where a Muslim was performing his prayers; and the law is that no one should cross where a person is praying. When the girl returned, the man said to her, 'How insolent! Do you know what you have done?' 'What did I do?' asked the girl. And the man told her. 'I did not mean any harm,' said the girl, 'but tell me, what do you mean by praying?' 'For me, prayer is thinking of God,' said the man. 'Oh!' she said, 'I was going to see my young man, and I was thinking of him and I did not see you; but if you were thinking of God, how did you see me?'

The idea, therefore, is that prayer becomes living if it is offered from a living heart; coming from a dead heart prayer has no meaning and is dead. There is a story of an Arab who was running to the mosque where the prayer of God was being offered, but before he arrived the prayers were finished. On his way he met a man coming from the mosque, and asked him, 'Are the prayers finished?', the man replied that they were finished, and the other sighed deeply and said, 'Alas!' Then the man asked, 'Will you

give me the virtue of your sigh in exchange for the virtue of my prayers?' And the other agreed. Next day the simple man saw the Prophet in a dream, who told him that he had made a bad bargain, for that one sigh was worth all the prayers of a lifetime because it was from the heart.

There is a great difference between the stages of evolution of various human beings, and it is natural that every human being, according to his particular stage of evolution, should imagine God before him when he prays. Has anyone else a right to judge the one who prays, and to say, 'God is not this or that'? People who force their beliefs on others often put them against that belief, even if it is a true belief. It requires a great deal of tact, thought, and consideration to explain one's belief, or to correct the belief of another. In the first place it is insolent on the part of man to wish to explain God, although man today would like not only to explain God, but even to examine whether the Spirit of God exists. The other day I was much amused to hear that there are people who not only want to take photographs of the spirits, but even to weigh the soul! In ancient times it was a good thing when the State had respect for the God-ideal and religion, and taught that respect to humanity. Today man wishes to use what he calls freedom in religion, even in the basis of all religions, the God-ideal. But it should be remembered that it is not the path of freedom that leads to the goal of freedom, but the path of the God-ideal that leads to the goal of truth.

Man has respect for his mother or father or wife, or for his superiors; but all these have limited personalities. To whom then shall he give most respect? Only to one being: to God. Man can love another human being, but by the very fact of his loving another human being he has not got full scope; to express all the love that is there, he must love the unlimited God. One admires all that is beautiful in colour, tone, or form; but everything beautiful has its limitations; it is only when one rises above limitations that one finds that perfection which is God alone. One may say, 'Yes, the perfection of all things, of love, harmony, and beauty, is God; but where is the personality of God?' This is the difficulty which some people experience when trying to find something to adore or worship, something different from all

they see. In all ages men have worshipped idols or the sun or fire or some other form as God, because they were not able to see further than their eyes could see. Of course, it is easy to criticize this or to look at it with contempt, but in fact it only shows that every soul has a desire to admire, to adore, and to worship someone.

Although no trace of the personality of God can be found on the surface, yet one can see that there is a source from which all personality comes, and a goal to which all must return. And if there is one source, what a great Personality that one source must be! It cannot be understood by great intellect, nor even by the study of metaphysics or comparative religion, but only by a pure and innocent heart full of love.

The great personalities who have descended on earth from time to time to awaken in man that love which is his divine inheritance, have always found an echo in innocent souls rather than in great intellects. Man often confuses wisdom with cleverness, but a man can be clever and not wise, and by cleverness a person may strive and strive, and yet not reach God. It is a stream, the stream of love, which leads towards God.

ii

There are two points of view from which one sees the God-ideal. One is the point of view of the imaginative person, and the other the point of view of the God-conscious. The former is the minor, and the latter is the major point of view. One person thinks that there is a God, and the other sees God. The believer who adorns his God with all that imagination can supply, sees God as all beauty, all goodness, and as the most merciful and compassionate God, and recognizes Him as the Almighty, the Supreme Being. He sees in God the true Judge, and he expects one day to receive justice from Him. He knows that in God he will find at last the perfect love on which he can rely entirely. He sees in God the Friend to whom he can turn in sorrow and in joy. He calls Him his Lord, his Father or his Mother; and all that is good and beautiful he recognizes as coming from God. In point of fact he makes an intelligible form of God, that being the only means by which he can see God. And the believer who has

imagined God as high as his imagination permits adores Him, asks His forgiveness, looks for His help, and hopes one day to attain to Him; and he feels that there is someone nearer to him than anyone else in life, whose mercy is always with him.

It is this point of view that is called monotheism: believing in the personality of God, a personality which man imagines to the best of his ability. Therefore the God of the monotheist is within him, made by his mind, though it is only the form of God that he makes; the spirit is always the same, hidden behind the form that man has made because he needs a form. But there is no doubt that at this stage the God of the believer is the form made by him, the form of a human being; God is behind that form, and He answers His worshipper through it. Someone once said to a Brahmin, 'O ignorant man, you have worshipped this idol for years. Do you think that it can ever answer you?' 'Yes,' said the Brahmin, 'even from this idol of stone the answer will come if your faith is real. But if you have no real faith, you will get no answer even from the God in heaven.' It is natural that man, who knows and sees all things through his senses and his feelings, and who tries to picture everything through his imagination, things that he has neither seen nor known, such as spirits, angels, and fairies, should make God intelligible to himself by means of his imagination.

The other, the major point of view, is perhaps less interesting to some and more interesting to others; however, this is the true point of view. When a person begins to see all goodness as being the goodness of God, all the beauty that surrounds him as the divine beauty, he begins by worshipping a visible God, and as his heart constantly loves and admires the divine beauty in all that he sees, he begins to see in all that is visible one single vision; all becomes for him the vision of the beauty of God. His love of beauty increases his capacity to such a degree that great virtues such as tolerance and forgiveness spring naturally from his heart. Even things that people mostly look upon with contempt, he views with tolerance. The brotherhood of humanity he does not need to learn, for he does not see humanity, he sees only God. And as this vision develops, it becomes a divine vision which occupies every moment of his life. In nature he sees God,

in man he sees His image, and in art and poetry he sees the dance of God. The waves of the sea bring him the message from above, and the swaying of the branches in the breeze seems to him a prayer. For him there is a constant contact with his God. He knows neither horror nor terror, nor any fear. Birth and death to him are only insignificant changes in life. Life for him is a moving picture which he loves and admires, and yet he is free from it all. He is one among all the world. He himself is happy, and he makes others happy. This point of view is the pantheistic point of view.

In reality these two points of view are the natural consequences of human evolution, and one cannot really separate them. No one reaches old age without having passed through youth, and no one attains to the pantheistic point of view without having held the monotheistic. And if anyone arrived at the pantheistic point of view at once, without having held the monotheistic one, it would be like a person becoming a man without having been a child, which would be devoid of beauty.

There are certainly two possibilities of error. One is that made by the monotheist when he continues to adore the God he has made, without allowing himself to see the point of view of the pantheist. In order to love God he limits his own God, which does not mean that God is really limited, but that He is limited for that person. The ways of childhood are charming in a child, but a grown-up person with the characteristics of a child is absurd. When man begins his belief in God by monotheism, it is the best way, but when he ends his life without having made any progress, he has lost the greatest opportunity of his life. The man who makes this mistake, separates man from God, when, in reality, they cannot be divided. For God and man are like the two ends of one line. When a believer in God conceives of God as a separate entity and of man as a being separate from Him, he makes himself an exile, an exile from the kingdom of God. He holds fast to the form of God created by himself, and he does not reach the Spirit of God. However good and virtuous he has been in life, however religious in his actions he has not fulfilled the purpose of his life.

The pantheist makes a mistake when he believes that only that

which he can conceive of and which answers to his five senses exists. For by this mistake he holds on to the form of God and loses His spirit. All that we can comprehend in man is not all there is to be comprehended; there is something which is beyond our comprehension. And if the depths of a human being are too profound to be touched by man, how can he hope to reach the depths of God? All that is visible is in reality one body, a body that may be called the body of God; but behind it there is the spirit of God. What is behind this body is the source and goal of all beings. And, of course, the part which is the spirit is the most important part. The pantheist who only recognizes the divinity of that which is comprehensible to him, although pantheism may be to him a great ideal, is yet like one groping in the dark. All that is subject to change, all that is not constant, all that passes through birth and death, may also some day be destroyed. The man who limits the divine Being to something that is subject to destruction, the man who cannot feel the trace of the divine Being in something that is beyond his comprehension, has gone astray. True pantheism means that God is all, and all is God; the known and the unknown; all that exists within and without; God is all that exists, and nothing exists save He.

The beginning of monotheism may be called deism, a belief in Someone higher than oneself. And for the souls who have reached this stage of evolution, many lessons have been given by the sages. The sages have taught them to adore the sun, fire, water, certain trees, and many idols. And no doubt behind all these teachings there is always the wisdom of the masters. The lessons given to certain peoples were not meant for others, as what is suitable for one period is not suitable for another. And in teaching pantheism elementary lessons were also given, such as the idea of many gods, as among the ancient Greeks and Hindus and Egyptians. All these peoples believed in many gods, and this lesson was given to them to help them to see in different things the same spirit of God. Every god had among his characteristics certain human traits, and by this means man was taught how to recognize God in his fellow-man, and to become tolerant and forgiving; also he was led to concentrate and meditate on certain human characteristics, considering them as something

divine. Consideration and respect for humanity were taught by meditation on certain traits.

A man who is without knowledge of these two different points of view, and who is strongly impressed by materialistic ideas, often looks upon God as a force or an energy, but he emphatically denies that God can have a personality. No doubt it would be a great mistake to say that God is only a personality, but it is a still greater mistake when man denies the personality of God. And if one asks such a person, 'What is your source? What is your goal? Are you yourself a personality? Is it possible that you should be a personality yourself when the goal and the source from which you come is not a personality?', he has no answer. The seed, which is the origin of the flower and the fruit, is also the result of the flower and the fruit. Therefore man is the miniature of the personality of God; God is the seed from which the personality comes. Man, in the flowering of his personality, expresses the personality of God. It is a subject that can hardly be discussed, because one is only able to distinguish anything by comparison, and since God is the only Being He cannot be compared; even to use the word personality in speaking of God would be a mistake. There cannot be a better way of looking at the God-ideal than to consider Him as being perfection in the widest and fullest meaning of the word.

iii

The God-ideal has been regarded by different men in different ways. Some have idealized God as the King of earth and heaven, some have a conception of God as a person, others think of God as an abstraction; some believe in God, others do not, some raise the ideal of the Deity to the highest heaven, others bring it down to the lowest depths of the earth, some picture God in paradise, while others make an idol and worship it. There are many ideas and many beliefs, and many different names, such as pantheism, idolatry, belief in a formless God, or belief in many gods and goddesses; but all are striving after the same thing in one way or another.

If I were asked how many conceptions there are of God, I would say: as many as there are souls; for all, whether wise or

foolish, have some conception of God. Everyone knows God in some way and has his own picture of Him, either as a man, as the absolute, as goodness, or as something beautiful or illuminating. Everyone has some conception, and even for the one who does not believe in God, the name of God exists.

Very often the unbeliever is an unbeliever because of his own vanity, though this is not always so. He says that only simple people believe in God; he sees that there are millions of simple souls who worship God, and yet this worship does not raise them higher, and so he finds no virtue in the worship of God. Others believe in the God-ideal so long as they are happy, but when conditions change, when sorrow and trouble come, they begin to doubt whether there really is a God. I have often met people who had had great belief in God, but having lost a dear one after having vainly prayed and implored God that they might keep him, they had lost their belief. I once met a most unhappy mother who had given up her belief in God after the death of her only child. It grieved me to think that a soul so religious, tender, and fine, had given up her faith because of that one great sorrow in life. I told her that while I sympathized with her most deeply, yet in giving up her faith she had brought upon herself a much greater loss, a loss for which nothing could make up.

In the Bible and also in other scriptures we read that we should glorify the Name of God. But is God raised higher by man's worship of Him, or is He made greater by man's belief in Him? The answer is that God is independent of all that man can do for Him. If man worships God, believes in Him, and glorifies Him, it is for man's own good; for belief in God serves the greatest and only purpose in life. That purpose is the attainment of divine perfection, and it is for its fulfilment that man was born.

There is a question often asked by the metaphysician or the philosopher, when he reads that all is God and God is all. He says, 'If God is goodness, what is then the opposite of goodness? Is it outside God? If so, God is limited and something else exists as well as God. Are there two powers, rival powers? What is the power called evil?' It is true that God is all, but we would not call a man's shadow the man; evil is only a shadow, just

like illness which is another illusion. In reality there is only life, real existence, and illness is lack of life.

The Being of God is recognized by His attributes. Therefore man speaks of God as the just God; he sees all power, all goodness, in God; but when the situation is changed, when he sees God as injustice, he begins to think that God is powerless, and to judge the action of God. But one must look at this from a different point of view. Human beings are limited, imperfect, and yet we try to judge the perfect Being, or His perfect action, from our own imperfect standpoint. In order to judge, our vision must become as wide as the universe; then we might have a slight glimpse of the justice which is perfect in itself. But when we try to judge every action by limiting God and by holding God responsible for every action, we confuse our faith, and through our own fault we begin to disbelieve.

The error is in man's nature; from childhood we think that all we do and say is just and fair, and so when man thinks of God he has his own conception of justice, and by that conception he tries to judge God and His justice. If he is forgiving, he tries to overlook God's apparent injustice, and to find goodness in God and to see the limitation of man. This is better; but in the end man will realize that every movement is controlled and directed from one source, and that source is the perfection of love, justice, and wisdom, a source where nothing is lacking. But it is most difficult for man to have a perfect conception of the God-ideal, and he cannot begin in a first lesson to conceive of God as perfect. So the wise are tolerant of all the forms in which souls picture their God.

There is a story told of Moses. One day he was passing through a farm, and he saw a peasant boy sitting quietly and talking to himself, saying, 'O God, I love you so; if I saw you here in these fields I would bring you soft bedding and delicious dishes to eat, I would take care that no wild animals could come near you. You are so dear to me, and I so long to see you; if you only knew how I love you I am sure you would appear to me!' Moses heard this, and said, 'Young man, how dare you speak of God in this way? He is the formless God, and no wild beast nor bird could injure Him who guards and protects all.' The young man bent

his head sorrowfully and wept. Something was lost to him, and he felt most unhappy. And then a revelation came to Moses as a voice from within, which said, 'Moses, what have you done? You have separated a sincere lover from Me. What does it matter what I am called or how I am spoken to? Am I not in all forms?'

This story throws a great light on this question, and teaches that it is only the ignorant who accuse one another of a wrong conception of God. It teaches us how gentle we ought to be with the faith of another; as long as he has the spark of the love of God, this spark should be slowly blown upon so that the flame may rise; if not, that spark will be extinguished. How much the spiritual development of mankind in general depends upon a religious man! He can either spread the light, or diminish it by forcing his belief on others.

Very often a person thinks that other people should believe in and worship his God. But everyone has his own conception of God, and this conception becomes the stepping-stone to the true ideal of God. Then there are others who believe in God, but do not show their belief in any outward religious tendency. People often misunderstand them, and yet there is something very beautiful hidden in their heart, not understood and not even known. There is a story told in the East of a man who used to avoid going to the house of prayer, who showed no outward sign of being religious, so that his wife often wondered if he had any belief in God; she thought a great deal about this and was very anxious about it. One day she said to her husband, 'I am very happy today.' The man was surprised, and asked what made her happy, and she said, 'I was under a false impression, but now that I have found out the truth, I am glad.' He asked, 'What has made you glad?' And she replied, 'I heard you saying the name of God in your sleep.' He said, 'I am very sorry.' It was too precious, too great for him to speak of, and he felt it as a great shock, after having kept this secret in the deepest part of his being because it was too sacred to speak of. He could not bear it, and he died.

We cannot say from outward appearances who believes and who does not believe. One person may be pious and orthodox and it may mean nothing; another may have a profound love for

God and a great knowledge of Him, and no one may know of it.

What benefit does man receive from believing in the kingship of God? How does he derive real help from his belief? He must begin by realizing the nobility of human nature. Not that one should expect everything to be good and beautiful, and, if one's expectation is not realized, think there is no hope of progress; for man is limited, his goodness is limited. No one has ever proved to be our ideal; but we may make an ideal in our imagination, and, whenever we see that goodness is lacking, we may add to it from our own heart and so complete the nobility of human nature. This is done by patience, tolerance, kindness, forgiveness. The lover of goodness loves every little sign of goodness. He overlooks the faults and fills up the gaps by pouring out love and supplying that which is lacking. This is real nobility of soul. Religion, prayer, and worship, are all intended to ennoble the soul, not to make it narrow, sectarian, or bigoted. One cannot arrive at true nobility of spirit if one is not prepared to forgive the imperfections of human nature. For all men, whether worthy or unworthy, require forgiveness, and only in this way can one rise above the lack of harmony and beauty, until at last one arrives at the stage when one begins to reflect all that one has collected.

All these riches of love, kindness, tolerance, and good manners a man then reflects, and he throws this light on to the other person and brings out those virtues in him, just as watering a plant makes the leaves and buds open and the flowers blossom. This brings one nearer to the perfection of God, in whom alone one sees all that is perfect, all that is divine. As it is said in the Bible, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'

iv

The pursuit of the impossible is inherent in man's nature. What man has he does not care for; what he has not he wishes to obtain. Certain things may have a greater or a lesser value, but man attaches most value to something which he cannot get. And of what he can get, however valuable it may be, the value

becomes less. Since that is the nature of man, the wise have called the ideal of his pursuit, which can never be attained, God, by which they meant the Source.

Everything is naturally attracted to its source: earth to earth, water to water, fire to fire, and air to air; and thus man's soul is attracted to its source. While the body is in pursuit of all that belongs to it and of everything that attracts its physical nature, the soul is continually in pursuit of its own origin. Rumi, in a lovely poem, tells us that when a person who has left his homeland and been away a long time, awakens, then even though he is absorbed in his new life a yearning begins to make itself felt; he longs for his origin, the home from whence he came. And so it is with human nature. The earth supplies all the things that man's nature demands except one, and that is his source; and therefore man remains dissatisfied all through life in spite of everything that he may obtain in answer to his desires: pleasure, comfort, rank, or wealth. He may obtain them all, but still the longing of his soul will remain because it is for home. Home is the source which the wise have called God.

There is another simile: that of a man who went into a dark room to search for some object that he had lost; and while he was searching he began to feel that he was melting in some way or other, and the moment he found the object he melted completely. He could no longer find anything of himself; the only thing he saw was that object. To his great sorrow and disappointment, though he found the object he did not find himself.

That is the condition of man on earth. The innermost being of man is that which may be called the source itself, and the outer being of man is what we call 'man'. Being absorbed in things of the world he loses, so to speak, the sense of the inner being. What he knows of himself is only that yearning and searching. He may have found what he was searching for, and yet he has lost himself. He can only be pleased with what he has found for a certain time, and then his longing will be to find himself.

In answer to this continual yearning of every soul, the wise have given to humanity the God-ideal. And when we consider the past and present attitudes towards the God-ideal, we see a great difference. The former was that man believed in God; and if one

among twenty thousand persons did not believe in the God-ideal, he dared not say so before others, as everyone else believed in God. So he could not help saying that he believed in God also. Today it is quite the contrary. Unbelief has become the pride of modern man. He thinks it is intellectual to disbelieve and that it is simple to believe; that the believers in God are simple people. And if they are intellectual and believe, they do not admit it fearing that other intellectual friends will laugh at them. Very few know what a loss it is to humanity that the education which in the past made it easier for a man to reach the fulfilment of his life's purpose has now been taken away from him.

There have always been many different conceptions of God. It is for this reason that there are so many different religions and sects, each sect having its own idea of God. There were people who believed in offering their worship to the sun. There were others who offered prayers to fire or water or earth, and some to trees; others considered animals sacred or looked upon certain birds as sacred; some made different forms and characters in marble or stone or metal, perhaps with the head of an animal, the wings of a bird, or the body of a fish. And these they have called their particular God.

The reason why animal worship was taught in the ancient religions was to point out to humanity some traits in certain animals which it would be beneficial for man to notice. Take for instance the cow-worship of the Hindus. The nature of the cow is harmlessness, usefulness; the cowherd takes her into the fields, she lives on the grass and herbs and comes home, recognizing the place where she belongs. In spite of her two horns she is harmless; harmless to man although he takes the larger share of her milk which was meant for her calf, without ever thinking about it, without ever appreciating it. He has many delicious dishes made from the milk, but he never thinks of her; she gives him the essence of her life without any bitterness, enmity, or selfishness. She returns after a whole day in the forest, coming back in the evening to the place where the best of her life is taken from her.

There are morals which one can learn by looking at a tree, by looking at an animal, by looking at a bird. In ancient times,

when there was no printing-press or any other means of giving philosophy or morals in the form of books, the teachers gave them in this way; and by it one can see God. Indeed, one sees God in all forms, especially in the things which teach lessons, which can inspire man and help him in his life; things which are pointed out by teachers to be looked at and worshipped. In fact they did not say, 'Worship the cow.' They said, 'To learn how to worship, look at the cow.' Those who only see the surface say that they are worshipping the cow, but in reality they are worshipping God.

Then there is the idea that if a person has not lived rightly in life he will go backward to the animal life. But life grows, and man goes forward. After becoming wise man will hardly become foolish; and when it seems that he has become foolish it is perhaps that he has gone one step backward, but it does not mean a hundred steps. True, there are hindrances on the path which may set him back two or three steps; but then he takes two or three steps forward again. In those ancient times, however, the priesthood would speak to the people as to children, 'If you are not good you will be punished!' And the threat was that they would be turned into a cow or a dog or a cat.

At the same time, when man comes to the real essence of truth, when he touches the ultimate truth, he realizes that there is nothing which is not in man. There is the animal kingdom in him, the mineral kingdom, the angelic kingdom, and the divine kingdom. All that is low, all that is high, all that is exists in man. Every man is a miniature of God, and God's constituents are all there, both in and outside his being.

How did idolatry come about? There were communities, people who could not understand the incomprehensible and were not even ready to accept something which was within their reach. And therefore the wise teachers said, 'Here is God. Here is a stone image and this is a certain God.' They thought, 'This is better: a god that does not move, that does not run away; when we long for Him at night, in the morning we can open the shrine and bow before Him.' It was a lesson for them. Some came to the wise men and said they wanted to seek for God. 'Yes,' said the wise ones, 'come to the temple; but first walk

fifty or a hundred times round it, and then you may come in.' Man does not value that for which he has not worked. That which is nearest he does not want.

Zarathushtra taught men to see the beauty of God, and to worship Him by looking at the water, at the sky, at nature. It was wise advice. When we look at the immensity of nature our mind naturally becomes keen, our heart larger, and we begin to see the signs of God there more than in the midst of worldly activity. Everyone who has had any experience of being surrounded by nature will accept this, whether he believes in God or not, and he will notice that nature is whispering, exalting, uplifting. Being face to face with nature gives a feeling of expansion of the heart, and nature causes the soul to awaken.

One might ask where then is unity, if different teachers and wise men have given different ideas of God, which means dividing the God-ideal; but the answer is that as many souls as there are, so many different conceptions of God are there. And it cannot be otherwise. God apart, we individual beings have some who look upon us as friends and others as enemies; some look upon us favourably and some unfavourably; some praise us, others blame us; some love us, others hate us. Therefore each individual is either a friend or an enemy, foolish or wise, great or small; to every person each one is different. The mother of the thief does not look upon him as a thief, but as her wonderful son who toils to serve and help her.

And what is God? God is a conception; and we each make a conception according to our capacity, according to what we have heard and what we think. One says, 'I do not wish to imagine God as the Beloved, as the Lover, as the Lord of Compassion.' Another says, 'I wish to imagine God as full of power, without whose command nothing can move, or as the wisest Being who weighs the actions of everyone as the Lord of Justice.' A third says, 'I look upon God as the perfection of Beauty; all the beauty and harmony there is, is in God.' And again another says, 'I wish to imagine God to be the Friend, the friend in need and trouble and difficulty.' Everyone imagines God in his own way, and as not everyone in the world has the same idea of his friend, so it is

natural that every person in the world has his particular idea of God, his own conception of what is his God at that time. Therefore one need not be surprised at the Chinese, the ancient Greeks, and the Egyptians who had thousands of Gods. I should say that is few; there should be millions of Gods, for one cannot have a God without a personal conception. But the source is the same, the source is one, and therefore God is One.

One might ask if God realized His oneness before man appeared on earth. But who can say how many times man appeared on earth and disappeared again? We know only of one history of our planet, but how many planets existed, how many millions of years? How many creatures were created, and how many withdrawn? We cannot speak of God's past, present, and future; we can only give an idea of this by saying that God is the only Being, who existed, who exists, and who will exist. All else that we see is His phenomenon.

God realizes His oneness as His own nature. Since God is one, He always realizes His oneness through all things, but through man He realizes it fully. On a tree there are many leaves, and though they differ from one another the difference is not very great. Worms and birds and animals differ more, but one finds the greatest variety in man. There are numberless human forms, and yet there are none exactly alike; this itself is a living proof of the oneness of God. God's unity keeps itself intact even in this world of variety.

There have been missions of prophets who came time after time to give man this conception in order to lift him up to the idea of the incomprehensible God, while at the same time they have tried to give him the idea of one God. They gave to humanity whatever was the best conception that could be given at that time. When we read the Qur'an, the picture of God is different from the picture of God that the Hindus have made. A Buddhist statue in India is Indian, in China it is Chinese, and in Japan it is Japanese. This is natural. When man pictures angels he draws them like human beings; he only adds wings to them. Man cannot imagine God's personality as being different from man's personality; that is why he attaches to God his ideal of the perfect man. These different conceptions of God very often

caused disputes and differences, and different sects were formed, each fighting for their God.

This is also the reason why it was necessary for the prophets to teach humanity the ideal of one God; yet it was most difficult for them to do so. Man is born with two eyes. He sees everything in twos; he is accustomed to see twos. Once when I was speaking of an Indian musical instrument I was asked, 'What does it look like? Does it look like a banjo?' Man cannot conceive of anything that is not like something else. If someone hears that a person has a notion of religious philosophy, he asks if it is something like New Thought or Theosophy or Christian Science. Man wants to compare, to see with two eyes; but that which is without comparison cannot be shown in the same way as things of this world are shown. That is why the prophets who came to teach the one God, told their followers to think of Him as Lord or Master or Friend or Beloved, in order to give them a certain conception of God. But when someone does not see the beauty of another person's conception he makes a great mistake, for the other also has a conception, and perhaps an even better conception than his own.

Man always has a tendency to give his conception to others or to force his belief on them as being the only right belief; he thinks the other person is an unbeliever or that his belief is wrong. But we do not know. Sometimes those who do not seem to have a proper belief, have a belief which is better than our own. Perhaps that person is more spiritual than we ourselves. We do not know.

We do not know the depth of people's devotion to God. We judge people from their outward appearance; whether they seem more religious from the outside, more orthodox, or whether they seem far removed from religion. But we do not know. Perhaps there is a person who does not show one sign of religion, yet in him there may be a spark of devotion, a perpetual fire of the love of God. There may be another person who in his outside actions appears to be narrow and inordinately fond of ceremonies; but perhaps the outside is quite different from what is hidden within him. But those who judge others, their beliefs, their conception of God, are very much mistaken. Their manner

may be an outside appearance, a cover; one does not know what is hidden behind it.

A large number of mankind are so-called believers in God. And we may ask ourselves whether they are all happy, whether they are all wise and prosperous and spiritual. There is also a large number of unbelievers, and again we ask ourselves whether they are all prosperous, happy, spiritual, intelligent, and progressive. And we shall find in the end that we cannot fix a rule. We cannot say that belief in God makes a person good or prosperous or evolved: we cannot say that the unbeliever is kept back from progress, prosperity, happiness, and evolution. But this leads us to another question: how to benefit ourselves by the God-ideal, and why the God-ideal is meant to be the best way to reach the truth.

If a man is standing on a staircase and remains on the first step, he may be a believer but he is not going up. Thus there are many believers who have a certain conception of God, but they are standing there without moving, while perhaps a person who has no conception of God at all may be moving. There are thousands of people who pronounce the name of God many times during the day, but who are perhaps most wretched. The reason is that they have not yet discovered the purpose of the God-ideal. It is not merely belief; belief is only the first step. God is the key to truth, God is the stepping-stone to self-realization, God is the bridge which unites the outer life with the inner life, bringing about perfection. It is by understanding this that the secret of the God-ideal is to be realized.

v

It is the spirit of all souls which in all ages has been personified as God. There are periods when this spirit has been materialized in the faith of humanity and worshipped as God, the Sovereign and the Lord of both worlds, as Judge, Sustainer, and Forgiver; but there are also periods when this realization has declined and when mankind has become more absorbed in the life of the world than in the spiritual ideal. Thus belief in God comes to humanity like tides of the sea, and every now and then it appears on the surface, mostly with a divine message given as an answer to the

cry of humanity at that time. So it is in the life of individuals; at times the belief in God comes like tides of the sea, with an impulse to worship, to serve God, to search for God, to love God, and to long for God-communication. The more the material life of the world is before one's eyes, the more this spiritual impulse is closed. The spiritual impulse therefore arises especially at times of sorrow and disappointment.

Belief in God is natural, but in life both art and nature are necessary. So God, who exists independently of our conception of Him, must be conceived by us for our own comprehension. To make God intelligible, man must first make his own God. It is on this principle that the idea of many gods and the custom of idol-worship were based in the ancient religions of the world. God cannot be two. The God of each is the God of all, but in order to comprehend that God we each have to make our own God. Some of us seek for justice; but we can better seek for God, who is just. Some of us look for beauty; we can best find it in the God of beauty. Some of us seek for love; we can best find it in the God of mercy and compassion. Some of us wish for strength and power; we can best find it in the God Almighty. The seeking of every soul in this world is different, distinct, and peculiar to himself, and he can best attain to it by looking for the object of his search in God.

The moment a person arrives at this belief, he need ask no question of his fellow-man, for the answer to every question that springs up in his mind he finds in his own heart. The dwelling-place of God, which is called heaven, is then found in his own heart. The Friend on whom he can constantly depend, whom he can always trust, whose sympathy and love are secure, who will never fail whatever happens, who is strong enough to help, and who is sufficiently wise to guide him in life, he will find in his own heart.

Those who because of their materialistic outlook cannot believe in the God-ideal, lose a great deal in their lives. That ideal which is highest and best, the only ideal worth loving, worshipping, longing for, worth the sacrifice of all one has, and worth depending upon both by day and through the darkness of night, is God. He who has God in his life, has all he needs; he who does

not have God may possess everything in this mortal world, but he will be lonely; he is in the wilderness even in the midst of the crowd. Thus the journey of the Sufi is towards God. It is divine knowledge which he seeks; it is the realization of God-consciousness which is his goal. The existence of God is a question which arises in every mind, whether of the believer in God or of the unbeliever. There are moments when even the greatest believer in God questions His existence—whether there really is a God. On reflection he finds it sacrilegious to have a notion such as this, and he tries to get rid of it. But more often such a question arises in the heart of the unbeliever: he wonders if it is really true, if there is such a thing as God. The idea of God is inborn in man. The God-ideal is the flower of the human race; and this flower blooms in the realization of God.

Just as everything in the objective world tends to rise upward, so the tendency of the soul can be seen in human aspiration, which always soars upward whatever the sphere of man's consciousness. The aspirations of the man who is only conscious of material life, reach as far as they can in material gains; yet his aspirations become higher and higher, and he remains discontented with all that he achieves, owing to the immensity of life in every phase. This craving for the attainment of what is unattainable is the longing of the soul to reach life's utmost heights. It is the nature of the soul to try to discover what is behind the veil; it is the soul's constant longing to climb heights which are beyond its power; it is the desire of the soul to see something that it has never seen; it is the constant longing of the soul to know something it has never known. But the most wonderful thing about it is that the soul already knows there is something behind this veil of perplexity; that there is something to be sought for in the highest spheres of life; that there is some beauty to be seen; that there is Someone to be known who is knowable. This desire, this longing, is not acquired; this desire is a dim knowledge which the soul has within itself.

Therefore disbelief in the God-ideal is nothing but a condition which is brought about by the mists arising from the material life of illusion, and covering the light of the soul like clouds. That is why the unbeliever is not satisfied with his unbelief. Of course,

sometimes his vanity is fed by the thought that he is wise in not believing in someone whose existence is only believed in by blind beings. So he begins to think, 'After all, to believe in God is not difficult; any simpleton can believe in the God-ideal.' He therefore takes the opposite direction and refuses to believe. He is honest, and yet he is like someone who stands before a wall which hinders his progress.

Even if this world offered somebody all it possesses, the soul would not be satisfied, for its satisfaction lies in its higher aspiration, and it is this higher aspiration which leads to God. Thus aspiration is a man's nature, but sometimes he wonders whether at the end of the journey he may perhaps find nothing. There is, however, no question which has no answer, and there is no desire that is impossible of fulfilment. There is appetite, and there is food; there is thirst, and there is water; there is sight, and there is something to be seen. So if there is aspiration then there is God, for one cannot know what does not exist; something must exist first to enable one to know it.

One might ask if those who do not know God, which not everybody can, then only believe in some idea, but the answer is: what is an idea? An idea is that from which everything is born—science, art, music, poetry, religion, and nationality. If the idea is the source from which all comes, then why should the idea be something insignificant, and why should not God, who is the source and goal of all, be found in the idea? The reason why the soul seeks for the God-ideal is that it is dissatisfied with all that only gives momentary satisfaction. All beauty, goodness, and greatness which man attributes to God are things he admires and seeks through life. He admires these things in others and strives to attain them for himself; and when, at the end of his examination, he finds that all that he thought to be good, great, or beautiful falls short of that perfection which his soul is seeking, he then raises his eyes towards the sky and seeks for the One who has beauty, goodness, and greatness; and that is God. The one who does not seek for God, is disappointed at the end of his journey of illusion, for throughout the whole journey he did not find the perfection of beauty, goodness, and greatness on the earth, and he neither believed in nor expected to meet such an ideal in

heaven. All the disappointments which are the natural outcome of this life of illusion disappear when once a person has touched the God-ideal, for what one seeks after in life, one finds in God.

The seeking for God is a natural outcome of the maturity of the soul. There is a time in life when a passion is awakened in the soul which gives the soul a longing for the unattainable, and if the soul does not take that direction, then it certainly misses something in life for which it has an innate longing and in which lies its ultimate satisfaction.

Now the question is: all beauty, goodness, and greatness, however small and limited, can be found on the earth, but where can the same be found in the Perfection called God? The answer is that the first necessity is the belief that there is such a Being as God, in whom goodness, beauty, and greatness are perfect. In the beginning it will seem nothing but a belief; but in time, if kept in sincerity and faith, that belief will become like the egg of the Phoenix, out of which the magic bird is born. The birth of God is the birth of the soul. Every soul seeks for happiness, and after pursuing all the objects which for the moment seem to give happiness, it finds out that nowhere is there perfect happiness except in God. This happiness cannot come by merely believing in God. Believing is a process, and by this process the God within is awakened and made living; it is the feeling that God is living in one which gives happiness. When one sees the injustice, the falsehood, the unfriendliness of human nature, and to what a degree this nature can develop—that it culminates in tyranny of which both individuals and communities become victims—there seems to be only one refuge, and that is the centre of the whole of life, God, who is the only place of safety and source of peace, which is the longing of every soul.

vi

Different conceptions of God have existed in various periods and among different people. Seeking for the deity, people in all ages have pictured Him in some form or other. This is natural with man. If he is told about someone he has never seen or known, he forms a conception of that person, and he takes this conception for knowledge of that person until he sees him. There

are some who make a conception in their mind of somebody whom they have never seen that is almost as real as the actual person.

The human heart is an accommodation which conceives the idea of God and pictures Him according to man's own mentality. The Buddha of China has Chinese features, and that of Japan has the eyes of Japan; the Buddha of India resembles an Indian. Man cannot conceive of an angel being different from a human being, except that he attaches two wings to the angel in order to make it a little different. If the angel were not pictured as a man, it would not attract a human being; therefore it is natural that in every period people have conceived of the Personality of God as a human personality. They could have had no better conception, for there is nothing in the world which is a more finished personality than the human personality.

People have called God He, recognizing the might and power of the deity. Other people have called God She, recognizing in the deity the mother-principle and beauty. It is from the differences of conception that the many gods and goddesses have come. For it is true that there are as many gods as there are conceptions. At the same time many gods mean many conceptions of the one and only God. Ignoring this truth, many have fought over their different gods; and yet the wise man in every period of the world has understood God to be the one and only Being.

For the ordinary mind it is not sufficient to feel that something exists as an idea. It is too vague. Man wishes to feel its existence with his own hands; then only can he acknowledge something to exist. The wise, therefore, have given different objects to such people, and have pointed them out to the people as gods. Some said, 'See God in the sun'; and the people understood this. They were not satisfied with thinking that God was an idea; they were much more pleased to know that God could be seen by them, God who is incomparable even with the sun, and who is unattainable.

Some wise men have said, 'He is in the fire'. Some said to a simple man who asked to see God, 'Go into the forest and find a certain tree: that tree is God.' The search for that tree gave that man something to do, which was essential, and the patience with which he sought for the tree also did something to his

soul. There was joy, too, in finding a rare tree, and in the end he found what he was looking for, for God is everywhere.

Some have made images of different ideas, such as love, justice, knowledge, and power, and called them goddesses, moulding them into different forms, and they have given them to man to worship. Some wise men have said the cow is sacred. Certainly it is sacred for a farmer whose farming depends upon the cow. His life's sustenance, in every form, comes from the cow; it is indeed sacred.

The wise have pointed out different objects to man which will hold his attention and become objects of concentration for him to still his mind; for in the mind which is still, God manifests. Then, again, the wise have presented the God-ideal to the people in the form of symbols. To simple beings a symbol was God; and to awakened minds the same symbol of God was a revealing factor of the secret of the deity. If one could only see how marvellously wisdom has played its part in the diversity of the conceptions of the divine ideal, guiding the souls of all grades of evolution towards the same goal, which in the end becomes spiritual attainment!

The conception of many gods came from two sources. One was the idea of the wise to personify every kind of power and attribute, and to call it a certain god. This was done in order to give the ordinary mind the thought that was most needed: that God is in everything and that God is all power. Later this idea was misunderstood and the wisdom behind it became obscured; and so some wise men fought against the ideas of other wise men. Yet they did not fight the idea; they fought the misconceptions of it. But in the West at the present time, when no such idea of many gods exists, a great number of people have lost their faith after the recent war, saying, 'If God is all goodness, all justice, all power, why has such a dreadful thing as war been allowed to take place?' If these same people had been accustomed to the idea of many gods and had recognized Kali, who has been worshipped by the Hindus for generations as the goddess of war, then it would not have been such a strange idea to them that if all is from God, then not only peace but even war is from Him.

The mystics of all ages have therefore given God many names. The Sufi schools of esotericism have distinguished many different names of God, all with their own nature and secret, and they have used them in their meditations upon the path of spiritual attainment. Therefore the Sufis do not have many gods, but they have many names of God, each expressive of a certain attribute. Suppose these names which the Sufis have used were not the Names of God, if they had only held in thought words such as mercy, compassion, patience, they would have worshipped a merit, not a personality. A merit is not creative; a merit is only something which is possessed. The attribute is not important; it is the possessor of the attribute who is important. Therefore instead of thinking of success the Sufi calls upon the God of success. For him the God of success is not a different God; there is only one God; only, by calling upon that name of God which is expressive of success, he attaches his soul to that spirit of success.

The idea of many gods has also come from the deep thinkers and philosophers who have seen God in every soul, and every soul making a God of its own according to its stage of evolution. There is a saying among the Hindus, 'There are as many gods as there are strains of music,' in other words, there are countless imaginations and numberless gods. Whenever this idea was taught to the people, it was to break the ignorance of those who tried to confine God to heaven, and deprived the earth of His divine presence: they waited for death to come, that they might be taken into the presence of God, who was sitting on the throne of justice in the hereafter. By this the sages tried to show people that God is in every soul, and that there are as many gods as there are souls: some advanced, some not advanced, some further advanced, yet all gods. If there is a struggle, it is a conflict between gods; if there is harmony, it is friendship between gods. By these means they tried to make man realize the most essential truth that God is all. No doubt those who misunderstand will always misunderstand.

This idea also became corrupted, and made people who believed in many gods interested only in the legends of the past which narrated the wars and battles that took place among the gods. Therefore the wise had to come to their rescue again, and

to teach them the one God, in order that they might again come to the realization of the oneness of life, which is best realized in the God-ideal.

vii

Many who are ready to accept the God-ideal, yet question the personality of God. Some think that if all is God, then God cannot be a person; but to this it may be answered that though the seed does not show the flower in it, yet the seed culminates in a flower, and therefore the flower has already existed in the seed. If one were to say that the flower is made in the image of the seed, it would not be wrong, for the only image of the seed is the flower. If God has no personality, how can we human beings have a personality, who come from Him, out of His own Being, we who can express the divine in the perfection of our souls? If the bubble is water, certainly the sea is water; how can the bubble be water and not the sea? The difference, however, between the human personality and the divine personality, God's personality, is that the human personality can be compared, whereas God's personality has no comparison. Human personality can be compared because of its opposite; God has no opposite, so His personality cannot be compared. But to call God 'all' is like saying that He is a number of objects, all of which exist together somewhere. The word 'all' does not express the meaning of the God-ideal; the proper expression for God is the Only Being.

And then there are others, philosophically and scientifically minded people, who have read many books and who have thought about the soul and the spirit, who have come to the intellectual understanding that if God exists it is as an abstract idea which we may call God or life, it does not matter which. They are the people who have eaten of the truth without digesting it. It is like swallowing pebbles which one can never digest. They have some part of the truth, but they do not profit by it. To the one who believes that we should not consider God as being abstract, but that He can only be realized, to him the abstract means something. But when the abstract means nothing, then God means nothing.

By turning God into something abstract man loses the

opportunity which is given to him to benefit by the formation of a conception of God. No doubt what man has constructed is subject to destruction; it can only last a certain time; but if he makes use of it he arrives at realization, whereas if he destroys that conception which was meant to bring him to the fulfilment of his life, he has lost something which was invaluable. By thinking in dry philosophical terms people often go astray, not so much by having false ideas as by not being able to digest the truth.

Thus one might ask if one should worship the personal God rather than the abstract God. We should begin by worshipping the personal God, and we should allow our soul to unfold in the abstract God. If we begin our religious life by worshipping the abstract God then we begin at the wrong end. The realization of the abstract God is the satisfaction which comes after we have perfected the worship of the personal God. But if we were to remain forever at the stage of worshipping the personal God, we would not derive the full benefit of that worship; we should worship the personal God as a means to attain to the knowledge of God, and this knowledge is to be found in the abstract. It is like an artist who has painted a beautiful picture, the best he has ever painted, and he looks at it and is so impressed by what he sees that he cannot believe that it is he who has made it; he sees in it something which is beyond himself. This is the moment when he begins to understand art, when he begins to profit by it.

The worship of the personal God is the art of idealizing, the greatest and best art there is. We idealize the object of our worship as the perfection of all things, of love and justice and forgiveness and power and beauty. In the idealization of our object we offer all the appreciation and admiration we have, and when we have humbled ourselves before the object we have created, we have begun our journey on the spiritual path. It is this beautiful negation of the self which is artistic, more so than the attitude of the ascetic who calls himself God but whose ego is rigid, devoid of beauty and art. In the end it is this path which helps us to efface ourselves entirely in that object of worship, that object in which we see God. And by doing so, in time a door opens, and then we enter into the abstract qualities of the Spirit, to realize the ultimate truth.

We read in the Bible, 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect'. Man only knows the outermost part of his being, for man is the sign of imperfection; but in the innermost being of man is perfection. Therefore man is entitled to perfection by realizing his innermost being. But as from the time of his birth he has identified himself with his limited being, he has never known himself as anything else but imperfect. There is no possibility for him, even by realizing that he is God or the Deity Himself, of attaining to perfection; for his first impression always is of limitation, of imperfection. Whatever position he may have in life, whether he is a king, or has fame or wealth or power or wisdom, yet he is limited. He cannot think of himself as anything but an imperfect being. That is the position, and yet the purpose of his life is to come to perfection.

And how is man to come to perfection? Only in one way, and that is first to make a conception by worshipping God, by trying to know about God, by attributing all that there is of beauty and power and justice to that perfect conception in himself. By doing this a man will come nearer and nearer to the truth; and by the time he has come closer to God he will have lost the idea of his false self which stood between himself and perfection. And by this process of losing his false self, which is called in the Bible self-denial, and which the Sufis called *Fana* and the Yogis *Yoga*, he will come to the realization which is the longing of his soul and by the attainment of which he fulfils his life's purpose.

The God-ideal is so tremendous that man can never comprehend it fully, therefore the best method adopted by the wise is to allow every man to make his own God. In this way he forms whatever conception he is capable of forming. He makes Him King of the heavens and of the earth; he makes Him Judge, greater than all judges; he makes Him Almighty, having all power; he makes Him the Possessor of all grace and glory; he makes Him the beloved God, merciful and compassionate; he recognizes in Him providence, support, and protection; and in Him he recognizes all perfection. This ideal becomes a stepping-stone to the higher knowledge of God. The man who has not enough imagination to make a God, who is not open to the picture of God presented by someone else, remains without one,

for he finds no stepping-stone to that knowledge which his soul longs for but which his doubts deny.

There are many who feel that it would be deceiving themselves to make a God out of their imagination, Someone who is not seen in the objective world. The answer is that our whole life is based and constructed upon imagination; and if there is one thing in this objective world which is lasting, it is imagination. The man who is incapable of imagination, who does not value it, is devoid of art and poetry, of music, manners, and culture. He can best be compared with a rock, which never troubles to imagine.

Man is not capable of picturing God as other than a person—a person with all the best qualities, the ideal person. This does not mean that all that is ugly and evil does not belong to the universe of God, or, in other words, is not in God Himself. But the water of the ocean is always pure, in spite of whatever may be thrown into it. The Pure One consumes all impurities, and turns them into purity. Evil and ugliness exist only in man's limited conception; in God's great Being these have no existence. Therefore he is not wrong who in his imagination makes God the God of all beauty, free from ugliness; the God of all the best qualities, free from all evil. For by that imagination he is drawn nearer and nearer every moment of his life to that divine ideal which his soul is seeking, and once he has touched divine perfection, he will find in it the fulfilment of his life.

viii

Why is God called the Creator? Because the creation itself is the evidence of some wisdom working. No mechanical creation could result in such perfection as that of nature. All the machines of the scientists are built on the model of nature's mechanism, and every inspiration that comes to the artist is received from nature. Nature is so perfect in itself that it needs no scientific or artistic improvement upon it; but to satisfy the limited human fancies man develops science and art. And yet it is still the creation of God which is expressed in art and science through man, as in man God is not absent. In some ways man is more able to finish His creation, which God completes through man. No better

evidence is needed for a sincere enquirer into the creation. If he only concentrates his mind upon nature, he will certainly get an insight sooner or later into the perfect wisdom which is hidden behind it. The soul that comes into the world is only a divine ray, and the impressions it receives on its way while coming to the earth are also from God, for no movement is possible without God's command. Thus in all creation, in its every aspect, at the end of the search God alone proves to be the only Creator.

Another name for God is the Sustainer. Jesus Christ said, 'Consider the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin; yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' and Rumi explains it further in the *Masnavi*, where he says, 'Even the spider is not neglected by God, but is supplied with its food.' If the smallest germ and worm, insignificant as it is, had depended for its supply upon man who cannot always supply himself even, how would the creation have continued? It appears that the creatures who do not worry for their supply have their food conveyed to their mouths.

Man's struggle for his supply seems to be greater than that of any other living being in the lower creation. But what makes it so? It is not God; it is man himself, who is selfish and unfair to his brother, and absorbed in his own interests in life. In spite of all the famines, the world still has sufficient supplies; but imagine the amount of food that has been sunk in the sea, and for how many years the earth, in which man's food is prepared, was neglected by men busy killing one another! If the result is hunger and greater strife, is God to be blamed? It is man who deserves all blame.

Sa'di very subtly and beautifully explains human nature in regard to providence, 'The Creator is always busy preparing my supply for me, but my anxiety for my supply is my natural illness.' Life is such a phenomenon, if only we dive deep into it, that we find there is no question without an answer. It is never that we need something and are not provided with it. Only, there is a difference between what we think we need and what we really need, in fact the supply is always greater than our need; that is the miracle of providence. Sometimes we look at it with smiles, at other times with tears, but it is something real and

living; and it will prove to be still more real if we look at it by climbing to the top of our reason.

God is spoken of as Judge by many prophets, and the man of reason and logic has tried to attribute justice to the law. But justice is not law; justice is above the law. To our limited view things in the world often appear unjust; and often it seems that man's law is simply to do what he wishes if it lies in his power. But behind this illusive appearance there certainly is a strict justice and a real law. No sooner does the heart become living than this law manifests. One cannot but marvel at life and nature, seeing how great is the justice of God. No soul has to wait for days or weeks or years, or for death to come, for the law to manifest. Every day is Judgment Day, and every hour is the hour of justice. A criminal will escape from the prison bars, but he cannot escape from being under the sky. There is the Judge within and without. When his eyes are closed he is being judged within; when they are open he is being judged without. We are always in a court of justice. If we do not realize it, it is because we are intoxicated by life, and we become like a drunken man in the court, who sees neither judge nor justice.

But what we can most marvel at in life is the knowledge that in spite of His great justice God is the Forgiver. He forgives even more than He judges, for justice comes from His intelligence, whereas forgiveness comes from His divine love. When His divine love rises as a wave, it washes away the sins of a whole life in a moment. For law has no power to stand before love; the stream of love sweeps it away. When the woman accused by everyone was brought before Christ, what arose from the heart of the Master? The law? No, it was love in the form of mercy and compassion. Even the thought of the love of God fills the heart with joy and lightens its burden. And if, as the religions have always taught, a man even once in his life has asked whole-heartedly for forgiveness, in spite of all his life's sins he will certainly be forgiven.

ix

God is called the King of heaven and earth, and of the seen and unseen beings, only because we have no better words than those we use for all the things of this world. To call God King

does not raise Him any higher; it only helps to make His power and glory more intelligible to our minds. Yet there are certain characters which are kingly, and in God is to be found the perfection of such characters. It is not that every person cannot have that kind of character, but that in a higher position a soul can perhaps show forth that character more than in an ordinary capacity. That character is love hidden behind indifference; in Sufi terms it is denoted by a Persian word, *Bi-niyaz*, which means hidden. It does not mean the hidden God; it means hidden beauty. Love expressed is one thing, and love hidden is another. Under the veil of indifference love is often hidden, and the Sufi poets have pictured it most beautifully in their verses, which are nothing but pictures of human life and nature.

There are examples in the histories of kings which show this character. Sometimes a person whom the king favoured the most was kept back from being the Prime Minister. This did not mean that it was not the wish of the king; it only meant that the king considered the sympathy and admiration he had for that man to be worth more than the prime ministership. Also, when the king did not speak to a certain person for a long time, this did not mean that he was out of favour; it only meant that the king knew that he would understand. There are instances when the patience of saints and sages has been tried to the utmost. The pain and suffering that spiritual souls have sometimes gone through has been greater than the average person's, but behind their indifference there are many reasons.

Then one sees the other part of kingliness: that sometimes those whom the king cared little for were graciously received and amply rewarded. The ordinary mind could not conceive of the reason behind this, but the king who was responsible for his subjects, understood rightly, like a gardener who knows which plant to rear and which tree had better be cut down. In spite of all opposition from all around, kings have held to their idea, conscious of their duty. So it is with God.

But apart from kings, even the manner and method of a responsible person is not always understood by another whose responsibility is not the same, so how can man always understand the ways of God, the only King in the true sense of the word,

beside whom all other kings are nothing but imitations? It is the kingship of God which manifests in the blossoming of every soul. When a soul arrives at its full bloom, it begins to show the colour and spread the fragrance of the divine spirit of God.

The God-ideal is meant to awaken God in the soul, in order that He may realize His kingship. It is this which is suggested in the prayer of Christ where it is said, 'Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done.' It is in this realization that the kingdom of God comes; and what follows is that His will is then done. But when a person does not know who is the king, neither does he know what is the kingdom.

From the time that man evolved enough to be able to understand his affairs, kingdoms have been established; when man had learned the first lesson, when he understood what a king and a kingdom meant, he knew that there was someone whose command was obeyed by all, both great and small; someone who raised and judged all those deserving of honour and respect in the kingdom; who was like a mother and father to his subjects. It was the same education as that of a child, which after playing with its dolls, begins to understand about the cares of the household.

The next step on the spiritual path was taken when the spiritual hierarchy was recognized, the prophet or the high-priest representing the spiritual Head. In this way man realized that it is not the outer environment, money, or possessions which make a king, but that spiritual realization can make a person greater than a king with all his kingly surroundings. This was proved to the people when the king, who was accepted as the head of the community, went before the high-priest with bent head and knelt down in the place of prayer. This taught man that kingship lies not in outer wealth but in spirituality; that even the king stands humbly at the door of the God-realized man.

When once this step was taken, then came the third step, which was to see that the high-priest, who was acknowledged as such even by the king, knelt down and bent his head low to the Lord, the King of humanity, showing his own greatness to be as dust before God, to whom alone belongs all greatness. When people realized the greatness of God, they glorified God, and the purpose

of aristocracy was fulfilled; it was nothing but a rehearsal before the battle. For once man realized that it is God alone before whom he should bow, that it is God alone who really is rich while all are poor, that it is God alone whose wisdom and justice are perfect, then for him the kingship of the king and the holiness of the high-priest faded away, and there remained only one king, the King of kings. On Him he depended, and under Him he sought refuge in all the different circumstances of life.

After man had taken these three steps towards the goal, he found the goal to be quite different from the way that he had taken, and that goal was the discovery of the traces of the King of kings within himself, a spark of that divine light which is the illumination of his own heart, a ray of that Sun which is the light of the whole universe. And thus self-realization developed, in which the soul found the wisdom, illumination, and peace which are the purpose of the God-ideal.

x

An ideal is something to hope for and to hold on to, and in the absence of an ideal hope has nothing to look forward to. It is the lack of idealism which accounts for the present degeneration of humanity in spite of all the progress it has made in other directions. There are many kinds of ideals: principles, virtues, objects of devotion; but the greatest and highest of all ideals is the God-ideal. And when this God-ideal upon which all other ideals are based is lost, then the very notion of ideal is ignored. Man needs many things in life, but his greatest need is an ideal.

Without ideals man can fulfil neither his obligations at home nor those outside his home. A man with an ideal, whether in business or in a profession or in politics, in whatever walk in life, will prove to come up to the standard of everyone else. When we look at life, when our mind has sobered from life's continual intoxication, then we can see the futility of life, its falsehood, its changeability, its illusive character. Then the importance of that same life which we considered in our intoxication to be so real begins to fade away, and its reality loses colour; something which we saw as beautiful during this intoxication seems now to be quite different from what we had thought. At this moment

of soberness man begins to realize that there is nothing in anything, neither in this life nor in the hereafter; and if there is anything that can come to the aid of his reason at that moment of disillusion it is the ideal, the ideal which he has made in his heart. It is this ideal which supplies all that is lacking, all that hides beauty from his vision.

For the one who has the God-ideal before him, the absence of this changeable world makes no difference; he has something which is greater than anything else. The sacrifice of someone who has suffered a great loss in life in order to keep to his principle is not so hard for him to bear, for his ideal gives him the strength to stand firm. There is no one who is perfect in this world, and even in those whom we love and adore and respect we shall always find some lack, some want. And if there is something lacking in every entity, in every being, and we have nothing to fill it with, what must be the consequence? Nothing but disappointment. Is this not the source of the tragedy in the lives of thousands and thousands of people? The general complaint is that one's brother or sister, wife or husband, child or parents do not come up to one's ideal, that they are not as one would wish them to be. But how can they be? They are different from us, our imagination has not made them, they are different entities. We have our imagination and we wish them to fit in with our imagination, but this is not possible. And how many souls one finds in the world constantly sorrowing over this question! If there were an ideal, that ideal would help to bring every person all that he lacks. In this way all that we lack in our life, whether money, position, power or rank, all these gaps can be filled by the ideal, and it is the ideal which is the strength of our hope and our very life.

Those who think that God is not outside but only within are as wrong as those who believe that God is not within but only outside. In fact God is both inside and outside, but it is very necessary to begin by believing in the God outside. From our childhood we have learned everything from outside. We learn what the eye is by looking at the eyes of others; everything we see in ourselves we have always learned from outside. So even in order to learn to see God we must begin by seeing God outside:

as the Creator, the Judge, the Knower of all things, the Forgiver; and when we have understood Him better, the next step is that the God whom we have always seen outside we now also find within, and that completes our worship. If we have only found Him outside then we are His worshippers, but we remain separate from Him and there is no communion, which is the purpose of life.

But now there comes a question: how shall we apply our ideal in practical life? For sometimes the practical life seems to be the opposite pole to the ideal, and while wanting to keep to the ideal we spoil our practical life, or while keeping to the practical life, we lose the ideal. What is the solution of this problem? The answer is that no doubt it is very difficult to apply our ideals in our practical life, because sometimes the ideal stands too far away from our practical needs. Idealism is more of the mind than of the body, but at the same time the body can be so worldly that it opposes idealism by not allowing the mind to express itself fully. But one thing should be remembered: that in order to live our practical life to the best of our ability, it is not necessary to forget our ideals. We can sustain the ideal just the same in the tenderest corner of our heart and do our very best to apply it; and if we cannot do this, we can still hold our ideal in our heart, and that will do us a great deal of good.

The ideal must be used as a torch in a dark house. We do not need to burn all the objects there with the torch; we only need to direct the torch upon them. The ideal is meant to illuminate our lives, not to paralyse our action. The ideal which paralyses our action is not properly applied. It is not the fault of the ideal; it is our own fault, our own weakness and not our goodness. If something happens to be our duty, then goodness may be an illumination for it, but this duty must be performed. We ought to discriminate between what should be done and how it should be done in everything concerning our practical life, and the ideal must not hinder what needs to be done. The ideal must only give the light on the path. Those who bring about a conflict between their action and their ideal are not clear in themselves. In reality the ideal and the action are not made to confuse man's life; they are made to perfect it.

The question humanity asks itself is, 'How can we live in the world, making the best of our life?' And this question can be looked at from two points of view. The first point of view is to try to make the best of our individual life so that those around us may benefit by it. This point of view takes us as deep as is our soul. It is not only a question of how we can lead our external life decently and properly; the question is how to keep our mind in a balanced and tranquil condition, how to find that happiness which is hidden in our own heart, how to reach that light which is hidden in our own soul and which is divine. By constantly thinking about this question we prepare the way for our happiness, illumination, peace, and rest which our soul constantly longs for.

And the other point of view is to concentrate on the life of those around us, asking ourselves how we can make them happy. It is not only a matter of those around us in the house, but of being responsible for giving happiness to all, however humble and small, in our village or town or country, in the whole world. This takes us from our home to the other end of the world with our sympathy. But if a man becomes proud, either of progress within himself or of his work for the good of others, then his true progress is halted and this brings inactivity, inertia. It is activity which makes life, and its absence is death. The ideal life, therefore, begins with the ideal and becomes perfect in completing the journey of progress by these two paths.

GOD THE INFINITE

THE INFINITE GOD is the Self of God, and all that has been manifested with name and form is the outward aspect of God. When we take all the existing forms and names and put them together, they become one form. In other words, all names are the name, and all forms are the form of God, But as God is One, His form also is One; and that is the sum total of all names and forms; there is no thing or being which is not the Being of God. In order to teach this, the wise have said God is in everything and in every being.

Many have wondered, if He is in everything, how He lives in everything, and as what; if He is in man, where is He to be found, and what part of man's being is considered to be God? Many answers may be given, yet none of them will satisfy, for the true answer is that all is God and God is all: none exists save He. And the question of what we are may be answered by the phrase in the Bible, that we live and move and have our being in God. God is we, but we are not gods. The difference between God and our being is not of the being; in being, God and we are one. The difference lies in our limitation and in the perfection of God.

How are we to conceive of the idea of God the Absolute? We are not meant to conceive of this. As limited beings we are not able to know perfection; only perfection itself can know perfection. We can imagine and make a God of our own, in order to make God intelligible to us and to make it easier for us to advance on the spiritual path. As we advance, the unlimited Being, working through us, makes His own way and realizes His perfection; for in doing this He only realizes Himself, which is not at all difficult for Him.

Man thinks that he has learned religion or philosophy or mysticism as he has evolved. Indeed, it is true, but the result of all this learning and evolution is realized to a certain degree not only by unevolved human beings, but even by the animals and

birds. They all have their religion, and they all worship God in their own way. The birds while singing in the forest feel that exaltation even more than man after he has worshipped God; for not all men who join in prayer are as sincere as the birds in the forest, not one of which utters its prayer without sincerity. If a human soul were awakened to feel what they feel when singing at dawn, he would know that their prayer is even more exalting than his own, for their prayer is more natural. The godly, therefore, worship their God together with nature, and thus they experience perfect exaltation as the result of their prayer.

Man thinks he is able to meditate and concentrate, but he cannot do it any better than the animals and birds in the forest. The cobra attracts its food by thought. There are certain cobras whose food comes and falls into their mouths; they fast patiently for a long time, not worrying about the food for the morrow. There are men, on the contrary, who are anxious about their breakfast: they are not even certain of their luncheon. They have no confidence in their own power nor faith in the providence of God.

In short, spirituality is attained by all beings, not only by man but by the beasts and the birds; and each has its own religion, its principle, its law, and its morals. For instance a bird, whose honour it is to fly over the heads of those who walk on the earth, feels it beneath its dignity to be touched by an earthly being: it feels it is polluted. And if this bird is touched once by a human being, its fellow-creatures will not rest till they have killed it, for to them it is an outcast. They dwell in the air and it is their dignity to act thus. The study of nature is of interest not only to the student of science, but also to the one who treads the path of spirituality, the study of nature is of immense interest. Man will find at the end of his search on the spiritual path that all beings, including trees and plants, rocks and mountains, are prayerful, and all attain to that spiritual perfection which is the only longing of every soul.

THE SELF AND THE MERIT OF GOD

In Sufi terms the Self of God is called *Zât*, and His qualities, His merits, are named *Sifat*. The Hindus call the former aspect of God *Purusha* and the latter *Prakriti*, which can be rendered

in English by the words spirit and matter. Zát, the Spirit of God, is incomprehensible, because that which comprehends itself is intelligence, God's real being; and comprehension has nothing to comprehend in its own being. No doubt, in our usual terms it is the comprehending faculty in us which we call comprehension; but this is not meant here, for intelligence is not necessarily intellect. Merit is something which is comprehensible; it is something which is clear and distinct, so that it can be made intelligible; but intelligence is not intelligible except to its own self. Intelligence knows that I am; but it does not know what I am.

Such is the nature of God. Intelligence would not have known its own power and existence if it had not known something besides itself, so God knows Himself by manifestation. Manifestation is the self of God, but a self which is limited; a self that makes Him know that He is perfect when He compares His own Being with this limited self which we call nature. Therefore the purpose of the whole of creation is the realization which God Himself gains by discovering His own perfection through this manifestation.

Among Christian ideas there is one which, if we can solve its riddle, helps us to discover the truth of life. It is the idea of the Trinity. What keeps the soul in perplexity is the threefold aspect of manifestation, and as long as the soul remains puzzled by this, it cannot arrive at the knowledge of the One. These three aspects are the seer, sight, and the seen; the knower, knowledge, and the known. In point of fact these are three aspects of life. One aspect is the person who sees; the second aspect is the sight, or the eyes, by the help of which he sees; and the third aspect is that which he sees. That is why one cannot readily accept the idea that what one sees is the same as oneself, nor can one believe for a moment that the medium by which one sees is oneself, for these three aspects seem to be separate and to be looking at one another's faces, as the first person, second person, and third person of Brahma.

When this riddle is solved by the realization that the three are one, then the purpose of the God-ideal is fulfilled. For then the three veils which cover the One are lifted, then they no longer remain three, and then they are found to be One, the Only

Being. As Abdul Karim al Jili, the fifteenth-century mystic, says, 'If you believe in one God, you are right; if you believe in two Gods, that is true; but if you believe in three Gods, that is right also, for the nature of unity is realized by variety.'

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US

Mankind tends to consider that all that is pleasant has come from the mercy of God, and all that is unpleasant either from the wrath of God or not from God at all, because he thinks that God is just and merciful. In reality God's goodness and mercy and justice are hidden under all pleasant and unpleasant experiences in life. We call things unjust when we cannot see their justice; things are unpleasant to us when the standard of our pleasure is limited; things appear unmerciful to us when we restrict and limit mercy. But sometimes things that do not seem just to us, are just according to their real nature; unmerciful things often contain a hidden mercy. Therefore the Sufi takes all that comes from God with resignation, seeing and recognizing in it His mercy, goodness, and justice.

We, the children of the earth, are like children, all through our evolution, to our heavenly Father; and in our ignorance our actions are like those of a child. If the parents give it sweets, it takes this as their kindness; if they give the child bitter medicine, it considers it anger on their part, not knowing that in giving that bitter medicine they show their kindness just the same. There are many things that we think are good for us, but in fact they may be the worst possible. One person cannot obtain a certain position which he wanted, another cannot settle in a town where he desired to live, another is unable to visit a city that he wished to see, while still another does not succeed in gaining the wealth he wished for. All such unpleasant experiences make a man discontented; and if he has not enough faith he begins to think that there is no such being as God. If we only considered how perfect is the mechanism of the infant's body, and how it works in such an orderly way, we should see and realize that there is a power behind everything, with full wisdom and understanding, which sets all things going harmoniously, and it is the same with the mechanism of the whole universe.

There is a story that Moses had sought to associate himself with Khizr, the guiding angel of all seeking souls, and had requested to be allowed to follow his path. Khizr said, 'No, Moses, teach the law that is given you; our way is complex.' After great persistence on the part of Moses, Khizr complied with his request, on one condition: that he should not interfere with his works, by any means, in any way. When on the seashore they saw a little child drowning, caught by a wave, and the mother calling loudly for help, Moses wished to run to help them, and he wanted Khizr to do the same. Khizr said, 'I have told you not to interfere with my works.' Moses said, 'Oh, would you allow an innocent child to be drowned like this when you can help? How dreadful!' Khizr said, 'Think of your promise, and do not say another word.' They went on farther, and took a boat to some port, and while in the boat Khizr began to enlarge holes that were already in the boat. Moses said, 'Oh, how cruel! Anyone who sits in the boat will be drowned!' Khizr said, 'It does not matter. Think of your promise, and do not say one word more.' Because of the great persistence of Moses in asking him to explain what it all meant, Khizr said, 'The child that was drowning would have brought many families to destruction, therefore God intended that, before he became able to do so, he should be drowned. We have done nothing but allow the will of God to take its course. And the boat in which I made the holes, on its return will carry thirty robbers who intend to destroy many lives in a certain village in order to accomplish their robbery. It was meant by God that as they have prepared themselves to destroy innocent lives they should be destroyed before they can do so. This shows the meaning of a Sufi verse:

The Controller of the world knows how to control it,
Whom he should rear and whom he should cut off.'

DEPENDENCE UPON GOD

Dependence belongs to matter and independence to the spirit. The independent spirit becomes dependent through manifestation. When the One becomes many, then each part of the One, being limited, strives to be helped by the other part, for each part finds itself imperfect. Therefore we human beings, however

rich with the treasures of heaven and earth, are poor in reality because of our dependence upon others. The spiritual view makes one conscious of this fact, but the material view blinds man, who then shows independence and indifference to his fellow-man. Pride, conceit, and vanity are the outcome of this ignorance. There are moments when even the king has to depend upon a most insignificant person. Often one needs the help of someone towards whom one has always been proud and upon whom one has always looked with contempt.

As individuals depend upon other individuals, so nations and races depend upon one another. No individual can say that he can get on without anyone else and no nation can be really happy while another nation is unhappy. But both individuals and communities depend most upon God, in whom we all unite. Those who depend upon the things of the earth certainly depend upon things that are transitory, and some day or other they must lose them, so there remains only one object of dependence, and that is God who is not transitory, and who always is and will be. Sa'di has said, 'He who depends upon Thee will never be disappointed.'

No doubt dependence upon God, which in Sufi terms is called *Tawakul*, is the most difficult thing. For an average person, who has not known or seen God, but has only heard in church that someone exists in the heavens who is called God, and who has believed this, it is difficult to depend entirely upon Him. A person can hope that there is a God, and that by depending upon Him he will have his desire fulfilled; a person can imagine that there can be someone whom people call God, but for him also it is difficult to depend entirely upon God. It is for them that the Prophet has said, 'Tie your camel and trust in God.' Daniel was not told to take a sword and go among the lions.

One imagines God, another realizes God; there is a difference between these two people. The one who imagines can hope, but he cannot be certain. The one who realizes God is face to face with his Lord, and it is he who depends upon God with certainty. It is a matter of either struggling along on the surface of the water, or courageously diving deep, touching the bottom of the sea. There is no greater trial for a person than dependence upon God. What

patience it needs, besides boundless faith, to be in the midst of this world of illusion and yet to be conscious of the existence of God! To do this, man must be able to turn all that is called life into death, and to realize the true life in what is generally called death. This solves the problem of the false and the real.

DIVINE GRACE

Divine grace is a loving impulse of God which manifests in every form: in the form of mercy, compassion, forgiveness, beneficence, and revelation. No action, however good, can command it, no meditation, however great, can attract it. It comes naturally, as a wave rising from the heart of God, unrestricted and unlimited by any law. It is a natural impulse of God. When it comes, it comes without reason. Neither its coming nor its absence has any particular reason. It comes because it comes: it does not come because it does not come.

It is in grace that God's highest majesty is manifested. While pouring out His grace He stands on such a high pedestal that neither law nor reason can touch it. Every blessing has a certain aspect, but grace is a blessing which is not limited to a certain aspect, but manifests through all aspects. Grace is all-sided; from it come health, providence, the love given by all those around us, inspiration, joy, and peace.

THE WILL, HUMAN AND DIVINE

The question of the will, human and divine, may be seen from two points of view: from the point of view of wisdom and from the point of view of the ultimate truth. If words can explain anything, it is from the former point of view; the latter point of view allows no word to be spoken, for in the absolute truth two do not exist; there is no such thing as two; there is One alone.

From the wisdom point of view it can be seen that one is weaker and the other stronger, and that one has to give in to the power of the other. This is observed in all aspects of creation. The little fish is eaten by the larger fish, but the little fish lives upon still smaller fish. So there is no one in this world so strong that there is not another stronger still, and there is no one in this world so weak that there is not another who is weaker.

The next subject to think about is the opposing conditions and situations which appear to a willing mind and a striving person like a stone wall, so that with every wish to do and to accomplish something he does not find his way. It is this experience which has made one say that man proposes, and God disposes. The Hindu philosophers have called these two great powers, one of which is like an intention and the other the power of destruction, by the names Brahma the Creator, and Shiva the Destroyer. The most wonderful thing about this creation and destruction is that what Brahma creates in a thousand years, Shiva destroys in one moment. Since God is almighty, the wise see the hand of God in the greater power, manifesting either through an individual or through a certain condition or situation; and instead of struggling too much against the difficulties in life, and instead of moaning over losses which cannot be helped, they are resigned to the will of God.

In short, every plan that a person makes, and his desire to accomplish that plan, is mostly an outcome of his personal will; and when his will is helped by every other will he comes in contact with, then he is helped by God. As every will goes in the direction of his will, so his will becomes strengthened, and then a person often accomplishes something which a thousand people might not have been able to accomplish. Then there is another person who has a thought, a desire, and meets with opposition from every side; everything seems to go wrong, and yet he has the inner urge to continue on the path of attainment. There also the hand of God is at his back, helping him on; even though there might seem opposition at the beginning of his strife, yet as the saying is: all's well that ends well.

The saintly souls, who consider it their religion to seek the pleasure of God and to be resigned to His will, are indeed blessed, for their manner is pleasing to everyone, because they are most careful lest they hurt anybody's feelings. And if by some mistake they happen to hurt someone's feelings, they feel they have hurt God whose pleasure they must constantly seek, for the happiness of their life lies only in seeking the pleasure of God. They watch every person and every situation and condition, and by constantly observing life keenly their heart becomes trained, like the ear of a

lover of music who in time learns to distinguish between the true and the false notes. So they observe every desire that springs up in their heart, to see if it is in accordance with the will of God. Sometimes they know it the moment the desire has sprung up; sometimes they know it when they have gone half-way in its pursuit; and sometimes they only know it at the end of their striving. But even then their willingness to resign themselves to the will of God becomes their consolation, even in the face of disappointment. The secret of seeking the will of God lies in cultivating the faculty for sensing harmony, for harmony is beauty and beauty is harmony. The lover of beauty in his further progress becomes the seeker of harmony, and by trying always to maintain harmony man will tune his heart to the will of God.

MAN'S RELATION TO GOD

Man's relation to God may be likened to the relation of the bubble to the sea. Man is of God, man is from God, man is in God, as the bubble is from water, of water, and in water. So much the same and yet so different! The bubble is different and the sea is different and there is no comparison between them. So although God and man are not different, yet there is such a difference that it is immeasurable. As Hafiz says, 'What comparison is there between earth and heaven?' For the same reason that man is small before God, the bubble is small before the ocean, and yet it is not apart from the ocean, nor does it consist of any other element than the ocean. Therefore divinity is in man as in God. The divinity of Christ means the divinity of man, although divinity itself is the ideal.

The word divine has its origin in the Sanskrit word *Deva*, which also means divine. And yet the root of this word means light, which explains that the divine is that part of being which is illuminated by the light within. Therefore, though in man there is light hidden, if not disclosed, he is not divine. If the hidden light were divine, then the stone could be divine too, for the spark of fire is hidden in the rock. All life is one, without doubt, and all names and forms are of the same life. But that part of life from which light springs, illuminating itself and its surroundings, and bringing recognition of its own being, is divine; for in this

is the fulfilment of the purpose of the whole creation, and every activity is directed towards achieving the same purpose. How calmly the mountains and hills seem to be waiting for a certain day to come! If we went near them and listened to their voices, they would tell us this. And how eagerly the plants and the trees in the forest seem to be waiting for some day, for some hour, the hour of the fulfilment of their desire! If only we could hear the words they say! In animals, in birds, in the lower creation, the desire is still more intense and still more pronounced. The seer can see it when his glance meets their glance. But the fulfilment of this desire is in man: the desire that has worked through all aspects of life and brought forth different fruits, yet always preparing a way to reach the same Light which is called Divinity. But even man, whose right it is, cannot reach it unless he acquire the knowledge of the self, which is the essence of all religions.

It is easy to claim, 'I am God!'; but is it not insolence on the part of man, who is subject to illness, death, and disease? It is bringing the highest ideal of God down to the lowest plane. It is as if the bubble were to say, 'I am the sea', when its own consciousness, as well as everybody else, sees that it is a bubble. And again it is blindness on the part of man, however righteous and pious he may be, to say, 'I am separate, God is separate. I am on earth, God is in heaven.' He may pray and worship a thousand years and not come near God. Since according to the astronomers it would take so many hundreds of years to reach a certain planet, how could one reach as high as the abode of God, which is supposed to be higher and farther off than anything else? No man has a right to claim divinity as long as he is conscious of his limited self. Only he who is so absorbed in the contemplation of the perfect Being that his limited self is lost from his sight, could say this, but in most cases he will not say it. It is at this stage that man closes his lips, lest he should say a word that might offend the ears of the people in the world. 'O bird, cry gently, for the ears of the beloved are tender!' says the poet. And if anyone, such as Mansur, has claimed divinity, it is only after having drunk that wine of divine life which intoxicated him, and in his ecstasy the secret came out as it comes from a drunken man, who if he had been sober would never have let it escape.

The wise realize the divine Being in the loss of the thought of self; they melt in Him and become absorbed in Him, and enjoy the peace that they can derive from the divine life; but they live in the world gently, meekly, and thoughtfully, just like any other man. It is the unwise who show themselves too wise. And with the increase of wisdom comes the beauty of innocence, which makes the wise the friend of everyone, both stupid and wise. It is the stupid who cannot agree with the wise, but the wise can agree with the stupid as well as with the wise. He can become both, while the stupid man is what he is.

DIVINE MANNER

In Sufi terms the divine manner is called *Akhlak-e Allah*. Man thinks, speaks, and acts according to the pitch to which his soul is tuned. The highest note he can be tuned to is the divine note, and once man has arrived at that pitch, he begins to express the manner of God in everything he does. And what is the manner of God? It is the kingly manner, but a manner which is not known even to kings, for only the King of heaven and of the earth knows it. This manner is expressed by the soul who is tuned to God; it is devoid of narrowness and free from pride and conceit, it is a manner which is not only beautiful but is beauty itself. The soul which is tuned to God also becomes as beautiful as God, and begins to express God through all that it does, expressing the divine manner in life.

Why is it a kingly manner? By the word kingly we only mean someone who possesses great power and wealth. But the soul tuned to God, before whom all else fades away and in whose eyes all the little things which are so important to everyone else are lessened, that soul begins to express the divine manner in the form of contentment. It might seem to an ordinary person that to this soul nothing matters. To him no gain is exciting, no loss alarming; if anyone praises him, it is of no consequence; if anyone blames him, it does not matter to him; honour and insult are all a game to him, and at the end of the game, neither is the gain a gain nor the loss a loss, for it was only a pastime.

One might think, what does such a person do for others; what good is he to those around him? That person is a healing for

others and for those around him; he is an influence for uplifting those souls who are suffering from the narrowness and limitation of human nature. For human nature is not only narrow and limited, but also foolish and tyrannical. The reason is that the nature of life is intoxicating; its intoxication makes people drunk. And what does the drunken man want? He wants his drink, he does not think about anyone else.

In this life there are so many kinds of liquor that man drinks: love of wealth, passion, anger, possession; man is not even satisfied with possessing earthly things, but he also wishes to possess those whom he pretends to love, and in this way proves to be both tyrannical and foolish. For all the things of this world that man thinks he possesses, he does not really possess; in reality he is possessed by them, be it wealth or property or a friend or position or rank. The soul with the divine manner is therefore sober compared with the drunken man of the world, and it is this soberness that produces in him that purity which is called Sufism, and it is through that purity that God is reflected in his mirror-like soul.

Nothing frightens the soul who reflects God. He is above all fear, for he possesses nothing; and fear is always connected with man's possessions. Does it mean that he leaves the world and goes and passes his life in a cave on a mountain side? Not in the least. He may possess the wealth of the whole world, he may have the kingdoms of the whole universe under his rule, but nothing binds him, nothing ties him, nothing frightens him; for only that belongs to him which is his own. And when his soul is his own, everything is his own, and what belongs to him cannot be taken away. If anyone took it away, it would be he himself who did so. He is his own friend and his own foe, so there is no longer pain or suffering, complaint or grudge; he is at peace, for he is at home, whether he is on earth or in heaven.

The difference between God and man is that God is omniscient while man only knows about his own affairs. As God is omniscient, He loves all and His interest is in all; and so it is with the godly soul. The divine personality, expressed through the godly soul, shows itself in its interest on behalf of all, whether they be known or unknown to that soul. His interest in another is not

only because of his kind nature or his sympathetic spirit; he does not take an interest in the welfare and well-being of another person because it is his duty, but because he sees himself in another person. Therefore to the godly soul the life and interests of another person are as his own. In the pain of another person the godly soul sorrows; in the happiness of another person the godly soul rejoices, and so the godly soul who has already almost forgotten himself, also forgets the remaining part of the self in his interest in others.

It is natural for the godly soul to take interest in others. Only the one who has emptied himself of what is called self, is capable of knowing another person's condition. Sometimes he knows more than the other person himself, as a physician knows the condition of his patient better than the patient does.

Divine manner, therefore, is not only like that of parents towards their children, of a man towards his close friend, of a king towards his trusted servant, or of a devoted servant towards his master. Divine manner comprises all manners; it is expressive of every form of love; and if it has any peculiarity it is its divinity. For in every form of human love and affection, the self is somewhere hidden, asking for appreciation, for reciprocity, for recognition; but the divine manner is above all this. It gives all and asks nothing in return in any manner or form, thereby proving the action of God through man.

THE SUFI'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

The idea of God is a means for the Sufi to rise from imperfection to perfection, as is suggested in the Bible, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.' There is a vast gulf between the state of imperfection and the state of perfection; and God is the boat in which one sails from the port of imperfection to perfection.

To a Sufi, God and man are not two; the Sufi does not consider God separate from himself. The Sufi's God is not in heaven alone; He is everywhere. He sees God in the unseen and in the seen; he recognizes God both within and without. Therefore in the eyes of the Sufi there is no name which is not the name of God, and there is no form which is not the form of God. As

Jelal-ud-Din Rumi says, 'The Beloved is all in all; the lover only veils Him; the Beloved is all that lives; the lover a dead thing.' In other words, this dual aspect of love which is expressed as lover and beloved, is in fact one, and one will die and One alone will live. The one that will die is the imperfect self which covers perfection; the One that will live is the perfect Self.

The Sufi recognizes both these aspects in himself, the imperfect and mortal aspect of his being and the perfect, the immortal aspect of his being. The former is represented by his outer self; the latter by his innermost self. Since the imperfect self covers his soul and confines it in a limited being, he recognizes at the same time the greatness of the perfect Being, and calls himself 'I', a servant of God, and he calls God the Lord of the whole of existence.

In the Sufi schools in the East this idea is expressed in an allegory which moves those who enjoy its poetic subtlety. In the Qur'an it is related that when the first man was made, he was asked, 'Say who is thy Master', and he answered, 'Thou art my Lord.' Philosophically this idea is the picture of human life. Man begins his life on earth by accepting somebody's command, fearing lest he cause him any displeasure, looking upon someone as his support, protector, or guide, be it in the form of father or mother, relation, friend, master, or king. This shows that man begins his life in the world with his imperfection, at the same time recognizing, surrendering, and bowing to perfection in whatever form.

When man understands this better, then he knows that all the sources that demanded his surrender or recognition were limited and powerless in comparison with that perfect ideal which we call God. The same attitude that the ordinary man has towards another who is greater than he in strength, power, or position, the Sufi learns to show towards his God, the ideal of perfection; because in God he includes all forms in which he recognizes beauty, power, greatness, and perfection. Therefore the worship of the Sufi is not only worship of the Deity; by worship he means drawing closer to perfection; by worship he tries to forget his imperfect self in the contemplation of the perfect One.

It is not necessary for the Sufi to offer his prayers to God for

help in wordly things, or to thank Him for what he receives, although this attitude develops in man a virtue that is very necessary in life. The whole idea of the Sufi is to cover his imperfect self even from his own eyes by the thought of God; and that moment when God and not his own self is before him, is the moment of perfect bliss. My murshid, Abu Hashim Madani, once said that there is only one virtue and one sin for a soul on this path: virtue when he is conscious of God and sin when he is not. No explanation can describe the truth of this except the experience of the contemplative, to whom, when he is conscious of God, it is as if a window is open which is facing heaven, and when he is conscious of the self the experience is the opposite. For all the tragedy of life is caused by consciousness of the self. All pain and depression are caused by this, and anything that can take away the thought of the self helps to a certain extent to relieve man from pain; but God-consciousness gives perfect relief.

SUMA

The Sufi's have a meeting called *Suma* which takes place as a part of their devotions. At this meeting musicians sing the words of inspired poets, either verses in admiration of the beauty or the qualities of the ideal, or describing the longing of the lover, his pain, his appeal; and sometimes the verses explain the finer laws of nature and of life; the difference between God the perfect Being, and man the imperfect individual. Sometimes the verses explain the nearness of man to God and the perfection of God in man.

The bodies of people who are spiritually advanced are generally ethereal, their hearts are tender, and their concentration is great. The verses and songs of these musicians become a reality to them; and just as the ordinary man is touched and moved by external conditions in his life, so musicians are touched and moved by the world they have created in their imagination, and this is helped by the verses and music. It expresses itself sometimes in tears, sometimes in movements of joy or sorrow. These movements are called *Rakhs*, and their state at that time is called *Hál*, or *Wajad*, i.e. spiritual ecstasy; this is regarded with respect by those present.

DEITY AND DIVINITY

WHEN DISTINGUISHING between these two concepts I should say that deity is God idealized and divinity is God personified. Deity has never been manifest on the physical plane except in the heart of man, but divinity has manifested in the physical form. Thus the secret of deity can be sought in the heart of divinity. Divinity is reduced God and enlarged man. The whole difficulty that has occurred in all periods of the world's history has been the difficulty of understanding divinity or apprehending the mystery of divinity. Man cannot think of man being God nor can man think of God being man. Therefore the claimant of divinity has sometimes been called God, but then he was kept remote and aloof from human beings. At other times the claimant of divinity has been brought to earth and called no better than man.

In reality divinity is the expansion of the human soul; divinity is human nature in God. That is why God is one, the only Being; but there are as many deities as there are human beings, for the deity is the enshrined God whom man has conceived by his thoughts and ideas. God is enshrined in his heart, and in that way the ideas about deity came to differ. Some say God is the Judge and some say God is the Father; some say God is the Creator while to others He is the Sustainer. Some say that God has three aspects, and that a Trinity makes God; some say Gods are many. The Hindus have conceived thirty-three score Devata, which means divinities. The Chinese have conceived numberless Gods. The believers in one God have ridiculed them, but in fact it is one and the same conception looked at from different points of view. Somebody can be praised by one and hated by another, and ten people may all have a different idea of the same person, because each understands him according to his state of evolution.

Each sees that person according to his own point of view, each looks at him through his own eyes, and therefore the same

person is different to each being. In the mind of one the person is a sinner, in the mind of another he is a saint. The same person who is considered gentle and good by one is considered the opposite by another. If this can be so in connection with a living being, it is equally possible that various ideas of the deity should be formed in each heart, and that each soul should mould his own deity according to his own evolution and according to his way of idealizing and understanding. Therefore the deity of every heart is different and is as that person has imagined; but the God of every soul is one and the same, whatever people imagine. It is the same God that they all imagine, but their imaginations are different and it is the lack of understanding of this that has caused the differences in religion.

We read in the books of the past that there used to be blood feuds, family feuds, because one family believed in one God and another family had another. They called Him a family God, and these families used to fight with one another because of their separate Gods and they gave their lives for their God. It is not very different even now when nations fight against nations; for the time being the God of each becomes different, or at least the people think the hostile country is not doing the will of their own God. Man is very much the same down the ages; he only shows his evolution by degrees.

The deity is pictured sometimes as a spirit, sometimes as a person, sometimes as a king, sometimes as a master. The Hindus picture the deity as Creator, as Sustainer, and as Destroyer. The word 'divine' comes from *Deva*, God (fem. *Devi*), and the word *Deva* is derived from *Dīv*, which means 'light'. Every soul is itself a light, but a light which is surrounded by clouds; clouds which have risen from the earthly impressions and surrounded the human heart. These clouds keep the soul covered; but the *Deva* or *Dīv* is always there.

One reads in the Bible that no one should keep his light under a bushel, and the hint to raise the light high shows us that *Deva* or the divine spark is within man; that divinity, even when it is human, is infinite; only, the expansion of this light and the disclosing of it are necessary. The prophets and great Avatars, the messengers who have come to the world from time to time,

have been examples of the expansion of this divine spark, and what they gave to the world has been the outcome of this divinity.

Divinity is like the seed which grows in the heart of the flower: it is the same seed which was the origin of that plant and it comes again in the heart of the flower. In a similar way the same God, who was unmanifested as the seed of the plant of this creation, rises again towards fulfilment; and in that fulfilment He produces the seed in the heart of that flower which is divinity. Some religious authorities have tried to recognize the divinity of Christ while ignoring the divinity of humanity. They have tried to make Christ different from what may be called human; but by doing so they have not been able to keep the flame alight, for they have covered the main truth that religion had to give to the world, which was that divinity resides in humanity, that divinity is the outcome of humanity, and that humanity is the flower in the heart of which divinity was born as a seed. And by this they have not done any good to religion; on the contrary they have harmed religion, trying to make man something different, not knowing that all is in man—angel, jinn, and animal.

There is nothing which is not in man, for instance things belonging to the earth such as metals, gold and silver, iron and steel, are all to be found in the body and mind of man. The one who knows alchemy can make use of it; he can make out of man a man of flesh, and he can make out of man a man of gold. That is what Christ wanted to do when he said to the fishermen, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' He wanted to perform that alchemy. And what stone is it which is called the philosopher's stone? It is the heart of the divine man: whomever it touches it turns into gold. All living beings, creatures high and low, creatures of the water, creatures of the forest, creatures that fly in the air, insects and worms, their nature, their character, their form, all can be found in man. The character of the bull, the character of the fish, the character of the insect, the character of all the animals can be seen in man. All that we can discover by going through the forest for thousands of miles we can find in one human personality. All is there, it only needs

to be seen, and he can see whose heart's eyes are open. Many in this world have their external eyes open but yet are asleep; they are moving about and think they are alive, but there is something which is not awakened and so they cannot see the great treasure which is hidden.

Again, jewels, precious minerals, and pearls can all be found in man, in his character, in his external and inner being. All this is hidden; but we can discover a pearl in a person, we can see in the heart of man a diamond or an emerald, all the jewels of this world are there if only we can see it. And not only that, not only worldly treasures but all the heavenly things are there. Man represents the planets, he represents the sun and moon, and he represents heaven and its angels; what does man not represent? He represents God. In that sense one may call man a miniature God, and it is the development of humanity which culminates in divinity; thus Christ is the example of the culmination of humanity. It would be hiding the greatest human virtue to hide this secret, which is the key to the mystery of the whole universe.

No doubt, compared with God divinity is the imperfection of God, but it is still the perfection of man. It is just like a drop of water which is entirely and absolutely water, and yet it is a drop in comparison with the ocean. The ocean is God, but the drop is divine. If man had understood this secret of life, no wars, no differences would have arisen among the followers of the various religions, who in all ages waged wars against one another's religious ideas. No prophet or master at any time would have been rejected or tortured or refused, if the world had only known this: that God always comes, that He always shows himself through the heart of the godly. The comparison of the divine with God is just like a sun-glass placed before the sun. The sun-glass partakes of the heat of the sun and transfers the heat to the earth, and so the divine man, the messenger in all ages, comes and partakes of God's rays and hands them down to earth in the form of the divine message.

Although a sun-glass is not the sun, yet when it is exposed to the sun it partakes of the sun and begins to show the quality of the sun. And so it is with the souls who focus their heart on God,

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No doubt, compared with God divinity is the imperfection of God, but it is still the perfection of man. It is just like a drop of water which is entirely and absolutely water, and yet it is a drop in comparison with the ocean. The ocean is God, but the drop is divine. If man had understood this secret of life, no wars, no differences would have arisen among the followers of the various religions, who in all ages waged wars against one another's religious ideas. No prophet or master at any time would have been rejected or tortured or refused, if the world had only known this: that God always comes, that He always shows himself through the heart of the godly. The comparison of the divine with God is just like a sun-glass placed before the sun. The sun-glass partakes of the heat of the sun and transfers the heat to the earth, and so the divine man, the messenger in all ages, comes and partakes of God's rays and hands them down to earth in the form of the divine message.

Although a sun-glass is not the sun, yet when it is exposed to the sun it partakes of the sun and begins to show the quality of the sun. And so it is with the souls who focus their heart on God,

for then God becomes reflected in their heart; and the beauty and power which are to be found in God in their perfection begin to show themselves in those souls, just as the sun-glass does with the sun. They express it in their lives. The Sufis call this *Akhlak-e Allah*: the divine manner. One cannot teach this manner; it comes when the heart is focused on God, and then all that is in God becomes manifest in man. When this realization comes one cannot speak any more of the God within; then God is within and without at the same time. As soon as God is realized God does not remain within; it is before realization that God is to be found within, and this will help to find the perfection of God, but once God is realized He is in all.

There are ages of aristocracy, and there are ages of democracy of all kinds, not only in regard to government, but also in regard to religion. And as it is natural that aristocracy should be misunderstood, so it is natural that democracy should be demoralized by the ignorant who can only understand the outer meaning of democracy. Aristocracy of religion is belief in God, worship of God in a certain form, in the form of prayer or service, of ceremonial or ritual, whatever the form may be, and also its recognition and acceptance when it is given by an actual man; not only that, but the recognition of the illumination which completes its development in the soul of man. The Zoroastrians by their sun-worship taught that the sun represents the light of the spirit, and so the sun of God represents the light of God; but others misunderstood it, and took it to mean something different. The son of God is he who finds out and who is conscious of his inheritance from God, and not of that from man. One who is conscious of his earthly origin is an earthly man; one who is conscious of his heavenly origin is the son of God.

Man is that which he is conscious of. Man's grade of evolution depends upon the pitch he has attained; it is a certain pitch which makes him conscious of a certain phase of life. A person standing upon the earth cannot enjoy the purity of the air which exists at the top of the mountain; in order to enjoy it he must be there. That is why an insincere claim has no effect. A man who is standing upon the earth and is talking about air is talking

nonsense. It will have no effect, because he does not know what is in the air; he must rise to where the air is and then he must get the experience and talk from there of what he is experiencing. Then it will have an effect, because then his word is sincere. It is not by theory that a person can trace his origin; he can only do so by practice. It is not only knowing a thing but living it and being it, and this is not easy; but there is no need to separate Christ from other men for the very reason that one man is so far above the other. There is such a great gulf between the evolution of one soul and that of another, that if one were to say that one man is standing on the earth and another is in the sky it would be quite right.

There is, however, no doubt that the aristocratic form of religion has also been misused. This happens when the religious authority turns religion into a means, an instrument, to keep the people under a certain law for worldly purposes. Then naturally that aristocracy breaks down and there comes a time of democracy; and it is necessary that religious democracy should come, because it is in religious democracy that fulfilment of the religious ideal lies.

Religious democracy means that no one should ever think that he is human while someone else is divine, and that God is in heaven, unattainable, imperceptible, and far away from his soul. He must realize that divinity is in his soul, that God is within him, that he is linked with God and that God is linked with him, that his soul can expand because he is not different from God nor is God different from him. Only, the danger of democracy is that when it comes too soon, before a person is ripe, then it brings disaster; for man's natural progress is to follow his highest ideal, but when he is blinded by the spirit of democracy he becomes so agitated that he wishes to break that ideal. In this way he works to his own disadvantage. He comes down instead of going up, and so it has been in all ages and with all nations and races.

The ideal must be held before us that the main purpose of life is to ennoble our soul, and that religion means to observe, to appreciate, to recognize, to respect, and to heed the ennobled soul; to learn not with the thought of following, but with the

ideal of becoming that which our soul recognizes as lofty and beautiful; realizing the possibility of touching that point which is attracting our soul as the light of the port attracts those who travel on the sea, giving us hope, inviting us, and telling us that the port is there.

PART III

THE SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY

i

THE IDEA OF a spiritual hierarchy has always been discussed in all ages, and especially at this time when people have many more divergent conceptions regarding spiritual problems. The spiritual hierarchy is not a product of man's imagination; it is not only a poetic idea; but it is as real as one's own being. Among hills and mountains there are small mountains and there are big mountains; among rivers there are larger and smaller rivers; and all through nature one finds the evidence of nature's hierarchy.

What gives us the best picture of life is the sky with the planets, and the sun apart as a giver of light and life. When we consider all the planets, including the moon, we shall find they are all receptacles of light, reflecting the light of the sun according to their capacity. The moon functions to the greatest degree as a receptacle of this same light. According to the mystical point of view, if it were not for the moon the whole cosmos would go to pieces, for the reason that the central currents of the sun are functioning in the moon, which reflects the light of the sun in fullness. The difference is that, as it is only the reflection of the sun, though a full reflection, it has finer currents of light; these are soft, cooling, attractive, and beautiful. Therefore the light of the sun is called *Jelal* by the Sufis, and the light of the moon *Jemal*: the former expresses power, the latter beauty; the former is creative, the latter responsive. It is the sun which has the light; the moon possesses the light of the sun, not its own. God is the Knower and the All-wise, and the one who gives His message gives God's knowledge, not his own. What the moon may seem to give as light, is not its own; it is the light of the sun; and so it has been with the messengers at all times. People have heard them speak, and therefore they called it the message of Buddha or of Christ or of Mohammad; but in reality the message was always God's.

All beings in the world are the receptacles of God's message;

not only human beings, but even the lower creation. All objects and all conditions convey to us the message of the one and only Being. But the difference is that although they convey the message of God, they do not know it; they are not conscious of it. Not only objects but even human beings are unconscious of it. If they only knew that there is nothing in this world which is not the instrument of God!

As there are more useful and less useful objects, so there are more important and less important human beings. If they were all equal, there would not have been the diversity of different ranks and positions in a state; there would not have been generals or colonels in the army, but only soldiers; there would not have been high and low notes on the piano but only one key, one note, one sound; there would not have been different rooms in the house but every room would have been a drawing-room. This shows that it is a necessity of life that there should be a hierarchy, either by election or by appointment, for the world cannot exist without it. Aristocracy and democracy are not two things, but essentially one; and in both cases there is only one chief thing, and that is hierarchy. When it is right, it is called aristocracy; when it goes wrong and a new spirit comes to rebuild it, this process is a state of democracy. It is natural that man should be agitated over one thing when he wants to build something else. He revolts against everything that existed before, and so, in rebuilding, this revolutionary spirit often acts to his disadvantage.

Just as there is a system of government externally, so there is also an inward system of government. One can see this government in every family too. There is a king in every family; there are ministers, counsellors, partakers of his responsibility, and servants who are paid for their work. Taking the universe as one whole, it also has a system of government. There is a system of government in the sky. There is the sun, then there is the moon which is directly focused on the sun, there are the principal planets which surround it, and there are the stars. And on the model of the heavens the inner and outer governments of the earth are planned.

Man's body is arranged in the same way; there is one principal factor, then there are working factors like servants, then principal

ministers; and when one takes the being of man, from his soul to his body it is one complete kingdom, constituted of all the necessary officials and servants, making one's being like a kingdom. Thus in all circumstances there will always be a king. No democratic ideal, however much it may be against the aristocratic form, will ever succeed in life without forming a kingdom; the only difference is that if the head or leader is not called King he will be named President.

In the spiritual hierarchy there are seven grades of spiritual souls, and each grade is divided into two classes, Jelal and Jemal. And descending from the combination of these two spirits there comes a third line as a central line; this is the spirit of prophecy, which is called the Spirit of Guidance. It has never been necessary for any of the members of the hierarchy to make claims for themselves. In this world of falsehood there are many false claims, and in the worldly life even the real claims are no more true than false. Also, there is no reason why these claims should be made, since the holders of these offices can serve their purpose better by being silent than by announcing themselves.

Every office in the world is accompanied by a certain amount of vanity, and vanity is the greatest enemy of spiritual people. Then there is always the jealousy of human nature at work, and also the competition and rivalry that give stimulus to life in the world. That is why the office has always been concealed by the spiritual office-holders, except by the teachers who had to give the message of God to the people. And how many in the world would not believe the teacher unless they knew he was the office-bearer from God!

The lives of the teachers were the example and proof of their office; they had no other evidence but that. Miracles only became known afterwards, legends were formed afterwards, poems were made afterwards, temples were built afterwards, their following increased afterwards, and their words were valued afterwards. But during their lifetime they met with nothing but opposition and the inconstancy of their followers, who agreed one day and disagreed the next. They suffered all sorts of ordeals, even crucifixion.

The teacher's position is more delicate than that of the master,

and he shows it in the harmony which reigns in his own life, not only with his friends, but he will also be in harmony with an adversary. He shows harmony with the changing weather, and its different influences, and he is in harmony with all that he eats and drinks. He is in harmony with the place he lives and moves about in, and he harmonizes with all atmospheres. And so his will becomes the will of God; in other words, the will of God becomes his will. He may control a community, keeping it on the right track, but he mostly does the work for which he is appointed in an unobtrusive way. The greater a person is in spiritual advancement, the less assuming he becomes, and the more he avoids every show of piety or spirituality.

Ghauth is the next grade of the initiates. The influence of the Ghauth is wider. He gives up his personality wholly to the divine guidance, and wherever this Ghauth may be there will be created an atmosphere of protection from all kinds of dangers such as floods, storms, plagues, or famines. He promotes the spiritual well-being of a community.

Qutb is the third degree of a master, a still higher grade, when his mind becomes focused on the divine mind, and he has, to a lesser or greater extent, power over all elements as well as influence upon life. Under him there is a dominion in which he is responsible for the order and peace of souls. He governs a country or a nation spiritually.

Nabi is the apostle, called in Sanskrit Bodhisatva, whose spirit reflects the Spirit of Guidance. His work is mainly the giving of the message in the form of warning, awakening, preaching, teaching, and inspiring those to whom he may be sent. He comes into the lives of those who are meant to be guided along the spiritual path. He is sent to nations when they are meant to change their conditions. He is sent to a community or race to give warnings. He is meant to be a reformer at the times when a reformer is needed. He elevates individuals and bears a divine message.

Rasul is the world-messenger, who comes for all people at the time of the world's need, and brings with him that inspiration, influence, and power which will harmonize humanity. He may be a king or a pauper; in whatever condition he comes, he will fulfil the purpose of his coming on earth. Answering the cry of humanity,

he fulfils the purpose of his mission. The sign of Rasul is the crescent, which represents a responsive heart.

No man in the world has the power to give these higher initiations. They are given by God Himself, and the initiates prove their initiations not in their claims, but in their works. The soul that rises to that stage where manhood ends and godhead begins, enters the initiation of the spiritual hierarchy, and then he is neither man nor God. He is not God, because he is limited man; and he is not man, because he is God-conscious.

THE MASTER, THE SAINT, AND THE PROPHET

THERE ARE three roads to spiritual attainment, which meet in the end at one junction. One road is that of the master; another comes from quite a different point and is the road of the saint; and the middle path between the two is that of the prophet. The path of the master is a path of war, war with those outer influences which prevent one from making one's way through life. The path of the master requires self-discipline and will-power to make headway through life. He conquers himself; he battles with life; he is at war with destiny; he crusades against all that seems to him wrong; he finds the key to the secrets unknown to him; he turns all conditions, all things, all people, into the shape that he wishes, and moulds as he likes the personalities that come in touch with him; he tunes personalities to the tone which will suit his orchestration.

It is a path of accomplishment. All that the master takes up, he accomplishes; all that the master desires, he attains, sooner or later. Yet the master's one desire is spiritual attainment at its fullest, therefore to him all other attainments, spiritual or material, are nothing but many steps on a staircase. The struggle on the path of the master is great; he has to struggle all the way. Every condition that he has to face on the way to accomplishment is harder to cope with than the one before. No doubt, as he advances on the path of attainment, he gains power through struggle. The greater the struggle through life, the greater his power. He has command over objects; he produces effects in objects which are not naturally there. He can even rise to a state where he can command nature.

The spiritual hierarchy is made up of the masters. The world is ruled and governed, and although the spiritual hierarchy is different from outward governments, it is nevertheless an inner government. In the East such masters, whose thought, whose feeling, whose glance, whose impulse, can move the universe, are called Wali. The master may advance gradually

through the five principal stages of attainment, and may even arrive at the stage of Rasul in the end.

The path of the saint is one of love, harmony, and beauty; ready to give, ready to sacrifice, ready to renounce, ready to give in and to yield. The saintly soul accepts all insults as a purifying process. He is resigned to every loss, for there is no loss without some gain and there is no gain which is without any loss; there is always a hidden loss in the gain and a gain in the loss. Renunciation is not difficult for that soul, for in renunciation it finds its freedom. No sacrifice is too great for the saintly soul, for it gives it happiness. It need not learn generosity, for this is its nature, its character. Modesty, humility, tolerance, and forgiveness are part of the saint's being; he cannot do otherwise, for he knows no other way.

No doubt in the beginning the saintly soul finds difficulty on this path. The path of the saint is a constant battle with the self, for there is no end to the world's demands; in this world no one can be too good or too kind. The better one is, the more good is asked of one; the kinder one is, the more kindness is expected from one; and so it goes on through life. The happiness a saintly soul finds, through all the continual sacrifices that he makes as he goes through life, lies in the fact that his will is gradually becoming harmonized with the will of God, so that God's will and his will in time become one. And no one can imagine that happiness except the souls who have experienced the feeling of resignation to all the crosses that one has to bear in life.

The spirit of a saint at last becomes tuned to the whole universe. He is in tune with all climates, with the weather, with nature, with the animals and birds; he becomes in tune with the trees and plants, in tune with all atmospheres, with all human beings of various natures, because he becomes the keynote of the whole universe. All harmonize with him: the virtuous souls, the wicked souls, angels and devils, all become in tune. He is in harmony with every object, with every element; he is in tune with those who have passed from this earth, with those in the other spheres as well as with those who live on earth. The moral of a saint is very difficult, but the spirit of the saint is a benediction to himself and a blessing to others.

The work of the master is to protect individuals and to safeguard the world, to keep away all disasters that might be caused by the inharmony of the nature both of individuals and of the collectivity. It is to help those who are feeble but in the right, who are weak but just, when they are opposed by a powerful enemy. The work of the saint is to console the wretched, to take under the wings of mercy and compassion those left alone in life, to bless the souls that he meets on his path.

The way of the prophet is more balanced, for in the life of the prophet there is a balance of these two attributes: the power of attainment and the patience to be resigned to the will of God. So the prophet is at the same time both a warrior and a peacemaker. This way is *Kemal*, that is, perfect or balanced. The work of the prophet is not only in his own spiritual attainment, but he has a service of great importance to perform. As the prophet goes through the five stages on his way towards the fulfilment of his life's mission he acts as a warner, a healer, a reformer, a lawyer, a teacher, a priest, and as a preacher. Such service keeps the prophet away from what his soul always craves for, and that is the solitude of the wilderness. He longs for one place, and he is put in another place. The very soul who constantly yearns to flee from the crowd, because of his mission is put in the very midst of the crowd. Thus the work of the prophet in the world becomes as hard as if a person were asked to jump into the water and then come out dry. He must live in the world and not be of the world. However, it is very often the prophetic soul whose life's mission is to serve humanity in time of need, and it is the fulfilment of this service which makes him *Rasul*, the messenger.

The prophet is the message-bearer, the prophet is both master and servant, the prophet is a teacher and at the same time a pupil, for there is a great deal that he must learn from his experience in life; not in order to make it possible for him to receive the message, but in order to make himself capable of giving the message. For God speaks to the prophet in His divine tongue, and the prophet in his turn interprets it in the language of men, making it intelligible to them, trying to put the most subtle ideas in the gross terms of worldly language. Therefore not all that

the prophet comes to give to the world is given in words, but that which cannot be given in words is given without words. It is given through his atmosphere, it is given by his presence, it is given by the great love that gushes forth from his heart, it is given in his kind glance, and it is given in his benediction. And yet the most is given in silence that no earthly sense can perceive. The difference between human language and divine words is this, that a human word is a pebble: it exists, but there is nothing further; the divine word is a living word, just like a grain of corn. One grain of corn is not only one grain: in reality it is hundreds and thousands, for in the grain there is an essence which is always multiplying, and which will show perfection in itself.

THE PROPHET

THE PROPHET is the manifestation of the same Spirit which, in its fullest expression, can rightfully be called Alpha and Omega; although the spirit of Alpha and Omega is really in all beings: in a loving mother, in a kind father, in an innocent child, in a helpful friend, in an inspiring teacher. The prophet is a mystic, and greater than a mystic; the prophet is a philosopher, and greater than a philosopher; the prophet is a poet, and greater than a poet; the prophet is a teacher, and greater than a teacher; the prophet is a seer, and greater than a seer. Why greater? Because he has a duty to perform, together with the blessing that he brings upon earth.

In the East, the prophet is termed *Payghambar*. There are also two other names, *Nabi* and *Rasul*; and although all these names mean a prophet, yet each of them signifies a certain attribute of the prophet; also, each of those words denotes a certain degree of his evolution. *Payghambar* literally means 'message-bearer', and this word is used for holy ones who brought a divine message from time to time to a certain community, nation, or race, whenever there was a need of awakening in a certain people. The *Payghambar* acted as an alarm to warn people of coming dangers; he also brought reforms to improve the condition of his people.

There are two steps in the life of the messenger, one minor and the other major. One stage is when he begins to give the message; the next stage is when the message is fulfilled. *Nabi* is the one who begins to give the message; *Rasul* is the one who fulfils the message.

Nabi is the prophet who has not only come for a certain section of humanity. Although he may only live and move in a limited region of the world, yet what he brings has its influence upon the whole of humanity. It may not be fulfilled in his lifetime, but a day of fulfilment will come, even if it be centuries later, so that all he brought at last reaches the whole of humanity. *Rasul* is a term which denotes a more advanced degree, when the prophet

has not only brought a message to the world, but has fulfilled his task during his lifetime through all the tests and trials that a prophet has to meet in life.

The prophet is an interpreter of the divine law in a human tongue. He is an ambassador of the spiritual hierarchy, for he represents to humanity the illuminated souls who are both known and unknown to the world, who are both hidden and manifest, and who are both in the world and beyond the world. The prophet is both an initiate and an initiator, for he is an answer to the cry of humanity, as much of individuals as of the collectivity; he is the one who sympathizes with those in pain, guides those in darkness, harmonizes those who are in conflict, and brings peace to the world, which is always losing its equilibrium, excited by centuries of its own activity.

The prophet can never tell the ultimate truth, which only his soul knows and no words can explain. His mission is, therefore, to design and paint and picture the truth in words that may be intelligible to mankind. The bare truth not every man can see; if he can he needs no more teaching. The prophet, so to speak, listens to the words of God in the language of God, and interprets those words in human language. He speaks to every man in his own tongue, he converses with every man on his own plane. Therefore he has little chance to disagree, unless there is someone who wants disagreement and nothing else; there he cannot help.

Besides the words which an intellectual person can speak also, the prophet brings the love and the light which is the food of every soul. The very presence of the prophet may make a person see things differently, and yet he may not know that it was because of the prophet. He may only think that that which was not clear to him, or for a moment seemed difficult to him, is now simple and clear. For the prophet is a living light, a light which is greater in power than the sun, for the light of the sun can only make things clear to the eyes, but the light that the prophet brings to the world makes the heart see all that the eyes are not capable of seeing. The prophet brings love, the love of God who is the Father and Mother of the whole of humanity, a love that is life itself. No words or actions can express that love. The presence of the prophet and his very being speak of it, if

only the heart has ears to listen. Verily, to the believer all is right, and to the unbeliever all is wrong.

The principal work of the prophet is to glorify the name of God, and to raise humanity from the denseness of the earth, to open the doors of the human heart to the divine beauty which is manifested everywhere, and to illuminate souls which have been groping in darkness for years. The prophet brings the message of the day, a reform for that particular period in which he is born. The claim of prophet-hood is nothing to the real prophet. His being, his work, and the fulfilment of his task, it is these which are the proof of prophet-hood.

THE SPIRIT OF GUIDANCE

i

THE SPIRIT of Guidance may be called in other words the divine mind; and as the human mind is completed after its coming on earth, so the divine mind is completed after manifestation. In fact, the Creator's mind is made out of His own creation. The experience of every soul becomes the experience of the divine mind; therefore the divine mind has the knowledge of all beings. It is a storehouse of perfect wisdom; it is the soul of Christ and the spirit of prophecy. Intuition, inspiration, vision, and revelation, all come from the same source whence every kind of revelation comes, and that is the divine mind.

There are some who receive knowledge from the divine mind indirectly, and some who receive it directly. In those souls which happen to receive the central current of the Spirit of Guidance, the spirit of prophecy is conceived. The messengers of all times, of whom we hear in the histories and traditions of the world, have been souls in whom the central current of the divine light has functioned, in other words, the prophets of all ages have been the reflections of the divine mind on earth. No one has ever seen God, and if the evidence of God's existence has ever been manifested, it was in man who reflected God. Apart from all that the prophets have taught, it was their personality which proved their prophecy. In their thought, speech, and word they reflected God, which was more than morals, doctrines, and teachings could do.

Every inspired person reflects in his own way some divine spark hidden in his soul, which wins the world. A musician may show his inspiration in music; a poet may show it in his poetry; an artist may show his inspiration in his art; but the central ray of light which the prophets reflect, falling upon every plane and every aspect of life, makes all things clear to their sight. Therefore the presence of the prophet clears away perplexity from the minds of those who are confused; in his presence

a person can feel and think more clearly, even without having spoken to him. Many forget their questions when before a prophet, for the light falling upon their hearts brings them the answer, and they realize that the answer was in themselves, something that they already knew. No doubt both the question and answer are in the soul; the first step of the soul's progress raises questions, and the second step brings the answer. This is why a prophetic soul is also a physician, a scientist, and an artist; a prophetic soul is capable of commerce, industry, and business, and he is qualified in warfare and competent in peace-making.

The Spirit of Guidance is like the yeast which is used to make bread, preparing humanity for the purpose for which it was created. The Spirit of Guidance is a plant that grows and blossoms when it meets with response and care; and when it is watered by the rainfall of divine inspiration it blooms in the light of the divine sun. The Spirit of Guidance is the light of God, which may be likened to a lantern that the farmer carries when walking on the farm in the darkness of night. It is like a searchlight, which shows up any object upon which it is thrown; and so when the light of the Spirit of Guidance is thrown upon any aspect of life, man receives a keen insight into it. In the Spirit of Guidance one finds a living God active in the heart of every person.

One who depends upon the Spirit of Guidance to direct his life, is guided rightly. We always have a counsel within, but the one who ignores the existence of the Spirit of Guidance is left alone by it for some time, so that he has to look out for himself. It is like the mother and the dependent child that tries to hold its mother's hand at every step it takes; so the mother's whole attention is drawn to every step of her child. But when the child tries to move about by its own will, and tries to keep away, then the attention of the mother, to some extent, becomes released. This does not mean that the mother entirely gives up the care of the child; it only means that she allows the child to have its own way to some extent, and feels sorry when the child falls and hurts itself. In point of fact, all souls are children of God, but such souls as are conscious of their relationship with God, like that between a child and its parents, certainly deserve to be called

children of God. They are especially cared for; they are always guided, because they ask for guidance.

The soul of the prophet, therefore, shows the innocence of a child. Of what is known to the world about Jesus Christ and his life, the most lovable attribute of the Master was his innocence in spite of his perfect wisdom. Certainly he deserves to be called the only-begotten son who has all his life depended for everything he said or did upon the guidance of God.

ii

Divinity is that aspect of God which emanates from God and forms itself into the Spirit of Guidance. The Spirit of Guidance may thus be called the heart of God, a heart which is the accumulator of all feelings, impressions, thoughts, memories, and of all knowledge and experience. It is like putting a man at the head of a factory who has been in that factory from the beginning; he has had experiences of all kinds, of the pioneer work and of how things have changed, of the new methods and of the right or wrong results which have come out of them. All such impressions have thus been collected in that one person.

In this mechanism of the world, all that happens, all that is experienced in the way of thought and feeling, is accumulated. Where? In the heart of God. Divinity is that heart which contains all wisdom and to which all wisdom belongs. The heart of God is the intelligence and the current of guidance in the heart of every man, and therefore it is not disconnected from the heart of man. Indeed, the heart of man is one of the atoms which form the heart of God.

If people have called Christ divine that is right too. The heart of the Master which fully reflected the divine heart naturally showed the sign of divinity. Not understanding this, people made this idea exclusive and incomprehensible, and by this they have taken away the ground from under the feet of the Master. And by this, too, further harm has been done, taking away the worthiness of man who was made to be the representative of God. The Hebrew scriptures say that man was made in the image of God, and the Muslim scripture says that man was made the Khalif of God, which means His representative.

When one says that man was born in sin, that man is on earth and that God is in heaven, one separates man from God; and this takes away the possibility of perfection of which Christ has said, 'Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'. That possibility of human perfection is taken away by making the idea of divinity exclusive and remote, and thus depriving man of the bliss of God which was meant for him. That is why disputes have arisen among the followers of different religions, each of them thinking their teacher to be the only teacher. For that reason wars have taken place in all ages, and people have disagreed with one another; people from one community have called the others heathen, depriving themselves of the bliss which constantly is, which was, and which always will be.

In reality the Spirit of Guidance may be pictured as one thread; and all the great masters of humanity are like the beads on that thread. One spirit and many individualities; one soul and many personalities; one wisdom and many teachers who have expounded wisdom according to their own personality. But at the same time, wisdom always being one, they cannot be compared with different scientists. For scientists when they have discovered something new say they have made a new discovery; but the prophets have never said that they had made a new discovery; they have always said, 'What those who came before me perceived I perceive, and those who come after thousands of years will perceive the same.' Yet in spite of that it is always new, for every moment has its new joy. As Hafiz says, 'Sing, my soul, a new song that every new moment inspires in you.'

Once the soul awakens, it begins to see that truth is always new and renews the soul, giving it perpetual youth. When one finds differences between the teachers of humanity, these are only in the lives they lived. But no matter what their life was, whether they were kings or faqirs, whether they walked or rode on an elephant's back, whether they were on a throne or in mountain caves or in deserts, they all had the same experience: realization. They might appear to be comfortable and rejoicing, but they heard the same note which others heard in tortures. Those who were kings such as Solomon and David, and those who were

sages such as Krishna and Buddha, all these different souls had the same realization, the same philosophy. There could never be an argument if they were all to meet. But they are not meant to meet because they are all one. It was the Spirit of Guidance which manifested through all these different names and forms.

When one looks at this subject from a metaphysical point of view, one observes that light has three principal currents: one current that takes the central line and shoots out, one current that goes to the right, and a third one that goes to the left. It is these three currents which are the secret of what is called Trinity, and by this threefold aspect the mystery of manifestation can be interpreted.

The current of the Spirit of Guidance which runs to the right is significant of power; that is why those who came under that current were called masters. The characteristic of such a soul is power; he is one who conquers himself, who contends with circumstances, struggles with life, and rises above conflicts.

The story of Daniel in the lions' den is the picture of the master: of the magnetism, power, and peace that make lions tame. The same power spreads and in time makes all hard things soft. The master therefore is a living power; his power of mind, of feeling, of heart, of spirit, has its influence on all living beings, things, and objects; to what extent, the human mind cannot imagine.

The other current, which runs to the left, is the sign of the saintly inspiration; of that passive character which has the desire to serve, an overflowing sympathy, a tender heart, widespread compassion, continual forgiveness, a gentle manner, a constant self-sacrifice, and perpetual renunciation.

And the central current which is prophetic is both, the power of the master and the wisdom of the saint. Such a character has been directed to go into the world, to the crowd, to endure the coarse vibrations of men, to go through all the experiences of life and yet to retain that fineness, delicacy, and tenderness which keep the soul close to God and in communication with the Spirit of Guidance, which ever flows and manifests in the form of the message.

THE PROPHETIC SOUL

i

THE SOUL of the prophet represents both the human and the divine. His feet on the earth and his head in heaven, he has to journey on the path of life, to respect and regard reason, and yet to cling to that rope which hangs down from heaven which he calls faith, two things quite contrary to each other. The world of variety with its numberless changes compels him to reason things out, while the world of unity promises to his unwavering faith the answer to every demand of life.

There is a Sufi expression, Akhlak-e Allah, which means the manner of God, and this manner can be seen in the prophetic soul. No one knows the manner of God, since God can not be seen by earthly eyes, but if there is any sign of God to be seen, it is in the God-conscious one; and it is the fullness of God-consciousness which makes a prophetic soul.

The life of the prophet is like that of someone walking upon a rope: matter on one side and spirit on the other; heaven on one side and earth on the other; the imperfect self journeying towards perfection and at the same time bearing the burden of numberless souls, many of whom have not yet learnt to walk even upon the earth. In the history of the prophets, at whatever time they have come on earth, one reads of their struggle being fourfold: struggle with self, struggle with the world, struggle with friends, and struggle with foes; and yet many wonder why a prophet should be a warrior! Most people know that the Prophet Mohammad was a warrior, but are unaware of the fact that Moses had the same experience; and very few know that the whole lives of the prophets of India, Rama and Krishna, were nothing but warfare from beginning to end. Their scriptures are full of the wars and battles that went on all through their lives, and if some prophets apparently did not have to wage war, then they had some other form of warfare to go through. The blood of the martyrs was the foundation of the Church.

The seers and saints, who live a life of seclusion, are happy when compared with the prophet, whose life's work is in the midst of the crowd. When he is known to be a prophet, jealousy and prejudice arise; if he is not known, he can do but little. When he goes into the world, the world absorbs him; when he thinks of God, God attracts him. Thus his spirit is pulled from both sides; and this is the meaning of the symbol of the cross. The prophet, representing God and His message, is tested and tried and examined by every soul; a thousand searchlights are thrown upon him; and he is not judged by one judge but by numberless judges; every soul is a judge and has its own law to judge him with. The mystic is free to speak and act; what does he care what people think of him? The prophet, however, must be careful what they think, not for himself, but for those who follow him.

Besides all these difficulties, in the end he finds no comprehension of his ideal of service in the world except in God, who alone is his consolation. Many follow the prophet, but very few comprehend his ideal. It is this that made Mohammad say, 'I am knowledge; Ali is the door.' In the first place, to express a lofty thought in words or actions is the most difficult thing, because what is expressed in words and actions is only the surface of the thought; in the same way to express deep feeling in words and action is very difficult. And so is the message of the prophet; it is often difficult for it to be put into words. The best way of following a prophetic message, a way which has been known to very few, is to adopt the outlook of the prophet; for the point of view of any person can only be fully understood by seeing from that person's point of view.

ii

What is asked of a prophet? The prophetic soul must of necessity rise so high that it can hear the voice of God, yet at the same time it must bend so low that it can hear every little whisper of human beings. Even the slightest lack of consideration or regard for those who wished to attract their attention has been noticed and remarked in the lives of the prophets. Being a prophet means to live in heaven and to live on the earth at the same time. The heart of the prophet is meant to be a harp, every

string of it tuned to its proper pitch, in order that God may play His music upon it. And it is that celestial music which is called the divine message.

That is why many of the ancient scriptures were named Githas, or Gathas, which mean the same thing: music. The gospel of Krishna is called Bhagavad Gita, which means the Song Celestial, the Song of God; and the Parsis call their sacred scripture Gatha. The Jewish scriptures are chanted when recited; also the Qur'an is recited in the form of singing.

Every musician knows how difficult it is to keep his violin in tune, especially when it is shaken; but the heart is incomparably more susceptible and gets out of tune far more easily. It is for this reason that the seers and mystics sought solitude and kept themselves away from the crowd; but the prophet, by the nature of his mission, is placed in the midst of the crowd. It is the problem of life in the crowd which he has to solve; and yet not solve it intellectually, as everyone wishes to do, but spiritually, by keeping that instrument, the heart, in proper tune with the Infinite, so that he may get the answer to all the questions arising at every moment of the day.

Thus it is that even the presence of the prophet is the answer to every question; without having spoken one word, the prophet gives the answer; but if a restless and confused mind cannot hear it, then that mind receives the answer in words. The answer of the prophet uproots every question; but the answer always comes from the heart of the prophet without his even having been asked a question. For the prophet is only the medium between God and man; therefore the answer is from God.

The Prophet does not answer a question because he reads the mind; it is the mind of the one who asks the question which strikes, on the inner plane, that divine bell which is the heart of the prophet; and God, hearing the bell, answers. The answer comes as if words were put into the mouth of the prophet. Thus the prophet need not ponder upon the question he is asked; the question automatically draws the answer from him. This rule is applied not only to individuals, but to the multitude. A thousand people may be listening to a prophet at the same time, each having a different question in his mind, and yet the question

of each one of them will be answered. In the same way the true character of the sacred scriptures is such that even the book can answer the question if a person opens it automatically in order to find the solution to a certain problem. And if the book can give an answer, then one can expect more from the prophet; for the soul of the prophet is the living book; his heart is the sacred scripture.

In the outer sense of the word religion is a form given to the worship of God, and a law given to a community to help them to live harmoniously. In the inner sense of the word religion means a staircase, made for the soul to climb and reach that plane where truth is realized. Both these aspects of religion may be found in the words and in the soul of the prophet: his words, the law; his message, the wisdom; and his being, that peace which is the seeking of every soul. God has never manifested as Himself in this world of variety, where every thing and every being, although it is a divine expression, yet has its limitations. But if the world has been able to believe in God and to recognize God in any being, it is in the godly, it is in the soul which reflects God. With all the arguments for and against the divinity of Christ, no sincere believer in God can deny that God has been reflected in the personality of the Master.

iii

There are two different conceptions of the prophetic soul. One is that of the Hindus, who called the prophetic souls Avatars, which means incarnations of God. They also distinguished the characters of their Avatars according to their claims: some claimed to be the Avatar or the incarnation of Vishnu; some claimed to be the incarnation of Shiva. It was easier for the people of India to grasp the idea of a prophet being a God incarnate than to accept him as another human being. The long line of prophets of Ben Israel were not called incarnations; they were called the godly, or the ones who were connected with God. Abraham was called Habib Allah, the friend of God; Moses was distinguished as Kalam Allah, the one who communicates with God; Jesus was called Ruh Allah, the spirit of God; Mohammad was called Rasul Allah, the messenger of God.

The difference between the prophets among the Hindus and those of Ben Israel, is that the Hindu prophets claimed to be God themselves. The reason was that owing to their philosophical evolution the people of India were ready to accept the divine in man; but in Arabia and Palestine on the contrary, even the prophetic claim aroused such opposition against the prophets that their lives were in danger and their mission became most difficult for them to perform.

After the claimants of godhead there have been many reformers in India, to whom people responded without much difficulty, but in the Near East it has always been difficult, and always will be so. It is for this reason that the ancient school of esotericism, the ancient Order of the Sufis, found it difficult to exist under the reign of orthodoxy. Many great Sufis have been made victims by the orthodox powers which reigned, until Sufism, that can be said to have been the mother of the coming reform in the religious world, was protected by Persia, and in the end found a still greater freedom in India, where the Hindus respected it and the Muslims followed it without the slightest hesitation. In the houses of the Sufis the followers of all religions met together in friendliness and in the feeling of brotherhood.

The Sufi message which is now being given in the Western world is the child of that mother who has been known for so many years as Sufism. It connects the two lines of the prophetic mission, the Hindu line and that of Ben Israel, in order that they may become the medium to unite in God and truth both East and West. It is the same truth, the same religion, the same ideal, which the wise of all ages have held. If there is anything different, it is only a difference of form. The Sufi message given now has adopted the form suitable for the age. It is a message without claim; and the group of workers in this message, and those who follow it, are called the Sufi Movement; their work is to tread the spiritual path quietly, unassumingly, and to serve God and humanity. In this lies the fulfilment of the message.

iv

A question which is always asked is how the prophetic soul receives the message of God; in what form. Does the angel

Gabriel bring it, as it is said in the scriptures of Ben Israel? Does it come as a voice? Does it come in a form which is visible? And the answer is, that everything which has been said about it in the ancient scriptures has much truth in it, but very often some of the symbolical ideas are misinterpreted by the uninitiated. The idea of Gabriel as a messenger is partly imagination; the real Gabriel is that Spirit of Guidance which is the soul of the prophets. Its voice is intuition, but to the attentive mind of the prophets this voice is sometimes so distinct that it becomes much louder than what is heard through the ears. For in their hearts a capacity is produced; in other words, their hearts become like domes which echo every word. The heart of the ordinary person does not give that echo, so the inner voice becomes inaudible to one's own soul. Just as a voice is necessary, so is hearing necessary also; without hearing the voice is inaudible. The hearing is the capacity in the heart. When the heart becomes like an ear, then it begins to hear the voice that comes from within.

Then there is the question whether Gabriel manifested to the prophets in a certain form. That is also true. There is nothing in this world which is devoid of form except God who is formless, although the form of some things is visible, and that of other things invisible. Even thoughts and feelings have forms. One may call them results, but form is always a result. The heart which can hear the inner voice louder than the spoken words can certainly see the form, even the form which is not seen by every soul. In fact, the eyes of the prophet do see a form; for what the heart sees fully is also reflected in the eyes. It is not seen from without but from within, and yet it is seen. Not everyone can conceive of such an idea, for most are accustomed to see and hear only what comes from outside. But to the wise it is as clear as day that the eyes and the ears are not only the organs in which the impressions from the outer life are reflected, but that even impressions from the life within are also reflected in them.

It matters little to a prophet whether his ears hear or his heart hears, whether his eyes see or his heart sees. He knows that he hears and sees, and that is sufficient evidence for him of a living God. One may ask if this means that God is so personal that He speaks and manifests as a phantom to a certain soul; but if this

were so it would only be limiting God. The limitless God cannot be made more intelligible to our limited self unless He is first made limited. That limited ideal becomes like an instrument, a medium of God who is perfect and who is limitless.

v

In the traditions of the ancients we find that there were many prophets of the past who, in a worldly sense, were not educated, among them the Prophet Mohammad. By many he was given the name *Umni*, which means 'unlettered', although according to the ideas of that time the Prophet was very well versed in the Arabic language. This shows that worldly education does not make the prophet, though it may help to express in more intelligible form the spiritual message which his heart receives.

We see in the world's scriptures four different forms in which the prophetic message was given: the ancient Hindu form, which can be traced in the scriptures of India and which was continued by Buddha; then the form of Ben Israel, which is to be found in the Old Testament, and which one can follow from the time of Abraham to the time of Mohammad; the third form is the form of Zarathushtra, which showed two aspects: the Gayatri of the Hindus and the prayer of Ben Israel; and the fourth form is the form of the New Testament, which gives the story and the interpretation of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and which has been made, with every new version, more intelligible to the mind of the people in the West. But the moment a soul dives deeper into these scriptures it begins to realize the one voice within all these outer forms, and that it is the same voice that has adopted these different forms to answer the need of every age.

What the prophet says is much less than what he really hears, and the sense of what he says is much deeper than what his outer words mean. For the task of the prophet is a most difficult one; it is trying to present to the world the whole ocean in a bottle. No one has ever been able to do it; yet they have all tried, for that has been their destiny. People have taken these bottles when given to them, and have said, 'See, here is the ocean; I have the ocean in my pocket!' But through what the prophets have taught in the scriptures they have only tried to point out the

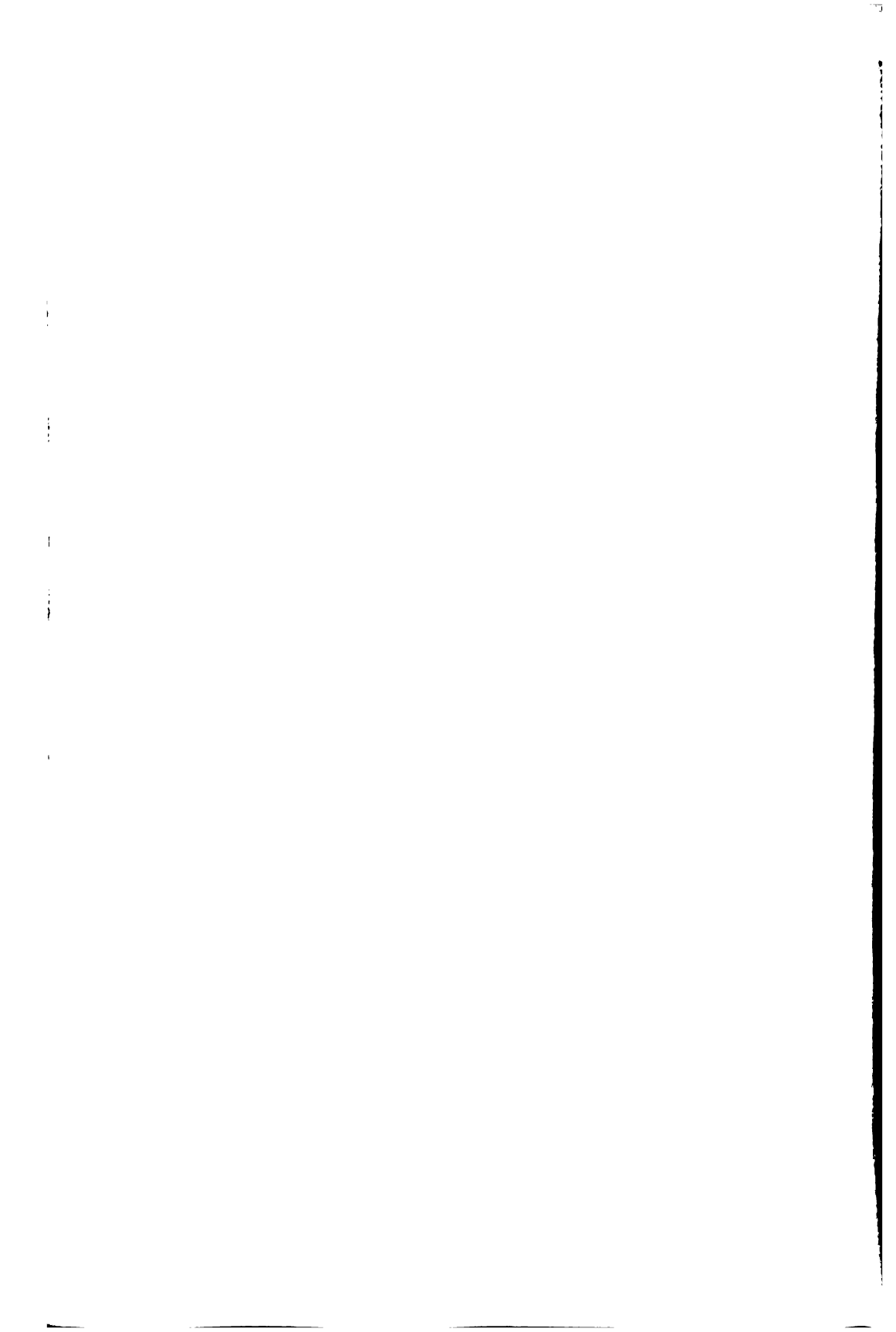
way; they have not pictured the goal, for no one can put the goal into a picture. The goal is above all form and beyond the power of words to explain.

Those who have benefited by the life and message of the divine message-bearers are not necessarily the followers of their message, but rather the imitators of their life; for they have not only followed the teaching, but also the teacher, who is the living example of his teaching. All the ancient traditions of religious evolution tell us how those around the prophets have benefited by this imitation, rather than by following the strict laws and by arguing about the differences between the laws. There is no scripture in which contradiction does not exist; it is the contradiction which makes the music of the message. The message would be rigid, like pebbles, if there were no contradiction. Even pebbles are not all alike; how can all words mean the same? The message is nothing but an answer to every question, every need, every demand of the individual and collective life.

Rumi has tried to explain in the *Masnavi*, from beginning to end, the nature and character of the heart of the prophet, and by this he has given the key to the door which opens on to the prophetic path. Therefore in reading any scripture we must remember first that it is not the words we read which are so important, but what is hidden behind them. To the ordinary mind, which only sees the surface, the words of the scriptures are nothing but simple phrases, and sometimes the ideas appear simple, even childish. But the one who tries to discover what is behind them, will find out in time that there is a vast field of thought hidden behind every word that has come from the lips of the prophets. Verily the words of the prophets are like seals upon the secret of God.

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PART IV



HINDUISM

FORMS OF WORSHIP

THE HINDU religion is one of the most ancient in the world, and to it almost all the religions of the past may be traced. The primitive religion of sun-worship, which came and went in the world, still exists among the Brahmins. They greet the sunrise after bathing in the river; and they are purified by its most inspiring rays. Besides the sun, they worship the moon and the planets, regarding each of them as a special god, signifying a particular power of the one God.

The mythical religion of the ancient Greeks, the gods and goddesses of the old Egyptians, all are still found today in the religion of the Hindus. They count among their gods almost all the animals and birds known to man; and all the different aspects of life are explained in their myths, which teach man to see the divine Being in all. The great powers of the Almighty are pictured as various gods and goddesses, to whom special powers are attributed. Some worship these. Even such savage animals as lions, elephants, or cobras are considered sacred, by which the moral of loving our enemies is taught.

The fire-worship of the Zoroastrians may be recognized in the Yag and Yagna ceremonies of the Hindus. The idea of Christian Trinity may be traced in the idea of Trimurti in the Hindu religion. The prostration at prayers, which exists in Islam, may be seen in its complete form in the Pranam and Dandavat forms of Hindu worship.

Besides all these objects of worship, they are taught the worship of the Guru, the teacher. They see the first Guru in the mother and father; then every person with whom they come in contact who teaches them anything, they esteem as their Guru; until they have developed in themselves the worshipping attitude which in the end they show to the real Guru, who helps them in their spiritual awakening. The following verse, from the

Hindi by Sundar Das, gives an idea of what the Chela thinks of his Guru:

I have enjoyed my life on earth, O Guru, by thy mercy.

Thy words have drawn me closer to God.

As with the rising of the sun darkness disappears,
So thou hast cleared away the darkness of ignorance from my
soul.

Some adore the earthly beings and some adore the heavenly,
But I revere thee, O holy Guru!

THE CASTE SYSTEM

When the Aryans came and settled in Bharat Khand, which today is called India, they wanted to found a life of solitude and self-sufficiency there.

Those among them who were learned and pious, whose way of life was better in every way than that of the others, formed a special group and called themselves Brahmins; their work was study, scientific investigation, music, and poetry; moreover priesthood was their right. They instructed people as teachers. At the weddings and at births and deaths they took charge of the ceremonies with their religious rites. Their life was like that of a hermit. They married only among their own people; and their living depended upon Bhiksha, freewill offerings.

There were others among them who revered the Brahmins for their learning and piety, but held themselves superior because of their warlike merits and their control of the land that belonged to them. They were called Kshatrias, landowners or warriors.

Those who were clever at commerce took refuge under the power and control of the Kshatrias, and handled all matters concerning money. They were called Vaishas. Business of all kinds was carried on by them.

Those remaining were the ones who laboured, and according to their labour, various grades were formed. They were called Sudras. Among them were some whose work was of such a nature that if they came into the house, or touched another person when working, it was against their sanitary principles.

Brahmanism, being a most scientific religion, made it a law that they should not be touched.

In this way these four castes were formed, and went on peacefully until the entry of foreigners into their land, which naturally interfered with their harmony, and the whole plan became a failure.

In spite of all the wisdom in forming these four castes, there was much selfishness shown by the higher classes, as has been always the case with the human race; and that has been a great hindrance to the progress of Hindus in general, for every chance of progress was barred for the lower classes. Their only consolation was the idea that they would reincarnate and be born in a higher class; there was no other way. This is the chief reason why the doctrine of reincarnation has such importance for the Hindu race.

RAMA

RAMA, THE great prophet and ideal of the Hindus, was at the same time an example of the incarnation of a godhead. The character and history of Rama is described by Valmiki in the great epic Ramayana. The training which was given to Rama by a great Rishi whose name was Vashishta, was in order to bring forth that kingdom of God which is hidden in the heart of man. In this respect Rama was not only an ideal for the Hindus of that particular age, but a model to mould the character of those who tread the spiritual path in any age.

Rama was a prince by birth, but was sent to be trained by a sage, with whom he lived in the solitude a life of both study and play. He was not only taught to read and write, but he was also trained in athletic exercises and sports, and in all manner of warfare. This shows what kind of education the ancient people had, an education in all aspects of life. And being trained thus, Rama completed his studies when he was in the prime of his youth.

By the Hindus the Ramayana has always been considered the most sacred scripture. The Brahmin recites this story in a poetic form, to which the devotees of the Master listen for hours without tiring of it, for they take it as their religious training.

The most interesting part of Rama's life is his marriage. In ancient times it was the custom for the husband to be chosen. This custom arose because of the tendency to warfare. Over every little disagreement the princes of the time rose up in arms, even in such matters as marriage. In order to avoid war, the father of Sita invited all the princes and potentates of his land and gave the right of selection to his daughter. A time was appointed for them all to gather in the royal gallery, adorned with their regal ornaments and decorations.

Rama had lived a simple life; he had not yet known what princely life meant, for he was being trained under a saint, where he ate the same food and wore the same simple clothes as the sage, and lived with him in the woods in the solitude. Yet the brightness of the soul shines out even without ornaments. When Sita entered this assembly, with a garland of flowers in her hands, her first glance fell upon Rama, and she could not lift her eyes

from that ideal of her soul to look at anyone else, for her soul recognized the pearl in its heart. Sita, without a moment's hesitation, came and put the garland on the neck of that youth, so simple and unassuming, standing with an innocent expression behind all the shining hosts.

Some marvelled at this choice, but many more became like glowing fire with envy and jealousy. Among them the one who was most upset was the King of Lanka, Ravana. For Sita was not only known as the most beautiful princess of the time, but she was also called Padmani, the Ideal Maiden. As in Rama his character was an example, so in Sita the ideal character was born.

Later the two were separated. Sita, who had followed Rama in his twelve years of *Vanavasa*, which means roaming in the forest, was once left alone in the woods, for Rama had gone to fetch some water. At that point Sita disappeared, and only after great difficulty and grief were her traces found. She had been taken prisoner by Ravana. She had steadfastly lived for Rama in this captivity, and would not yield to Ravana's tempting and threats. In the end victory was won. Rama fought a battle with Ravana and brought Sita home again.

This story shows how life is a struggle for everyone, to a greater or lesser degree. The outer nature of the struggle may be different for everyone, but at the same time no one can live in the midst of this world and be without a struggle. In this struggle the one who wins in the end has fulfilled the purpose of his life; the one who loses in the end has missed his purpose.

The life of Rama suggests that apart from spiritual strife the struggle in the world is the first thing to face; and if one keeps to one's own ideal through every test and trial in life, one will surely arrive at a stage when one will be victorious. It does not matter how small the struggle may be, but it is the victory won at the end of every struggle which is the power that leads man further on the path towards life's goal. Man's life, however great and spiritual, has its limitations. Before some conditions in life even the greatest man on earth, the most powerful soul, will for a moment seem helpless. But it is not the beginning that counts, it is the end. It is the last note that a great soul strikes which proves that soul to be real and true.

KRISHNA

THE LIFE OF Krishna is an ideal; it gives the picture of the life of a perfect man. The real meaning of the word Krishna is God, and the man who was identified with that name was the God-conscious one who fulfilled his message in the period in which he was destined to give it.

The story of Krishna, apart from its historical value and interest, is of great importance to the seeker after truth. Nothing is known about the father and mother of Krishna. Some say he was of royal birth, and this means of kingly origin, from that King who is the king of all. Then he was given into the care of Yeshoda, who brought him up as his foster-mother. This is symbolical of the fact that the earthly parents are only the guardians, the real father and mother being God. It is said that in his childhood Krishna was fond of butter, and that he learned as a child to steal butter from everywhere. And the meaning of this is that wisdom is the butter of the whole of life. When life is churned through a wheel, then out of it comes butter; wisdom is gained by it. Krishna was stealing it, which means that wherever he found wisdom he learned it, and thus he benefited by everybody's experience.

There are two ways of learning wisdom. One way is that a person goes and drinks to excess, and falls down in the mud, and then the police take him to the police-station and when he recovers from his drunkenness he cannot find his clothes and is horrified at his own appearance. This makes him realize what he has done. This is one way of learning, but it is possible that he does not learn. The other way of learning is that a young man is going along the street; he sees a drunken man, and realizes how terrible it is to be in this state; and from that he learns. That is stealing the butter.

Then the latter part of Krishna's life has two very important aspects. One aspect teaches us that life is a continual battle and the earth is the battlefield where every soul has to struggle, and

the one who wants to own the kingdom of the earth must be well acquainted with the law of warfare. He must learn the secret of an offensive, the mystery of defence, how to hold his position, how to retreat, how to advance, and how to change position; how to protect and control all that has been won, how to abandon what must be given up, the manner of sending an ultimatum, the way of making an armistice, and the method by which peace is made. In this battle of life man's position is most difficult, for he has to fight on two fronts at the same time: one enemy is himself, and the other is before him. If he is successful on one front and fails on the other front, then his success is not complete.

The battle of each individual has a different character; it depends upon a man's particular grade of evolution. Therefore every person's battle in life is different, and of a peculiar character. No one in the world is exempt from that battle; only, one is more prepared for it while the other is perhaps ignorant of the law of warfare. And in the success of this battle lies the fulfilment of life. The Bhagavad Gita, the Song Celestial, from beginning to end is a teaching on the law of life's warfare.

The other aspect of Krishna's life shows that every soul is striving to attain God—not God, as Judge or King, but as the Beloved. Every soul seeks God, the God of love, in the form it is capable of imagining, and thus the story of Krishna and the Gopis signifies God and the various souls seeking perfection.

The life and teaching of Krishna have helped the pious people of India very much in broadening their outlook. The religious man full of dogmas is often apt to make these too rigid, and he expects the godly or God-conscious to fit in with his standard of goodness. If they do not fit in with his particular idea of piety he is ready to criticize them. But the thought and life of Krishna were used by the artist, the poet, and the musician; and out of this came a new religion, a religion of recognizing the divine in natural human life. And the idea of considering a spiritual person as someone exclusive, remote, stone-like, and lifeless ceased to exist. The people of India became much more tolerant towards all the different aspects of life, at the same time looking at the whole of life as an immanence of God.

Some Hindus are called worshippers of Krishna, for although all

Hindus belong to one religion, yet different gods and goddesses are worshipped by different members of it. Among them the worship of Krishna is most prevalent, and it is as full of ceremony as the ancient Church of Rome, and even more so. This teaches us that ceremony is a concrete expression of thought, and it has suited the masses better than a religion of thought alone.

In the temple of Krishna there is an image of Krishna lying in a cradle. Women who go there for worship will sing lullabies in a prayerful attitude. Then in the same temple there is an image of Krishna grown up, and with him the image of Radha, his consort. Men and women will go there and worship both. They will take flowers and sandalwood and a few grains of rice, in order to make an offering to the god. Then there is an image of Krishna with a sword, cutting off the head of Kamsa, the monster-man. There are also images of Krishna driving the chariot of Arjuna, the exiled Pandava prince, on his way to wage war against the Kurus, the rulers of the time.

At first sight it surprises a stranger to think that God is worshipped in the form of a man, and that God is considered small enough to be rocked in a cradle; that God Most High should be pictured standing with his wife; or going to war, is something which any kind-hearted person would abhor. But to a Sufi it gives a different impression, since he sees God in every form. First, he says that if the worshipper cultivates his patience by standing, in joy or trouble, before a heedless god of stone that never answers or stretches out a helping hand, he will prove to be a steady worshipper of the true God; he will not fail, as many do when they see no help coming from God, and who then begin to disbelieve or at least to doubt His existence. The Sufi thinks that when God is all and in all, what does it matter if one person looks at heaven and the other looks at the earth? To him both are looking at the same thing.

In ancient times many thought that spirituality meant being alone in a forest; this thought is dispelled by seeing Krishna and Radha together, thus showing that both mean God, not one alone.

Many people today ask why, if there is a God, should wars and disasters take place. And many give up their belief when they

think more about it. The image of Krishna with a sword, going to war, shows that God who is in heaven, and who is most kind, is yet the same God who stands with a sword in his hand; that there is no name, no form, no place, no occupation, which is devoid of God. It is a lesson that we should recognize God in all, instead of limiting Him only to the good and keeping Him away from what we call evil; for this contradicts the saying that in God we live and move and have our being.

BUDDHA

INDIA, A LAND of extremes, was at one time very much absorbed in idealism. This reached its greatest heights when Brahmanism gave to the people an idealism which made them recognize the face of God in man, and experience heaven on earth. And when this had touched its zenith, then came another epoch, an epoch of reaction, and that was the period of Buddha.

The mission of Buddha was quite unique in its character, and therefore it stands quite apart from the many other religions of the world. People sometimes wonder if all religions are one; they can easily see a similarity between the Hebrew religion and Islam, and also the religion of Christ; but they cannot understand that what Buddha taught could also be a religion, and that it could be one with all the others. The answer is that the work of all those who have served humanity in the form of religion has been of great importance, firstly because they had to give the same truth which every other servant of humanity has given, and secondly because they had to answer the demand of the time in a form suited to that particular time. In this they differed from their predecessors who had done the work in other ways. When idealism had reached its zenith in India, it did not fall to Buddha to teach an even greater idealism than the people already had. Indeed, in order to bring about a balance, he had to give them a pill of disillusion. And in that way perhaps, at that time or even today, he might appear to be a teacher of quite a different philosophy and of a religion which differs from all other religions which are more idealistic. Yet at the same time no one can show one word in the teaching of Buddha which is opposed to any religion. His mission was to bring the birds of idealism flying in the air nearer to the earth, because the food for their bodies belonged to the earth.

Buddha, born as a prince, was recognized by the wise of that time as a soul of the finest possible feeling and the greatest depth of heart. Being born in a family where he could be taken good

care of, they naturally kept all the sorrows and distress and troubles of life away from him. His parents wanted to give this soul the time to develop without being depressed by worldly troubles. It was not only the love of the parents, but it was the wisdom of destiny that brought up in this manner a soul who was born to sympathize with the world.

When after the best education the mind of Buddha came to maturity, then one day he was allowed to go out and look at the world. This soul, who had not been allowed to see much of the world and who had never known pain and distress and trouble, was quite unaware of the experiences of life in the world. So when he went out for the first time and saw an aged man who could only walk with difficulty he asked, 'What is it?' His attendants said, 'It is age.' And he sympathized. And then he saw another person, worn out and tired and down-hearted. He said, 'What is the matter?' They answered, 'It is illness.' And he sympathized, saying, 'So that is illness!' There was another man who had lost his money and was in despair and poverty. Buddha asked, 'What is it?' They said, 'It is poverty.' And he sympathized, feeling this man's condition. In short, this soul whose heart was open to sympathize with everyone felt that life has many limitations and that every limitation has its despair. And the number of limitations that he saw was so great that he wondered what remedy could be found for all these limitations.

In the first place he saw that human nature seeks for happiness, not because happiness is outside of man, but because it belongs to him. Then he saw that all these limitations make a barrier for man depriving him of the consciousness of this happiness which is his own. He also saw that even if all the different kinds of distress and all the causes of distress were removed, man would still not be free from distress. It is the nature of man to find happiness; no one in the world is looking for distress, although almost everyone in the world finds distress without seeking for it. But Gautama saw that the removing of these apparent limitations was not sufficient, but that it is the study of life, observation, analysis, that is most necessary. He found in the end that the analysis of life, a thorough analysis, clears one's reason from all darkness, and produces in it its own original light.

Man is distressed by looking at distress without having studied it. This is generally the case. Man is afraid of every distress that comes to him, and he partakes of it without first having faced it and studied it analytically. But at the same time Buddha saw that if there was a key to happiness, it came by throwing the light of analysis upon all the different situations of life. This Buddha taught in the form of religion, and today the thinkers of the modern world are beginning to find the same solution which Buddha found over two thousand years ago; they call it psycho-analysis. It is the beginning of that which had already reached its summit in the highest idealism.

Buddha was the title of Gautama. He was called Buddha because his spirit expressed the meaning of the word *Buddh*, which is the Sanskrit term for reason, for the faculty in man which knows, which sees, and thereby distinguishes and discriminates between things and beings. In Buddhist terminology the Spirit of Guidance is called *Bodhisatva*, which means the essence of reason. Reason in its essence is of a liquid character; it is the cream of intelligence. When it is crystallized it becomes rigid. Intellectuality very often expresses a knowledge formed by reasons, most of them of rigid character. But the finer reasoning is subtle; the finer the reason, the less it can be explained in words. Therefore people with fine reasoning cannot very well put their reason into words. Reason in its essence is the depth of intelligence. The intelligence knows, not because it has learned; it knows because it knows. In this higher reason the Spirit of Guidance is conceived, and from that fountain of reason all the great prophets have drunk.

In the teaching of true Buddhism, Buddha has never been considered as an exclusive personality. Buddha has been known to those who have understood his message rightly, as a man who attained the realization of that essence of reason which is the fulfilment of life's purpose.

Worshipping Buddha does not mean that the Buddhist worships the personality of his spiritual master. He only means that if there is any object that most deserves worship, it is a human being; it is the one from whose heart the essence of reason, *Buddh*, has risen as a spring. By this knowledge he recognizes the possibility for every soul, whatever be its grade of evolution,

of attaining that bliss, trusting that the innermost being of every soul is divine.

Hope is the honey of life. If the knowledge of God does not give hope of attaining that divine bliss which can be attained in life, then that knowledge is of no use. Man may believe in God for years and yet may not be benefited by spiritual bliss, for spiritual bliss is not only in believing in God, but in knowing God.

Buddh, which is subtle reasoning, is the path which leads to the goal, and its absence keeps a person in obscurity. As the sun is the source of light which shows outward things in life, so Buddha is the inner source of light which enables man to see life clearly, both inwardly and outwardly. The true aim of the disciples of Buddha has been not only to adhere to Buddha, to his name or his ideal, but by taking Buddha as an example, some day to become Buddha. This same idea is the secret of Sufism.

Buddha did not teach his followers to worship his own image, as they do today. In every Buddhist temple and monastery one finds statues of Buddha of all sizes, in gold, silver, brass, and stone—Buddha sitting cross-legged or standing in a mystic posture. No home of a Buddhist, no sacred place, is without his statue. And although the original four scriptures of the Buddhist faith have vanished long ago, yet the fragrance of his philosophy and moral could not be lost. Although it seems to be idolatry, yet his image, as a symbol, inspires not only his devotees but every thoughtful mind; for it shows balance, quietude, peace, the absorption within, purity of character, beauty of personality, gentleness, tenderness, a restful attitude, and perfect wisdom.

Just as today in modern civilized countries the statues of heroes, royalties, commanders of armies, politicians, poets, writers, and musicians are set up everywhere, and the statue of Liberty reminds America of national freedom, so to a Buddhist the statue of Buddha speaks of spiritual liberation. Why should it be regarded as being any worse if the Buddhists have the statue of their inspirer before them, whose very image elevates their soul toward the highest ideals, and the life of renunciation and self-denial that their teacher led?

Buddhism, being the rival and the child of Brahmanism, could not very well leave out the influence of its parent religion. Although Buddhism denies belief in all that is not proved by logic, such as God, the soul, mediation, or the hereafter, yet the image-worship of the Brahmins still exists among Buddhists in the worship of Buddha, and Buddhists also believe in reincarnation and the law of Karma.

JAINISM

JAINISM IS a religion still widely spread in India, which in many ways resembles Buddhism. This religion is most admirable, especially in its teaching, 'Harmlessness is the only religion'. The Jains are not only vegetarians, but they do not harm even the smallest form of life. Many among them carefully avoid causing harm even to beetles, mosquitoes, ants, bees, scorpions, and snakes, which are so often to be found in a tropical country.

Their whole moral is based upon the principle of harmlessness, and their priests cause even less harm than the other followers of Jainism. In order to do the least harm they do not wear shoes, thereby avoiding two ways of causing harm as the leather which is used to make shoes depends on the death of so many creatures, and by walking with shoes one crushes and kills more lives than by walking barefoot. Some among them are even seen with a little piece of cloth tied over their lips, for by walking with open mouth, as so many do, innumerable small lives are drawn into the mouth. This custom has also another aim, which is to keep one as much as possible from talking. Inharmony and a great many other faults are caused largely by talkativeness, which is often unnecessary.

ABRAHAM

ABRAHAM was the father of three great world religions. For it is from his descendants, who were called Ben Israel, that came Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Abraham was the first to bring the knowledge of mysticism from Egypt, where he was initiated in the most ancient esoteric order. And on his return the place he chose to establish as a world centre was Mecca, to which people made pilgrimage. Not only in the age of Islam, but long before Mohammad was the sacred centre of Mecca held in esteem by the pious.

In the ancient tradition the family of Jesus Christ is traced back to the family of Isaac, and Mohammad came from the family of Ishmael. The prophecies of Abraham were always living words, though various people have given different interpretations according to their own ideas. But to the mind of the seer these prophecies have a very deep meaning.

With Abraham's vast knowledge of esotericism, he was considered a great patriarch among his people. He was interested in everybody's troubles and difficulties. He was thrown into the midst of worldly responsibilities, to learn all that he could from them, and then to teach his knowledge and experience to those who looked to him for the bread of knowledge. No doubt some of the stories of ancient times strike our modern ears as somewhat childish. But it is the way they were told, and to what kind of people, that makes all the difference. In the first place there was a great scarcity of lettered people in those days; therefore the stories were told by the unlettered, who must certainly have improvised upon every legend and pictured it according to the understanding of their particular age. Nevertheless, truth is there, if we only know how to lift the veil.

Abraham's life makes him not only a prophet, but also a murshid. He was a mystic; he gave counsel to those who came to him in difficulty. He examined them, treated their minds and healed their souls according to their needs. The most remarkable

thing one finds in Abraham is that, besides being a prophet and a mystic, he lived the life of an ordinary human being, at one with his fellow-men in their times of pleasure or sorrow.

One story from the life of Abraham has been a subject of great argument in the East, and that is the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. It is not only a source of argument in the East, but it is also alarming to a Western mind. People can ask a thousand questions about the proper reason and justification for such an act, yet if we look from the ideal point of view no sacrifice for a beloved ideal can be too great. There are numberless souls whose dear ones, their beloved husbands or sons, have been sacrificed in this recent war. They could do nothing else; they had to surrender their will to the ideal of the nation, and offer this sacrifice for the national cause, without thinking for one moment that it was unusual.

During the time of Abraham there existed a group of thinkers who devoted their lives to the thought of God and to the search for the eternal truth. They spent their time in seclusion and contemplation, and they helped those who came to them to be guided on the spiritual path. It is their symbology that we find in the traditions of Abraham sacrificing his son for the love of God. For in Sufism human life is considered as a line with two ends: one end immortal, the other mortal; one end unlimited, the other limited; one end Allah, the other Bandeh; one end the father, the other the son.

As the child is sometimes loved by the father more than his own self, so the body is loved by the spirit more than it loves itself. This is why man always neglects the happiness of the spirit for bodily comforts and pleasures. The sacrifice of the son symbolized the complete crushing of the human ego, of the limited self, and that could only be done for a higher gain, such as love of God. It is said that the son was taken away and that he was not killed after all, and in other scriptures we find that in the place of the son a ram was found and sacrificed, which means that the animal nature of the ego in man was crushed. And then it is said that from that moment both were blessed by God, which means that both the natural self and the spiritual self become blessed when this sacrifice is made. Sufis call this *Fanà*,

which means annihilation. Not understanding this, many have sacrificed animals for the love of God and have made feasts of this sacrifice; but the underlying meaning is the way of the Sufi, who progresses by self-control and arrives at the eternal goal.

When we think deeply about the problem of life, there is no path in the world, whether spiritual or material, which we can tread successfully without a sacrifice. Sometimes the sacrifice is great, and sometimes small; sometimes the sacrifice is made first, before achieving success, and sometimes afterwards. As sacrifice is necessary in life, it is made by everyone in some form or other, but when it is made willingly, it turns into a virtue. The greater the ideal, the greater the sacrifice it demands, and if one studies wisely the process of advancement through life in any direction, one finds that it is nothing but a continual sacrifice. And happiness comes from the understanding that this is the nature of life, and from not being hurt or troubled by it but knowing that it is by sacrifice, made until the end, that man attains to the desired goal.

The idea of sacrifice has always existed in some form or other, in every religion. Sometimes it has been taught as giving up one's possessions for the love of a higher ideal, which means that when man claims to love his high ideal and yet is not willing to give up something he possesses for it, then there is doubt about his devotion. But sacrifice of a possession is the first step; the next one is self-sacrifice, which was the inner note of the religion of Jesus Christ. Charity, generosity, even tolerance and forbearance, are a kind of sacrifice, and every sacrifice in life, in whatever form, means a step forward towards the goal of every soul.

MOSES

MOSES, THE most shining prophet of the Old Testament, gave to the world the divine law, the ten commandments; in reality this was the interpretation of the divine law that he had perceived, expressed in the words of those who stood before him at that period of the world's civilization. It is interesting to notice the ancient Sufi saying, 'Be the follower of love, and forget all distinctions'; for in this path of spiritual attainment to claim, 'I am so and so' is meaningless. Moses was found on the riverside by a princess, who knew not what family he came from, nor who were his father and mother. Only the name of God came to the mind of thoughtful enquirers as to the father and mother of Moses.

When people compare the teachings of different religions and readily form opinions about them, they are often mistaken; it is premature to make such distinctions. There comes a stage in the evolution of an illuminated soul when he begins to see the law hidden behind nature, its true psychology. To him the whole of life reveals the secrets of its nature and character, and when he gives an interpretation of these secrets to others they become limited, for they take the colour of his own personality and the form of the thought of those to whom the message is given. The story of Moses as told by Sufis is most interesting and helpful to the traveller on the path. Moses has been the favourite character of the poets of Arabia and Persia, and in the poems of the Persian Sufis Moses is mentioned as often as Krishna is in the poetry of the Hindus.

Moses was walking in the wilderness seeking the light when from a distance he saw smoke rising on the top of a mountain. So he climbed the mountain in order to find that fire. But on arriving at the summit he saw a flash of lightning which was so powerful that it went throughout his whole being. Moses fell down unconscious, and when he recovered his senses, he found himself in a state of illumination. From that time he often went to Mount Sinai to communicate with God.

This story is very enlightening for it shows that it can be possible for all the illumination that is desired to come to a soul in a moment. Many think that spiritual attainment can only be achieved by great labour. It is not so; labour is necessary for material attainment, but for spiritual attainment what one needs is a seeking soul like that of Moses. Moses falling upon the ground may be interpreted as the cross, which means, 'I am not; Thou art.' In order to be, one must pass through a stage of being nothing. In Sufi terms this is called *Fanà*, when one thinks, 'I am not what I had always thought myself to be.' This is the true self-denial, which the Hindus called *Layam*, and the Buddhists annihilation. It is the annihilation of the false self which gives rise to the true self; once this is done, from that moment man approaches closer and closer to God, until he stands face to face with his divine ideal, with which he can communicate at every moment of his life. The law of God is endless, as limitless as God Himself, but once the eye of the seeker penetrates through the veil which hangs before him, hiding from his eye the real law of life, the mystery of the whole of life becomes manifest to him, and happiness and peace become his own, for they are the birth-right of every soul.

ZARATHUSHTRA

THE LIFE AND teaching of Zarathushtra give an example, to those who tread the spiritual path, of the manner in which to begin the spiritual journey. Zarathushtra is said to have been born from the Huma tree. The interpretation of this idea is that the Spirit of Guidance does not come direct from heaven; he is born from the human family; the tree is the family.

It has been the great error of some religious people that out of devotion to their master they have placed him, through their imagination, on a pedestal, although they themselves could never prove him to be there when it came to reasoning. It could only stand on the horizon of faith. No doubt faith is the lamp which lights the path, but reason is the globe over it through which its light appears.

The purpose of this whole creation is fulfilled by attaining that perfection which a human being is intended to attain. All the saints, sages, prophets, and masters of humanity have been human beings, and they have shown divine perfection in fulfilling the purpose of being human.

Zarathushtra's spiritual attainment began by his communication with nature. He appreciated, adored, and worshipped the sublimity of nature, and he saw wisdom hidden in the whole of creation. He learned and recognized from that the being of the Creator, acknowledged His perfect wisdom, and then devoted his whole life to glorifying the name of God. To those who followed him in the path of spiritual attainment, he showed the different aspects of nature, and helped them to see what they could behind it all. He pointed out to his followers that the form, line, colour, and movement which they saw before them and which attracted them so much, must have been accomplished by an expert artist; it could not all work mechanically and be perfect. A mechanism, however highly perfected, cannot run without the help of an engineer. Therefore he showed them that God is not an imaginary object, though outwardly He is moulded by

man's imagination. In reality God is the Being: such a perfect Being that if one tries to compare Him with other living beings of this world, He is beyond comparison. He is the only Being.

The way of worship taught by Zarathushtra was to worship God by offering homage to nature. For nature suggests to the soul the endless and unlimited Being hidden behind it all.

The source of Zoroastrianism is the same as the source of Hinduism, although Hinduism has been practised in India and Zoroastrianism in Persia. The original source of these sister religions of the Aryans was sun-worship, which is also the ancestor of the religion of the Hebrew prophets. Indeed, no religion can escape from this ancestry.

Even today the Zoroastrians worship the god Ahura Mazda by looking at and bowing to the sun. The symbolical meaning of this is the worship of the light, and especially the one Light which has not its like anywhere, which shines upon all things, by which all things are reflected, and upon which the life of the whole universe absolutely depends. This was the lesson given in ancient times to prepare men's minds to value light; in order that the soul may some day unfold and begin to worship the inner light, the eternal Sun, of which the sun is the reflection on the surface.

People have called the Zoroastrians fire-worshippers. It is a fact; they keep a constantly burning fire in their place of worship, but they keep it before them when thinking of God, for fire purifies all things and the light within purifies all souls. It is in fact a great comfort to have a fire in a cold climate. Also, the burning of incense takes away dampness and makes easier the free and deep inhaling and exhaling of the breath. Besides on earth fire is the substitute for the sun, for its flame gives light. It is, again, an awakening of the mind to the light within.

The Zoroastrians also worship before running streams of water and different scenes of nature which speak to the hearer of the divine immanence in them. And in their houses they have pictures of Zarathushtra, their prophet, with a torch in his hand, somewhat in the likeness of Christ, though his dress is different, being of ancient Persia. The teacher of every community is pictured in some particular way, and it inspires those who look at such a portrayal with the right attitude of mind.

All Zoroastrians, men or women, wear round their waists a cord of silk, called *Zunnar*, and consider it most sacred because of its religious significance. This custom has been observed by Zoroastrians from the beginning of their religion, for Zarathushtra himself wore this sacred thread, and it is still seen today among the Parsis, even though they left Persia, their original land, ages ago, and have mostly adopted the customs of India, where they took refuge after leaving their country. Many Hindus also wear a thread crossways over one shoulder.

The Parsis purify their thread with water, fire, and air; they untie and tie it several times during the day, and they consider this to be the most important part of their prayer. It is true that few among them will be found who know the real meaning of this prayer with the thread, but this is mostly so with the followers of any religion.

The moral meaning of *Zunnar* is service. A soldier, a policeman, a postman, or a gatekeeper, when on duty has a belt on, which expresses that he is on duty—not free to do everything he wishes, but only that for which he is appointed. This explains that man, as the most intelligent of God's creatures, is not supposed to lead his life as he wishes, but to consider the duty for which he is born and the service that he must render to God and His creatures. As man is apt to forget all that is not in his own immediate interests, the loosening and the tying of the thread reminds him of his duty, as the belt reminds the soldier that he is on duty. The idea is that we are all servants of God, and that we must do all things for Him who has created us, supports us, and has engaged us in His service.

But the mystical meaning of *Zunnar* is still greater, for the vertical figure of man against the horizontally-worn *Zunnar*, forms a cross. This means, as the Sufi understands it, self-denial: 'I am not.' When that first I, the false I, is thus denied, then the next I, which is the real I, awakens, and God Himself realizes His Being, and accomplishes thereby the purpose of creation.

A keen student of the Zoroastrian scriptures, with an illuminated mind, will notice that every invocation that Zarathushtra has used, is as if he prayed to the light within to guide him by all evidences with which nature presented him; and to strengthen

the conviction that all is from God, created by God, and ruled by God. The mystical meaning of Ahura Mazda, upon whom Zarathushtra called, is the universal breath.

Zarathushtra considered that there were three aspects of sin and virtue: *Manashni*, *Gayashni*, and *Kunashni*; thinking, speaking, and doing, which means that a sin can be committed not by action alone, but even by intending to commit it, or by saying, 'I will do it.' And the same is true of virtue.

The chief point in the teachings of holy Zarathushtra is the path of goodness; and he separates goodness from badness, calling God all-good and Satan all-bad. According to this point of view of the Master, God was, as He is always, the ideal of worship; nothing but good can be praised, and none but the good can be worshipped; and all that is bad naturally leads man astray and veils the good from his eyes. The spirit of evil was personified by the Master, as it had already been personified by the ancients, as Satan.

As the point of view makes all the difference in every teaching, so it made a difference in this teaching of Zoroaster. Many, instead of understanding the true spirit of this idea, have drawn a line between good and bad, and produced so to speak two gods: God, the All-good, and Satan the Lord of Evil. This helped the people morally to a certain extent, but also deprived many who could not grasp the real spirit of the Master, of the realization of God, the only Being. The good God was named by Zoroaster Ahura Mazda, the first part meaning literally 'indestructible' and the second 'Supreme God'; and he called the Lord of Evil Ahriman.

JESUS

THE CHRIST spirit cannot be explained in words. The omnipresent intelligence, which is in the rock, in the tree, and in the animal, shows its gradual unfoldment in man. This is a fact accepted by both science and metaphysics. The intelligence shows its culmination in the complete development of human personality, such as the personality which was recognized in Jesus Christ by his followers. The followers of Buddha recognized the same unfoldment of the object of creation in Gautama Buddha, and the Hindus saw the same in Shri Krishna. Those who followed Moses recognized it in him too, and they have maintained their belief for thousands of years; the same culmination of the all-pervading intelligence was recognized in Moham-mad by his followers.

No man has the right to claim this stage of development, nor can anyone very well compare two holy men both recognized by their followers as the perfect Spirit of God. For a thoughtless person it is easy to express an opinion and to compare two people, but a thoughtful person first thinks whether he has arrived at that stage where he is able to compare two such personalities.

No doubt it is different when it concerns a question of belief. The belief of the Muslim cannot be the same as that of the Jewish people, nor can the Christian belief be the same as that of the Buddhists. However, the wise man understands all beliefs, for he is one with them all.

The question whether a certain person was destined to be a complete personality, may be answered that there is no person who is not destined to be something. Every person has his life designed beforehand, and the light of the purpose that he is born to accomplish in life had already been kindled in his soul. Therefore, whatever be the grade of a person's evolution, he is certainly destined to be so. Discussion of the lives that the different prophets have lived, as to the superiority of one over the

other, seems to be a primitive attempt on the part of man. If without knowing the conditions of that particular time when the prophet lived, nor the psychology of the people at the time, he is ready to judge that personality by the standards of today he does not do that personality justice.

When a person compares one particular teaching of a prophet with the teaching of another prophet, he also makes a great mistake, because the teachings of the prophets have not all been of the same kind. The teachings are like the works of a composer who writes music in all the different keys, and who puts the highest note and the lowest note and all the notes of different octaves into his music. The teachings of the prophets are nothing but the answer to the demands of individual and collective souls. Sometimes a childlike soul comes and asks, and an answer is given appropriate to his understanding; and an old soul comes and asks, and he is given an answer suited to his evolution.

It is not doing justice to either to compare a teaching which Krishna gave to a child with one which Buddha gave to an old soul. It is easy to say, 'I do not like the music of Wagner; I simply hate it.' But I should think it would be better first to become like Wagner and then to hate if one still wants to. To weigh, to measure, to examine, to pronounce an opinion on a great personality, one must first rise to his stage of development; otherwise the best thing is a respectful attitude. Respect in any form is the way of the wise.

Then there are simple people who hear about miracles; they attach great importance to what they have perhaps read in the traditions about the miracles performed by the great souls, but in this way they limit the greatness of God to a certain miracle. If God is eternal then His miracle is eternal; it is always there. There is no such thing as unnatural, nor such a thing as impossible. Things seem unnatural because they are unusual; things seem impossible because they are beyond man's limited reason. Life itself is a phenomenon, a miracle. The more one knows about it, the more one is conscious of the wonder of life, and the more one realizes that if there is any phenomenon or miracle it is man's birthright. By whom are miracles performed? It is by man, who

can do it and who will do it; but what is most essential is not a miracle: the most essential thing is the understanding of life.

The soul who realized the truth even before he claimed to be Alpha and Omega, is Christ. To know intellectually that life is eternal, or that the whole of life is one, is not sufficient, although it is the first step towards perfection. The actual realization of this comes from the personality of the God-conscious soul like a fragrance in his thought, speech, and action, and affects the world like incense put on the fire.

There are beliefs such as that of salvation through Christ, but the man who is prejudiced against religion closes the doors of his heart before having had the patience to understand what it really means. It only means that there is no liberation without an ideal before one. The ideal is a stepping-stone towards that attainment which is called liberation.

There are others who cannot conceive the idea of Christ's divinity. The truth is that the soul of man is divine, and that divine spark deserves to be called really divine when with the unfoldment of the soul it reaches the point of culmination.

There are also many different beliefs about the immaculate birth of Jesus. In point of fact when a soul arrives at the point of understanding the truth of life in its collective aspect, he realizes that there is only one Father, and that is God; that this world, out of which all the names and forms have been created, is the Mother; and that the Son, who becomes worthy through his recognition of the Mother and the Father, by serving them and thus fulfilling the aim of creation, is the Son of God.

Then there is the question of the forgiveness of sins. Is not man the creator of sin? If he creates it he can also destroy it. If he cannot destroy it his elder brother can. The one who is capable of making is also capable of destroying. He who can write something with his pen can rub it out with his eraser from the surface of the paper. And if he cannot do it, then his personality has not yet reached that completeness, that perfection which all must attain. There is no end to the faults in man's life, and if they were all recorded, and there were no erasing of them, life would be impossible to live. The impression of sin in metaphysical terminology may be called an illness, a mental illness and just as the

doctor is able to cure illness, so the doctor of the soul is able to heal. If people have said that through Christ sins are forgiven, it can be understood to mean that love is that shower by which all is purified. No stain remains. What is God? God is love. When His mercy, His compassion, His kindness are expressed through a God-realized personality, then the stains of one's faults, mistakes, and wrongdoings are washed away, and the soul becomes as clear as it has always been. For in reality no sin nor virtue can be engraved or impressed upon a soul; it can only cover the soul. The soul in itself is divine Intelligence; and how can divine Intelligence be engraved with either sin or virtue, happiness or unhappiness? For a time it becomes covered with the impression of happiness or unhappiness; but when these clouds are cleared from it, then it is seen to be divine in its essence.

The question of the crucifixion of Christ, apart from its historical aspect, may be thus explained: that the life of the wise is a continual crucifixion. The wiser the soul becomes, the more it will realize the cross, for it is the lack of wisdom which causes the soul to commit all actions, good or bad. As it becomes wise, the first thing that happens is that its action is suspended, and the picture of that suspension of action becomes a picture of helplessness: the hands nailed and the feet nailed. Such a soul can neither go forward nor backward; it cannot act, nor move. This outward inaction may appear as helplessness, but in point of fact it is the picture of perfection.

As to the belief that Christ gave his life to save the world, it explains the real meaning of sacrifice: that no man in this world going towards the goal will escape from the test to which life will put him. And that test is sacrifice. At every step towards the final goal, the attainment, a greater and greater sacrifice will be demanded of him, until he arrives at a point where there is nothing, whether body, mind, action, thought, or feeling, that he keeps back from sacrifice for others. It is by this that man proves his realization of divine truth. In short, the Christ-ideal is the picture of the perfect man; and the explanation of what the perfect man is and what are his possibilities can be seen in the verse of the Bible, 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.'

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

The belief in Christ is in the Church, the book of Christ is with the clergy, the spirit of Christ is in the illuminated soul. The spirit of Christ can be traced in Christ's own words where he said, 'I am Alpha and Omega', I am first and last. By this he meant, 'I was before Jesus was born, and I shall be after Jesus has gone.'

'I am Christ' means 'I am now, and I shall be till the end.' In this the Master identifies himself with that light of which we read in the Vedanta, and which existed thousands of years before Christ, the divine light which is recognized by the Sufis as the Spirit of Guidance, and which is also mentioned in the Qur'an. This light of Christ is symbolized by the lantern in the story of Aladdin, in the Thousand and One Nights. And it is this same light which the Hindu legend speaks of when it says that there exists a cobra with a light in its head, and when it searches for food it takes that light in its mouth and by its illumination it can go about in the forest. It is the light of life of all men and all beings, seen and unseen. In reality it is the essence of light.

Where is this light to be found? It is to be found in the sun and in the higher intelligence; but this phenomenon of light occurs in all different forms. Even the spark that comes from the heart of the stone when it is struck represents the same light; also the light that manifests in the blossoming of plants, in the ripening of fruit, in the light that we see on a moonlit night, and in the rising and the setting of the sun. It is all one and the same light manifesting from the unseen to the seen, yet existing in the unseen to a much greater extent than can be seen with our eyes.

One might ask why, if God is all sufficient, should He have made the Christ Spirit? An example will explain this. A farmer wanted to go to a place which was at great distance from his farm. And he thought how during dark nights with storms and winds and fogs one very often loses the way. Therefore he made a lantern to light him in case there should be a dark night, so that it could guide him on the path. It was his creation; he made, he prepared the lantern for himself in order to be guided by it.

This creation is nothing but the manifestation of God, and man

is the culmination of that manifestation. God did not make man as a carpenter makes a chair, for the carpenter uses wood, something different from himself, in order to make the chair. But God made man out of Himself; in other words God manifested as man, and in His manifestation the One has become many, the unity has become variety and has become a puzzle. Thus life on earth for man is in the first place a puzzle: he does not know where to go and where not to go, he does not know what to do and what not to do. From the beginning till the end he is puzzled as to what is right and what is wrong. The wiser a man becomes the more difficulties there are. This shows that there are storms and winds, mists and fogs on this life's path which his eyes do not see but which the soul experiences. And in order to make these difficult times easier, a lantern is given which is God's own spirit, and which He made for His creation in order that man may take this lantern to guide him on his path.

Not only human beings have this lantern, even beasts and birds have it. In herds of animals there is always one that guides them; in flocks of birds there is one that guides and sees from which way the wind blows. The one that leads knows which way to go and the other birds follow him. In India a beautiful story is told about elephants by those who live in the forest. They say that in a herd of elephants there is one which is the leader and takes the branch of a tree in its trunk and goes ahead examining the ground where it walks in order that those which follow may not fall into a ditch. It is also alert to the sound of gun and arrow, and detects any atmosphere which may be unwholesome for elephants. But sometimes there is an unwilling elephant; it goes astray and is lost, and in order to catch it men dig pits in the ground so that when this lost elephant goes near one it may fall into it. And after two or three days they come and capture him.

This is a beautiful picture of the work of the Christ spirit. When one understands this one cannot blame those who say, 'Christ is our Saviour', or, 'Christ is our God'. They may not see what the Spirit of God is in our interpretation, but there is nothing wrong about it except that they do not know themselves what they are saying. If one sees divinity in Christ, there is nothing wrong about it. If divinity does not manifest through man,

then where is it to be found? Is divinity to be found in the heavens alone? And if on the other hand someone else calls Christ man, he only raises the standard of man to the highest point; and in this there is truth also. Only, the two do not understand each other's meaning, and they each say that the other is wrong; and this arises because they do not believe that he who is often called Christ, the Saviour, is in reality the saviour spirit. With elephants that saviour spirit is the one that guides the herd; and a loving father, a kind mother, an innocent child, a helpful friend, and an inspiring teacher, all represent to a greater or lesser degree that saviour spirit. The one who saves a man's life by jumping into the water does not do such a great work as the one who saves a soul who was groping in the darkness.

But then, one might say, what about the whole world, the whole of humanity? Each soul is connected with the other, and there is not one soul which does not undergo the influence of the whole cosmos, consciously or unconsciously. Every cell sooner or later has an effect upon the whole body. Therefore if one looks at it rightly, there is no exaggeration in calling a liberated soul the Saviour of the world; but if one only holds it as a belief, one does not know what it really means.

Naturally the liberated soul is like the living drop of blood. Scientists have discovered that blood-transfusions can give new life. A soul who has risen to great illumination can inspire and invigorate the whole of humanity, just as one powerful man can influence a whole nation. He is then called the man of the day, and he may have an influence which can raise man to the height of heaven. If a material man can do this to the whole nation, why then should not a spiritual man have such an influence upon the whole world? Whether we recognize it or not, it does not matter; but there are souls in the world whose influence is greater than that of the so-called man of the day about whom so much is written in the newspapers.

If Christ existed before he was known as Christ, what was he? And if Christ will be after he has been known as Christ, what will he be? We are too limited as human beings to determine this; to try to do so would be nothing but folly. But at the same time, have we not known inspirers of humanity before Jesus? Have

there not been prophets like Moses and Abraham and Zarahushtra, inspirers like Krishna and Buddha, whose influence has been felt all over the world? What were they? If truth is one, if wisdom is one, if human personality is one, if God is one, then what are they if not the same spirit? Those who saw them have called them Buddha or Krishna; but they were all one and the same, the same lantern, the same light although in different globes.

After they have gone the light comes in another form to illuminate humanity. Does not that light work in our everyday life? In our deepest distress, in our greatest confusion, a friend, a relation, or a teacher comes and tells us something he himself does not know to be the message of wisdom. And sometimes it comes in such a queer way; perhaps in the form of a change, and we do not understand from whence it comes, so that we do not even believe it. But at the same time the inner guidance comes just at the moment when we have need for it. It comes perhaps from an innocent child, the word that is a message of God. For the light is hidden.

Those who say that after Jesus Christ they have not seen the light being kindled any more, limit Christ. Those who see the Christ spirit in all the various globes which are the light, they are the ones who really see Christ.

Christ identified himself with the Spirit of Guidance instead of with the personality which was known as Jesus. And people have limited that divine wisdom, that Spirit of Guidance, to the personality which came as Jesus. And they forgot that he himself said, 'I am Alpha and Omega', which means all prophets and seers who came before Jesus whether it were Abraham or Zarahushtra or Buddha or Krishna. He identified himself with them. That is why he said he had not come to give a new law, but to fulfil the law, by which he also indicated that the guidance would continue afterwards. It was really a declaration of that identity in which Jesus lived, but not that in which the people recognized him.

Jesus Christ also said to some, 'I will come', and to others, 'The son of man will come'. It was one answer to two mentalities: to the souls who could recognize his identity he said, 'I will come',

and to those who could not realize his real identity he said 'Someone else will come; whenever wisdom is lost, Christ will come.' The real meaning of this is, 'I will come in another form, which is myself just the same.' It is a puzzle of words only for those who want to puzzle themselves. For those who wish to get out of the maze it is easy and simple; but human nature enjoys complexities and prefers to make the truth as difficult as possible.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SACRAMENT

The true meaning of the sacrament, which is said to be symbolical of the flesh and blood of Christ, shows that those who give importance to the flesh and blood of the Master, are mistaken; that the true being of the Master was bread and wine. If he had any flesh and blood, it was the bread and wine. And what is bread and wine? The bread is that which is the soul's sustenance, and the soul's sustenance is the knowledge of God; it is by this knowledge that the soul lives the eternal life. And the blood of Christ is the love element, the intoxication of which is a bliss; and if there is any virtue, it all comes from that principle.

Man is not made only of flesh, skin, and bone, but is also composed of many fine and gross elements, and therefore, for him to live, many different properties are needed. But man generally considers only his food to be that which nourishes his physical body, and seeks for a stimulant for that body, not realizing that besides this much of his being is starved for food all through his life. Man's ignorance of this other part of his being allows it to die, at least to his consciousness. The words of Christ, 'The spirit quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing', indicate this.

We read in the Bible of Christ telling his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood. What does it mean? It does not mean, 'Eat the flesh of my physical body and drink its blood'; it means, 'The being in which I am living is God's being; take this as the food to nourish your finer being; drink this to stimulate your spiritual being.'

There is a verse of Abdul Qadir Jilani of Baghdad, 'I am the bird of the spiritual spheres dwelling at present in earthly spheres, but my food is the knowledge of God and my drink is His beauty in manifestation.' Those who are conscious of the earthly spheres

live on earthly food and stimulants; but those who become conscious of the higher world are nourished by the thought of God which is their bread; and that which stimulates them like wine is their vision of God in the sublimity of nature. This is the real sacrament, given symbolically in churches as bread and wine.

BAPTISM

The custom of baptism has a mystical significance which should be studied according to the Sufi ideal which they call *Fanà*. Immersion of the whole body in the water means being as if not being, or living as if not living. In others words, living not as the dead are living, but as those who are really alive.

The water symbolizes the ocean in which there are so many waves and yet it is one ocean. Baptism means immersion in this spiritual ocean, which is the Spirit of God, and becoming as nothing, in the love of God, in the knowledge of God, and in the realization of God. From that time one understands the meaning of the saying, 'I exist no more as myself, as a separate entity; and yet I exist, and this existence is the existence of God.'

This is the main teaching of Sufism: to sink into the Consciousness of God, that no trace of one's limited being may be found, at least in one's consciousness. That is really the ideal, the path, and the goal of all. There is a verse of Ghalib that gives a beautiful picture of this, 'I degraded myself in the eyes of the world by dying. How well it had been, had I been sunk in the water! No one could have seen my funeral; no one would have found my grave!'

THE BEATITUDES

The essence of all that can teach man to bring out the good in the soul of man is to be found in the Beatitudes as taught by Jesus Christ, the *Murshid* of *murshids*; and if anybody wants to see it practised, he may go today and watch the life that the Sufis live in the East. It is they who have understood it properly and have practised it to their utmost ability. Therefore the real treasure of Christ's teaching is Sufism, though the latter is not called Christianity. However, the name makes no difference so long as the sense is right.

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ ‘Poor in spirit’ means mild in ego, and the ego is by nature tyrannical; all the tyranny in the world is only caused by the ego. When the ego is laid before God, in other words, when the ego is illuminated with the knowledge of God, it begins to fade; for it denies its limited being and it realizes the being of God. So it loses all its tyranny and becomes mild, which is being poor in spirit. This makes man’s whole life heaven, both here and in the hereafter.

‘Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.’ All things are given to those who demand; only they deserve them, and only they can enjoy them. The infant cries when it is hungry, and if it is given food, it is then that it enjoys it most. So it is with the lovers of God, with the seekers of truth: when their desire becomes so deep that it makes them mourn, it is then that they are comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.’ There is a saying in Persian, ‘If your word is sweet, you can win the world.’ The world is too small when meekness can win even the hearts of men, for the heart can contain a thousand such worlds.

‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.’ There are only two paths: the path of light and the path of darkness. The former leads to all joy, while the latter leads to all sorrow. Not everyone understands this, but the one who understands goes in pursuit of it, for he knows that the only sustenance of his soul is righteousness.

‘Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.’ The warmth of one’s own feeling takes away the coldness from another person’s heart. Therefore one cannot receive mercy either from the earth or from heaven, unless one has oneself awakened mercy in one’s soul.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.’ This purity of heart is not only in thought, feeling, and action; it is the purity which in the East is called *Sáf*, from which word ‘Sufi’ is said to have come. This *Sáf* makes the heart pure from all that is not God, in other words, the heart must see and realize all as God and God as all.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the

children of God.' Only those make peace in life who are unbiased, unselfish, or impartial, and this is the nature of God, before whom all, rich or poor, foolish or wise, are equal. His mercy is upon all, and He bestows His gifts on all, both the deserving and the undeserving. Therefore those who follow the way of the heavenly Father are really His deserving sons.

'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' It is easy to be righteous when everything is smooth in life, but when a person is tried it is difficult to keep to it; for the more righteous he is the more losses he has to suffer, and, though there may not seem to be any gain in righteousness, yet the reward of the righteous is heaven in the end.

'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.' This advice is not given only to the followers of Christ, but specially to the mureeds, whose murshid bears a message. It means that they can only prove worthy when their faith in the teaching of their teacher is so great that they stand by him and his teaching in all conditions, and suffer contentedly all that befalls them through the ignorance of man; for so it has been and will ever be with everyone who gives the message of truth.

THE MEANING OF THE SYMBOL OF THE CROSS

The symbol of the cross represents three great secrets. By understanding these secrets one can understand the whole of nature.

The first secret is the secret of form: that every form has been built up on a perpendicular and a horizontal line. In fruit, flower, leaf, in everything one can see the cross as its basis. It becomes fully manifest in the form of man, this being the perfect form. It is perfect because every form of the mineral, vegetable, or animal kingdom has evolved gradually and developed into the human form. One can notice this by studying the latent human form even in the mineral and vegetable kingdoms. Not only the animals have a resemblance to man's form and face, but even in the rose

you can see man's face indistinctly. In the pebbles by the sea-shore, in the rocks, in the mountains, one sees an indistinct human form. And when one distinguishes the human form in its real aspect, it is nothing but a cross.

There are two kinds of space, one known to all and the other only known to a mystic. The first space is the one which we see and which we can measure; the other space is that which accommodates this first space within itself. For instance, a space of ten, twenty, or even fifty miles can be accommodated, in other words can be reflected, in the eye, which is hardly one inch wide when measured according to the external space. This shows that the space that the eye occupies is a different kind of space from that which it can accommodate within itself. The eye is the representative of the soul. If the eye can accommodate so much space, how much more can the soul accommodate! It can accommodate the whole universe. Therefore that which we call space is in the terms of the mystic the horizontal space; but that space in which this horizontal space is reflected is the perpendicular space. It is these two kinds of space that are called in religious terms 'this world' and 'the next world', and it is these two lines that show the sign of the cross.

In the beginning the traveller on the path of morals understands that the whole of life is a fight against destruction, a continual destruction that threatens his life. The picture of activity or construction is the perpendicular line, and the picture of destruction or hindrance is the horizontal line. But when he advances from the moral to the spiritual plane, then he sees two paths of attainment, both of which are equally necessary for perfection. One is the expansion of the spirit from a single being to the whole universe, which signifies the horizontal line, and the other is the journey of man to God, from the limited state of being to the unlimited, which represents the perpendicular line; and in this cross is hidden the secret of perfection.

'THY WILL BE DONE, IN EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN'

In the Lord's prayer there is a sentence, 'Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.' This gives an important key to metaphysics. It gives a hint to the seer that His will, which is easily

done in heaven, is done with difficulty on earth. And who stands against His will? Man. And where lies the will of God? In the innermost being of man. And what stands as an obstacle? The surface of the heart of man. And this means struggle in man himself. In him there is the will of God, as in heaven, and where there is an obstacle to it, there is the earth. By this prayer man is prepared to remove the obstacle which stands before the will of God.

How can we distinguish between these two aspects of will: the will of God, and the obstacle which is the will of man? It is easy for a person with a clear mind and open heart to distinguish between them, if he only knows the secret of it. For to that which is the will of God his whole being responds, and in doing His will his whole being becomes satisfied. When it is his own will, only one side of his being perhaps is satisfied for a certain time, and a conflict arises in him. He himself finds fault with his own idea or action; he himself feels dissatisfied with his own being. The wider the scope in which he sees his idea or his action, the more dissatisfied he will become. When a man looks at life in this manner, by the ray of intelligence he begins to distinguish between his own will and the will of God. The kingdom of God, which is heaven, then comes on earth. It does not mean that it disappears from heaven, but it means that not only heaven remains as a kingdom, but even earth becomes a kingdom of heaven. The purpose behind the whole of this creation is that heaven may be realized on earth; for if one does not realize it on earth, one cannot realize it in heaven.

What is meant by heaven? Heaven is that place where all is the choice of man and everything moves at his command. Heaven is the natural condition of life. When on earth life becomes so entangled that it loses its original harmony, heaven ceases to exist. And the motive of the soul is to gain in life the kingdom of heaven which it has lost. Nothing else in life will give the satisfaction which can be attained by bringing heaven on earth.

MOHAMMAD

MOHAMMAD IS the only one among the prophets the account of whose life is to be found in history. Born of the family of Ishmael, Mohammad had in him the prophetic heritage, and before him the purpose to be fulfilled, which Abraham had prophesied in the Old Testament. The Prophet became an orphan in childhood, and knew what it was to be without the tender care of a mother and without the protection of a father. And this experience was the first preparation for the child who was born to sympathize with the pain of others. He showed a sense of responsibility even in his boyhood, when looking after his cows. A cowherd came and said, 'I will look after your herd, and you may go to the town and enjoy yourself. And then you must take charge of my cows, and I will go there for a time.' Young Mohammad said, 'No, I will take charge of your herd. You may go, but I will not leave my charge.' The same principle was shown all through his life.

Some say that once, others say twice, others say three times, a miracle happened: that the breast of the Prophet was cut open by the angels, and that they took something away, and instantly his breast was healed. What was it? It was the poison which is to be found in the sting of the scorpion and the teeth of the serpent; it is the same poison which exists in the heart of man. All manner of prejudice, hatred, or bitterness in the form of envy and jealousy, are the minor expressions of this poison which is hidden in the heart of man. And when this poison is removed, then there remains the serpent with its beauty and wisdom, but without its poisonous teeth; and so it is with man. Man meets with hardships in life, sometimes too hard to stand for the moment, but often such experiences become like higher initiations in the life of the traveller on the path. The heart of man which is the shrine of God, once purified of that poison, becomes the holy abode where God Himself resides.

As a youth Mohammad travelled with his uncle when he went

to Syria on a business trip; and he learned the shortcomings of human nature, which have great scope in the world of business; he found out what profit means, what loss means, and what both mean in the end. It gave him a wider outlook on life, when he saw how eager people are to profit by the loss of others, and that human beings behave no better in this world than the large and small fishes in the water who prey upon one another.

When the time came to defend the country against a powerful enemy, young Mohammad stood shoulder to shoulder with the young men of his land to defend his people in their terrible strife. His sincerity in friendship and the honesty of his dealings endeared him to all, both far and near, who called him by the name of Amin, which means trusty, or trustworthy. His marriage with Khatija showed him a man of devotion, a man of affection; an honourable man as a husband, as a father, and as a citizen of the town he lived in.

Then came the time of contemplation, the time of fulfilment of that promise which his soul had brought into the world. There came moments when life seemed sad, in spite of all the beauty and comfort it could offer. He then sought refuge from that depression in solitude. Sometimes for hours, sometimes for days or weeks, sitting in the mountains of Gár-e Hirá, he tried to see if there was anything else to be seen, if there was anything else to be heard, or to be known. Patient as Mohammad was, he continued in the search after truth. At last he began to hear a word of inner guidance, 'Cry out the sacred name of thy Lord'; and as he began to follow this advice, he found the echo of the word which his heart repeated in the whole of nature; it seemed as if the wind repeated the same name, as if the sky, the earth, the moon, and the planets, all said the same name that he was saying. When once he was in tune with the Infinite, realizing his soul to be one, within and without, the call came, 'Thou art the man; go forward into the world and carry out Our command; glorify the name of God; unite those who are separated; waken those who are asleep, and harmonize one with the other, for in this lies the happiness of man.'

Often Khatija found that Mohammad had covered himself with a mantle, so that he might not see himself, trembling at the

sight of the responsibility that was thrown upon him. But she constantly told him, 'You are the man, a man so kind and true, so sincere and devoted, forgiving and serving. It is your task to perform this work; fear not, you are destined for it by the Almighty; trust in His great power, and in the end success will be yours.'

When Mohammad gave his message, however, to his surprise, not only his enemies but the friends who were near and dear to the Prophet turned against him, and would not listen to the teaching of a new gospel. In spite of the insults, the harm and injury they caused him and those who listened to him, he still continued, although exiled from home three times; and proved in the end, as every real prophet must prove, that truth alone is the conqueror, and to truth belongs all victory.

THE GOD OF ISLAM

In every period there were people who held the idea of a formless God. This idea was called Islam, literally 'peace'; sometimes it disappeared and then it reappeared during the time of the different prophets. It materialized fully during the time of Mohammad, when a nation was formed which became the custodian of a religion whose main spirit was this idea; and this religion was called by the same name: Islam. Proof of this fact can be found in the name of the holy city Dar-e Sala'm, that is Gate of Sala'm, or Islam, which is known in the West as Jerusalem. Thus this name existed long before the coming of Mohammad, but in the period of the Prophet Mohammad's message especially, great stress was put upon the idea of a formless God.

It is difficult for man to make God intelligible without giving Him a form; and yet a step higher in God-realization is to make Him intelligible beyond the limit of form. Therefore in Islam God was made intelligible by His attributes. He was conceived of as Creator, as Father, as Mother, as Sustainer, as Judge, as Forgiver, as the Source and the Goal of this whole manifestation, as the One who is always with His creatures, within them, outside them, who notices all their feelings, thoughts, and actions, who draws the line of man's fate, before whom man must appear to give his account—this is the God of Islam.

Islam believed in one only God, who has many attributes but is yet beyond any attributes; invisible and beyond the comprehension of man, almighty, incomparable, no one save He having any power beside Him, the Knower of all things and pure from all impurities, free from all things and yet never far from them, all abiding in Him and He living in all. The whole essential teaching of Islam, which is called *Kalamat*, tends to explain clearly the oneness of God; and yet the attributes are suggested, not in order to explain God, but with a view to making God intelligible to the human mind.

These attributes form what is called *Sifat*, the external part of God which is intelligible to man; but that part of the divine Being which is hidden under attributes and which cannot be intelligible to the human mind is called *Zát*, which means the real Being. The whole tendency of Islam has been to disentangle man's heart from such thoughts as limit and divide God, and to clear man's heart from duality which is the nature of this illusory world, bringing him to that at-one-ment with God which has been the real aim and intention of every religion.

FORMS OF ISLAMIC WORSHIP

Islamic worship shows an improvement upon the older forms of worship in human evolution, for Islam prefers nature to art and sees in nature the immanence of God.

The call of the Muezzin to prayer before sunrise, and his call when the sun is at its zenith; his call at sunset, the prayers in the afternoon, in the early evening and at midnight, all suggest to the seer that, while worshipping God, a revelation was sought from Him through the tongue of nature. It is said in the Qur'an, 'Cry aloud the name of thy Lord, the most beneficent, who hath by His nature's skilful pen taught man what he knew not,' which means: who has written this world like a manuscript with the pen of nature.

If one desires to read the Holy Book, one should read it in nature. There are several suras which support this thought. As is said in the Qur'an, 'By the night when it covers, by the day when it brightens, by what created the male and female, verily your aims are diverse.' We read in the manuscript of nature that

diversity is natural; the very covering and brightening of the light in nature and the difference between male and female, show that our aims should be diverse.

The laws of cleanliness are strictly observed in Islam; and no one is to offer prayer without an ablution, which is taught as a preparatory part of his worship.

The worship of Islam contains a universal code of humility: that the customs existing in all parts of the world of bowing and bending and prostrating are all devoted to the one Being, who alone deserves it, and to no one else. There is beauty in these customs. Man is the most egoistic being in creation; he keeps himself veiled from God, the perfect Self within, by the veil of his imperfect self which has formed his false ego. But by the extreme humility with which he stands before God and bows and bends and prostrates himself before the almighty Being, he makes the highest point of his presumed being, the head, touch the earth where his feet are, and thus in time he washes off the black stains of his false ego, and the light of perfection gradually manifests. Only then does he stand face to face with his God, the idealized Deity, and when the ego is absolutely crushed, then God remains within and without, in both planes, and none exists save He.

THE DUTIES OF THE FAITHFUL IN ISLAM

There are four duties of the faithful taught in Islam. The number four mystically signifies squareness and balance.

The first is *Salát*, the prayers which are said five times a day; the continual balance between work and rest, and rest especially in God, in whom is the only rest of every soul. Life in the world is such that it absorbs every moment of man's time, and the innate yearning for peace of every soul is never satisfied. Therefore to pray five times a day is not too much, considering how far life in the world removes a soul from God. To my mind, if it were a hundred times a day it would be too little.

The second is *Zakát*, charity. However pious and godly a person may be, however much time of his life he devotes to piety, he cannot deserve the blessing of God unless he is charitable, for charity is the only test of selflessness. All love and friendship

are proved by service and sacrifice, and to the extent one is able to do this, one is selfless. And self being the only barrier that stands between man and God, charity is the only means to break down that barrier, in order that man may come face to face with God.

Once someone asked the Prophet, 'Who is the most blessed, the prayerful, the one who fasts, the pilgrim, or the charitable one?' The Prophet answered, 'The charitable one, for he can pray and build a mosque for others to pray in; he can fast and help those who fast by giving them rest and peace, by providing for the families that depend on them for maintenance; he can go on pilgrimage and send many on pilgrimage. Therefore all these four blessings are included in the charitable one.'

The third duty is *Roza*, fasting. Man is so dependent on food that even in his infancy, when he is an angel, a king in himself, he hungers after food. This shows that what man needs most in life is food. He will give his diamonds and gold and all his treasure when there is lack of bread. Therefore abstaining from food is like abstaining from the dearest thing in life, and sacrificing all comfort, joy, rest, and happiness. As renunciation of lower things is the only means of attaining higher objects, there can be no better means to attain spiritual life than fasting. Fasting crushes not only the appetite, but the root of all desire that binds the soul, which is the bird of paradise, to earth's lower regions. Jesus Christ went into the desert and fasted for forty days, and at the end of his fast, he conquered the temptations of the devil.

The fourth duty of the faithful is *Hajj*, or pilgrimage. It is said in the Qur'an that Abraham, the father of the nations and the fountain from which such streams as Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad came, had offered a prayer when leaving his son Ishmael in the barren desert of Arabia. His heart was broken, and there came forth from it a prayer, 'O Lord, bless this land, that it may become a centre of attraction to the whole world.' And so it happened in the course of time that the Word of God was born again among the descendants of Ishmael, Mohammad who glorified the name of the Lord of Abraham aloud; this was heard from the depths of the earth to the summit of heaven, and re-echoed from the North to the South Pole; it shook the nations and stirred up

racess, and so pierced the hearts of men that this desert which bore no fruit, no treasure of any kind, which had no beauty of scenery, no charm of climate, became a centre of attraction for numberless souls; and they came from all parts of the world and assembled in that land of bliss, king and pauper standing shoulder to shoulder, both recognizing the equality of men in the Presence of God. The strong and weak, rich and poor, high and low, civilized and uncivilized, all come year by year on pilgrimage to Mecca in this land; they all are clad in one piece of cloth, that all may look alike to show before God and humanity the equality of the human brotherhood. This is Hajj.

THE FOUR GRADES OF KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAM

In Islam there is no caste, as the message was meant to unite humanity in one brotherhood, and yet it was found necessary to train individuals according to their evolution in life. A training was given in four grades, namely *Shariat*, *Tariqat*, *Haqiqat*, and *Marefat*.

Since the world of Islam became engaged in national and social affairs, the religious authorities held on to *Shariat* only, and a few pious ones to *Tariqat*. It was the latter who sought the door of the Sufi, wanting an initiation into the inner light which was contained in the two remaining grades, *Haqiqat* and *Marefat*.

Two immediate disciples of the Prophet, Ali and Siddiq, were initiated by the Prophet, and they became the great masters of the inner teachings of the knowledge of God. The Sufis who lived at the same time as the Prophet were benefited by his presence and the inspiration they gained in Sufism, which is soon reached through the path of *Shariat*, *Tariqat*, *Haqiqat*, and *Marefat*.

Shariat means the law which is necessary for the generality to observe, in order to harmonize with one's surroundings and with one's self within. Although the religious authorities of Islam have limited this law to restrictions, yet in a thousand places in the Qur'an and Hadith one can trace how the law of *Shariat* is meant to be subject to change, in order to suit the time and place. The law of *Shariat*, unlike any other religious law, deals with all aspects of life, and that is why the Prophet of Islam had

personally to experience all aspects of life. The Prophet as an orphan, as a warrior, as a politician, as a merchant, as a shepherd, as a king, as a husband, as a father, as a brother, as a son and a grandson, had to play different parts in various aspects of life in the world before he was ready to give this divine law.

Tariqat means the understanding of law besides the following of it. It means that we must understand the cause behind everything we should do or not do, instead of obeying the law without understanding it. Those who are less evolved are supposed to have faith and to submit to the law. The law is for those whose intelligence does not accept things that cannot be explained by reason.

Haqiqat means knowing the truth of our being and the inner laws of nature. This knowledge widens man's heart. When he has realized the truth of being, he has realized the one Being; then he is different from nobody, distant from no one, one with all. This is the grade in which religion ends and Sufism begins.

Marefat means the actual realization of God, the one Being, when there is no doubt anywhere.

When these four grades are accomplished, then Sufism comes into full play. Sufi comes from *Sáf* meaning pure; not only pure from differences and distinctions, but even pure from all that is learnt and known. That is the state of God, the pure and perfect One.

THE IDEA OF HALÁL AND HARÁM IN ISLAM

In Judaism there were very definite ideas about eating and drinking and about certain things being allowed and others forbidden; and the same ideas were perhaps developed even more in Islam. Those who have followed them have obeyed the law of religion, and those who have understood them have found the truth. Of edible things, in particular the flesh of certain beasts and birds and of certain creatures living in the water was forbidden. The only reason underlying this law was to protect man against eating anything that might hinder his spiritual evolution. In Islamic terms that which is lawful is called *Halál*, and that which is unlawful *Halám*.

As everything that man eats and drinks has its cold or warm effect on man's body, and to a certain extent on man's mind, so,

especially with animal food, it is natural that man should partake of the quality of the animal he eats. The pig was particularly pointed out, both by Judaism and Islam, as a forbidden animal. Chief among many reasons was that if one compares the life of the pig with that of other animals it proves to be the most material, regardless of what it eats, blind in passion, and without the faculty of love and affection. Also the dog, the cat, in fact all carnivorous animals, were considered from the hygienic point of view Harám, unwholesome, and the people who have used their flesh as food have realized that its effect upon their bodies and minds was harmful.

Then there was a law among Islamic and Judaic people that the animal which was used for food should be killed in a certain way which is called *Zebah*. People believed in this as a religious tenet; they did not understand the truth behind it, and refused to eat meat coming from people not of their religion. The reason for this law was that people should not eat animals or birds which had died a natural death, on the assumption that their flesh was as wholesome as that of freshly killed animals. And behind it there is a philosophy: that it is not only flesh that benefits man as a desirable food, but the life that still exists in the flesh is the secret of the vigour and freshness that flesh food gives to man; to eat it when the life is gone out of it is not the same; it is flesh, and yet there is no life in it. That is why it was made a religious custom, so that if the people did not understand its scientific and philosophical basis, at least they might follow it because it was their religion.

Then intoxicating drinks were made Harám, especially during the time of the Prophet, who, it is related, accepted milk from an angel who had brought him two bowls, one of wine, the other of milk. Milk was considered, as it was by the Vedantists, as a Satva food, a food that gives rest, comfort, and wisdom, whereas wine was considered as a Tamas food, which gives momentary joy, pleasure, confusion, excitement, and happiness. It has been clear to all peoples in all ages, that the drinking of wine could have very bad results, which explains why it was forbidden. But added to this it is a philosophical fact that everything made of decayed substance, whether flesh, herb, or fruit, has lost the life that was in it; and the idea is to touch life in eating, in drinking,

and in everything that is done, until one is able to touch the life eternal, which alone is the innate yearning of the soul.

NIMAZ

Nimaz, or prayer, is an inherent attribute in every soul. Whatever and whoever appears to man to be beautiful, superior, or precious, wins him; and he surrenders himself, conscious of his imperfection and dependence upon the object or being that has conquered him. This is why so many objects, such as the sun, moon, planets, animals, birds, spirits, and men, have been worshipped by different individuals, according to their evolution and to what appealed to them. But the inspired souls have realized from the first day of creation that all the objects and beings which caused the admirer to bow before them, are only many in appearance, but in existence they are one. Therefore the One is idealized as the supreme Being, as the Sovereign of both worlds, as God. While all appeared to worship many, they only worshipped the One, and they have always taught, in whatever religious form it may have been, the same truth, bowing to that One who alone deserves all worship.

As there have been so many kinds of people in the world, and so many customs and manners, so one bowed differently from another. In one country people bowed down, in another country they folded their hands; in one country people knelt, in another they prostrated themselves. The *Nimaz*, therefore, was a form adopted to reconcile all and to combine all customs in one form of worship, that the people might not fight over the forms of worship when in reality they all worshipped One and the same God.

In order that any object or affair should be fulfilled, its highest point should first touch the utmost depth. The soul which has descended on earth from its existence in the heavens, and which has temporarily supposed itself to be this material body, rises again to its former glory through laying the highest part of itself upon the ground. Also, the mechanism of the body is kept in order by the regular action of the breath through every part of the body, and by the regular circulation of the blood in all parts of the body; this can only be properly done by placing the highest part of the body, the head, on the ground.

The world of living beings consists of egos, one Ego assuming several forms and becoming several egos. Among this variety of egos everyone claims perfection, for this is the nature of the real ego within. Upon examination this ego proves to be imperfect, for it is the imperfect division of the perfect ego. It is not perfect, yet it claims perfection in its ignorance, and longs for perfection when wise. The imperfect ego can only attain this perfection by practising worship and by his life in the world, in which he may show such humility, meekness, and gentleness that this false presumption which has formed the imperfect ego may be crushed. What then remains will be the perfect ego. Nimaz is the first lesson for this attainment.

IDOLATRY

IDOLATRY SEEMS to have been prevalent throughout all ages as one of the principal forms of religion, though the names of the gods have varied among different people. The idea of gods and goddesses came from the two sides of man's nature, one being idealism and the other veneration. Man, however primitive in his evolution, has always had a desire to look up to some object or some being as higher and better than himself. Sometimes he created an ideal from his own nature, and sometimes he was helped to such an ideal by another. There is no race in the world that can say that they have never known idolatry, although many today would look at it with contempt.

Man has known God more through goodness than through greatness, for no man really admires power. Man surrenders to power but admires goodness; thus the ideal of worship is based on two things: praise of goodness and surrender to a greater power. Support, protection, providence, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness were also counted as goodness; and the creation and destruction of all things and beings were counted as power. Combining these two, goodness and greatness, man completed the idea of God; and since God is one, he could not make Him two, though there are as many gods as there are human beings, since each person's ideal is peculiar to himself.

Man could not complete his ideal without forming an idea of personality; he could only be satisfied by some form, which he naturally preferred to make rather like his own, or to make a combination of likenesses, or to portray any likeness that his mind could grasp. As each man differs from his fellow-men in his ideas and thoughts, so each differed in his choice of the ideal idol. Therefore, if one called a particular idol his god, and his friends and followers and relations also accepted that god, then the one who was opposed to him said, 'My god is different from yours', and he made another god. If any disadvantage arose from idol-worship, it was only this: that instead of bowing to one God,

and uniting with their fellow-creatures in the worship of one God, men have taken different routes in the name of different idol-gods, and thus many idolators turned their backs on one another.

Idol-worship has been taught to mankind in order that they might learn to idealize God even if they were not sufficiently developed to understand the ideal of God in its true sense. This was a training, as a little girl receives her first training in domestic life by playing with dolls. Man can only idealize God as man, for every being, in the first place, sees himself in another. A rogue will fear the roguery of another, and a kind person will expect kindness from his fellow-man.

Man had always thought of ghosts, spirits, jinns, fairies, and angels as having a human form. Although he has sometimes added wings or horns or a tail to make them different, yet he has kept his conception as close as possible to the human form; and so it is no wonder that he pictured his highest ideal in the form of man. But he called it the reverse; instead of saying, 'I have created God in my own image', he said that God has created man in His own likeness. Even such ideals as that of liberty are pictured today in the form of a woman or man, as may be seen in New York harbour and on the postage stamps of France.

Man in all ages has been dramatic. He is an actor by nature, and it is his greatest pleasure to make a drama of his life and to play a part in it himself. This spirit is also hidden within the Church and the nation, and it is this same spirit which wears a crown or accepts the patched robes of a dervish. When this natural attitude plays its part in religious or spiritual life, its first tendency is to place before itself a Lord, a King, or a Master before whom it can bow; and it has given man a tendency to idealize God in a human form or to idealize a human name and form as God.

Though there exists, always has existed, and always will exist diversity of religions, faiths, and beliefs, yet human nature will always remain the same everywhere and in all ages; and the one who knows this human tendency will understand the religion of all, and he will consider all others as belonging to his religion, the one and only religion of wisdom.

Man is accustomed to believe in the reality of things that he can touch and perceive, and he may believe in an ideal that is beyond his touch and perception although he cannot be certain of its existence. Moreover, the absence of that ideal prevents him from expressing his worship. He doubts, and wonders to whom he is praying, whether there exists such a being as God, and, if there does exist such a being, what He looks like. And as not everyone has a beautiful imagination that satisfies him, so not everyone is capable of picturing in his mind the ideal of his worship. It is musicians who compose music, though everybody can sing or hum a little; it is the painter who paints a picture though everybody can draw a little to amuse himself; and so it was those with imagination above the ordinary who gave a picture of their imagination to the world in the form of a myth, which was then reproduced by art and made into an idol. In ancient times this seemed the only way possible to uplift humanity.

The Hindus were the earliest to form the conception of three aspects of the Divinity, which they called Trimurti: Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer, and Shiva the Destroyer. These three powers keep the whole universe in balance and they are active in everything in the world. Brahma was represented with four arms, which signifies that besides the physical arms there are mental arms which are necessary in the scheme of creation. And Vishnu is pictured seated on a cobra; this indicates the power of destruction that is waiting like a cobra to devour every activity: to take away fame from the famous, wealth from the rich, and power from the powerful. He who can rest upon this power is the sustainer of all activities and interests in life.

The picture of Shiva is that of an ascetic, from whose head spring rivers, round whose neck is a cobra, ashes on his body, a bull his vehicle. In this picture the cobra signifies destruction which has been accepted: all that man fears is wrapped round his neck, while ashes are significant of annihilation: everything that has gone through a perfect destruction turns into ashes. Rivers springing from the head show a constant spring of inspiration, as the inspiration of the mystic is limitless; and the bull signifies one with simple faith, who, without reasoning, accepts the truth, which one cannot readily accept intellectually.

There are three goddesses who show the other aspect of these natures: Sarasvati, the consort of Brahma, who rides on a peacock, with four hands of which two are holding a *vina*, the third a rosary, the fourth a book; which means that music, learning, and contemplation are creative; and the peacock represents the beauty which is in art. The goddess of Vishnu is Lakshmi, who stands on a lotus with a crown of gold; she has four hands, in one of them a *Sankha*, an ancient weapon, in another a *Kaml*, a lotus flower, which indicates that the goddess of wealth has all the beauty of life at her feet, and delicacy and tenderness in her hands. The weapon represents the power that is needed to hold wealth: one arm to collect, the other to give; the crown of gold signifies that the honour of the wealthy is his wealth. The third goddess is Parvati, the consort of Shiva.

These are lessons given to humanity in order that they may study the different aspects of life with the thought of sacredness.

To the eyes of the wise in all ages the universe has become one single immanence of the divine Being; and that which cannot be compared, or which has no comparison, has been difficult to explain in the human tongue. Therefore the idea of the wise has always been to allow man to worship God in whatever way he may be capable of picturing Him. One can trace in histories and traditions that trees, animals, and birds were worshipped, also rivers and seas, and planets, the sun, and the moon; heroes were worshipped, of all kinds; there has been worship of ancestors, of spirits, both good and evil; and the Lord of heaven was worshipped by some as the Creator, by some as the Sustainer, by some as the Destroyer, and by some as the King of all. And the wise have tolerated all aspects of worship, seeing that they all worship the same God in different forms and names, though not yet realizing that another person's god is the same God worshipped by all. Therefore the religion of the Hindus recognized these many gods in one God, and at the same time recognized that one God in all His myriad forms.

There came a time when God was raised from idol to ideal, and this was no doubt an improvement. Yet even in the ideal He is still an idol, and unless the question of life and its perfection can be solved by the God-ideal, by one's love and worship of

Him, one has not arrived at the object which all religions seek.

The need of the God-ideal is like the need of a ship in which to sail through the ocean of eternity; and as there is a danger of sinking in the sea without a ship, so there is a danger of falling a prey to mortality for the man without the God-ideal. The difficulty of the believer has always been as great as the difficulty of the unbeliever. For a simple believer, as a rule, knows God from the picture that his priest has given him: God the Good, or Cherisher, or Merciful; and when the believer in the just God sees injustice in life, and the believer in the kind God sees cruelty around him, and when the believer in the Cherisher-God has to face starvation, then comes the time when the cord of his belief breaks. How many in this late war have begun to doubt and question the existence of God, some even becoming total unbelievers!

Idolatry in a way has been to man like a lesson in practising his faith and belief patiently before heedless gods of stone, prostrating himself and bowing before the idol-god made by his own hands. No answer in man's distress, no stretching out the hand in man's poverty, no caress or embrace of sympathy come from that heedless god; and yet faith and belief are retained under all circumstances, and it is such belief that is founded on rock, and that stands in rain and storm, unshaken and unbroken. And after all, what is the abode of God? It is man's belief. And upon what is He seated? His throne is man's faith. So idolatry was the initial stage in strengthening faith and belief in God, the ideal which alone is the source of the realization of truth.

When the world evolved to the point where a believer in God was able to see even his God in the idol, and to communicate with Him by the power of his faith, then came the next lesson for the faithful, which was given by the series of prophets of Ben Israel. From Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Christ, the lesson was taught which culminated in the message of Moham-mad. The idea of this next lesson was to turn the idol into an ideal, and to rise from the worship of form to the abstract. By prayer, praising the Lord, by glorifying His name, by meditating upon His attributes, by admiring His righteousness, and by realizing His goodness, man created his God in his own heart. This was

also the purpose of idolatry, but it was only the first lesson; the second was to free one's mind from the form; for when God is recognized in one form, then the many other forms are abandoned, because then they are all recognized as His forms also.

Man has a weakness in his nature; and it is that when anything is given to him for his good, and if he likes it, he becomes attached to it until he gets its bad results; and once he is thus attached to it he never wishes to let it go. If a physician gives a drug to his patient and the patient likes it, he indulges in it, and wishes to continue with it until instead of being a medicine for his cure it turns into a vice for his destruction. So idolatry gradually became a vice, until the messengers had to fight it and break it as with a hammer. But in cases where it was considered only as a first lesson it brought great improvement, and prepared people to receive the second lesson of the God-ideal, which many have found difficult to learn.

No doubt it is true that God cannot be worshipped without idolatry in some form or other, although many people would think this absurd. God is what man makes Him, though His true being is beyond the capacity of man's making, or even perceiving, and thus the real belief in God is unintelligible; only that part of God is intelligible which man makes. Man makes it in the form of man or out of the attributes which seem to him good in man; and that is the only way of modelling God, if man ever tries to do so. To make a statue of stone in some form and to worship it as God is the primitive stage of worship, and to picture God in a human form, in the form of some hero, prophet, or saviour, is a more advanced stage. But it is a higher kind of worship when man worships God for His goodness, when he is impressed by the sublimity of His nature, when he holds the vision of divine beauty, recognizing this beauty in merit, power, or virtue, and when seeing this in its perfection he calls it God, whom he worships. This stage of God-realization is a step forward from the realization of the Deity in a limited human form.

This influence became apparent in the Hindu religion during the time of Shankaracharya, who did not interfere with those who were in the more primitive stage and worshipped idols,

but tried throughout his life, in a very wise and gentle way, to make the truth known in his land. His teaching spread slowly, yet its influence has been very helpful. In the Semitic races this higher form of worship is known to have been introduced by Abraham.

PART V

THE SYMBOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS IDEAS

THE WISE have given lessons to the world in different forms suited to the evolution of the people at the particular time; and the first and most original form of education that the wise gave to the world was symbolical. This method of teaching has been valued in all ages, and it will always keep its importance. That which is not veiled is not beauty; in the veiling and unveiling of beauty lies the purpose of life. Beauty is that which is always out of reach. We see it and we do not see it. We touch it and we cannot touch it. It is seen and yet veiled; it is known and yet unknown. That is why words are often inadequate to express the beauty of truth, and why symbolism was adopted by the wise.

The religions of the ancient Egyptians, of the Greeks, of the Hindus, and of the Parsis, all have symbols which express the essential truth hidden under each of them. There is symbolism in Christianity and in many other religions. Man has often rebelled against symbolism, but this is natural, as man has always revolted against things he cannot understand. There has been a wave of opposition to symbolism in both the East and the West. In the East it came in the period of Islam, and in the West it re-echoed in the Reformation. No doubt when the sacred symbols are made into patents by the religions which want to monopolize the whole truth for themselves, it encourages that tendency in human nature which is always ready either to accept or to reject things. However, one can say without exaggeration that symbolism has served to keep the ancient wisdom intact for ages. There are many ideas relating to human nature, to the nature of life, to God and His many attributes, and to the path towards the goal, which can be and have been expressed in symbols.

To a person who sees only the surface of life, symbols mean nothing. The secret of symbols is revealed to souls who can see through life, whose glance penetrates through objects. Verily, the things of the world disclose themselves to the seer and in

this uncovering beauty is hidden. There is a great joy in understanding, especially in understanding things which mean nothing to most people. It requires intuition to read symbols, even something deeper than intuition, namely insight. To the one to whom symbols speak of their nature and of their secret, each symbol is in itself a living manuscript. Symbology is the best means of learning the mysteries of life, and also one of the best ways of passing on ideas which will continue to live after the teacher has passed away. It is speaking without speaking; it is writing without writing. The symbol may be said to be an ocean in a drop.

THE SYMBOL OF THE SUN

Light has the greatest attraction for the human soul. Man loves it in fire and in things that are bright and shining, and that is why he considers gold and jewels to be precious. The cosmos has a greater attraction for him than the earth, because of its light. As man evolves, he naturally ceases to look down towards the earth, and instead looks up to the cosmos, the heavens. The most attractive object that he sees is the sun, the sun which is without any support and is more luminous than anything else in the heavens. Therefore, as man is attracted to beauty and surrenders to beauty, he bows to the sun as being the greatest beauty in the heavens, and has taken the sun as nature's symbol of God.

This symbol he pictures in different forms. In Persia, China, Japan, India, Egypt, whenever God was pictured, it was in the form of the sun. In all ages man has pictured his prophet, master, or saviour with the rays of a sun round his head. In ancient Persia there used to be a golden disc behind the head of the king, representing him as the sun, and they used to call this disc *Zar-dash*. The name of Zarathushtra has the same origin: the word simply meant 'the golden disc.' In Hindu and Buddhist temples around the images of different Avatars there is this symbol of the sun, and it was used both in the East and in the West in the form of turbans and hats. There are even now in India people who put a copper band on their turbans, for the same reason.

A deeper study of the sun suggests the four directions of lines which are formed around it. It is from this sign that the two sacred weapons were made, *Chakra* and *Trisula*, and it is this sign that

is the origin of the symbol of the cross. Ancient traditions show that the symbol of the cross existed in the East long before the coming of Christ, especially among the Brahmins. Islam, the religion which allows no symbols, yet has the same symbolism of the sun in the shape of the mosques. Whether the name of the sun be written in Persian or in Arabic, it takes the form of the mosque.

Men, according to their nature, have condemned and mocked the sun-worshippers, but they have never been able to uproot the charm, the attraction for human souls held by the sun.

THE BRAHMIN SYMBOLICAL FORM OF WORSHIP

Puja is the name of the Brahmin form of worship, which is from beginning to end a symbolical expression of what the seeker has to perform on the path of spiritual attainment. Before sunrise the Hindu bathes in a stream of running water and calls it the Ganges, the sacred river, no matter what river or water it may happen to be. He then proceeds with flowers to the shrine of the deity. He puts the flowers on the deity, repeating a mantram; he stands to greet the deity with joined hands, and prostrates himself. Then he rings a bell and repeats the sacred word; then he takes rice in his hands and puts it at the feet of the deity; and with the tip of his finger he makes a mark with a red powder, called *Kumkum*, first on the shrine and then on his own forehead. After this he lightly anoints the deity with a certain ointment, whereupon he touches his forehead with the same ointment. Next he prostrates himself, before making three circles round the shrine. Then he rings the bell again, and the service is ended. Afterwards he goes and stands before the sun and does his breathing exercises, and that completes the next part of his worship.

However primitive this form of worship may seem, it has a deep meaning behind it. The bath in the Ganges signifies being purified before one makes any effort on the spiritual path. The purification of both body and mind is necessary before one takes the first step towards the God-ideal. One must not approach the deity before such purification, outer purification as well as inner purification, for only when a person is pure will he find it easy to attain the desired presence of God.

The meaning of presenting flowers is that God is pleased with offerings which are delicate, beautiful, and fragrant. Delicacy means tenderness of heart; beauty of colour means fineness of character; and fragrance the virtue of the soul. This is the offering with which God is pleased. The worshipper holds the thought that his self is devoted in perfect discipline to the supreme will of God. His joined hands express no action on the part of himself, but complete surrender. The meaning of prostration is self-denial in the true sense of the word, which means, 'I am not; Thou art.' Whispering the words and ringing the bell signifies that the same words ring like a bell in one's heart. Touching the red powder means touching the eternal life; and when he touches the deity with the powder, it means that from this source he will gain eternal life; when he touches his forehead with it, it means he has gained it for himself. The ointment means wisdom, and applying it to the god and then to his own forehead means that true wisdom can be obtained from God alone, and that he himself has gained it. The three circles round the shrine indicate that life is a journey, and that the journey is made to attain his goal, which is God. 'Every step I take in my life,' the Brahmin thinks, 'will be in His direction, in the search of God.'

The second part of the service, when he stands before the sun, means that God is to be sought in the light, and the breathing exercises weld that link of inner communication between God and the worshipper.

THE FLUTE OF KRISHNA

Krishna is pictured in Hindu symbology with a crown of peacock's feathers, playing the flute. Krishna is the ideal of divine love, the God of love. And the divine love expresses itself by entering into man and filling his whole being. Therefore the flute is the human heart, and a heart which is made hollow will become a flute for the God of love to play upon. When the heart is not empty, in other words, when there is no scope in the heart, there is no place for love. Rumi, the great poet of Persia, explains this idea more clearly. He says the pains and sorrows the soul experiences through life, are like holes made in a reed flute, and it is by making these holes that a player makes the flute out of a reed.

This means that the heart of man is first a reed, and the sufferings and pains it goes through make it a flute, which can then be used by God as the instrument for the music that He constantly wishes to produce. But as every reed is not a flute, so every heart is not His instrument. As the reed can be made into a flute, so the human heart can be turned into an instrument, and can be offered to the God of love. It is the human heart which becomes the harp of the angels; it is the human heart which is known as the lute of Orpheus. It was on the model of the heart of man that the first instrument of music was made, and no earthly instrument can produce that music which the heart produces, raising the mortal soul to immortality.

The crown of peacock's feathers leads to a further revelation: that it is the music of the heart which can be expressed through the head; it is the knowledge of the head and the love of the heart that together fully express the divine message. The peacock's feather in all ages has been considered as a sign of beauty and knowledge; beauty because it is beautiful, knowledge because it is in the form of an eye. It is by keen observation that man acquires knowledge. Knowledge without love is lifeless. So, with the flute, the crown of peacock's feathers makes the symbol complete.

WATER

In the old scriptures, such as the Vedanta and the Old Testament, spirit is symbolized as water. One wonders why something which is next to earth, should symbolize spirit; but just as the nature of water is to give life to the earth, so the nature of the soul is to give life to the body. Without water the earth is dead; so is the body without the soul. Water and earth both mix together; so the spirit mixes with matter and revivifies it. And yet the spirit stands above matter, just as water gradually lets the earth sink to the bottom and itself remains above the earth. The spirit is hidden under matter, as the soul is hidden in the body, in the same way as water exists beneath the earth. There is no place where water does not exist, though there are places where earth is not to be found; thus nowhere in space is spirit absent, and only the absence of matter is possible.

The symbolical way of expressing lofty ideas does not come

from the brain; it is an outcome of intuition. The beginning of intuition is to understand the symbolical meaning of different things, and the next step is to express them symbolically. It is in itself a divine art; and the best proof of it is to be found in the symbol of water, which so aptly expresses the meaning of spirit.

WINE

Wine is considered sacred, not only in the Christian faith, but in many other religions also. In the ancient religion of the Zoroastrians, Jam-e Jamsheyd, the bowl of wine from which 'Jamsheyd drank deep', is a historical fact. Among the Hindus, Shiva considered wine sacred, and in Islam, though wine is forbidden on earth, yet in heaven it is allowed. *Hauz-e Kauthar*, the sacred fountain of heaven, about which there is so much spoken in Islam, is a fountain of wine.

Wine is symbolic of the soul's evolution. Wine comes from the annihilation of grapes; immortality comes from the annihilation of self. The bowl of poison which is known in many mystic cults also suggests the idea of wine; not a sweet wine, but a bitter wine. When the self turns into something different from what it was before, it is like the soul being born again. This is seen in the grape turning into wine. The grape, by turning into wine, lives; as a grape it would have vanished in time, but by turning into wine it only loses its individuality, and not its life. The self-same grape lives as wine; and the longer it lives, the better the wine becomes. For a Sufi, therefore, the true sacrament is the turning of one's grape-like personality, which has a limited time to live, into wine, in order that nothing of one's self may be lost, but that on the contrary it may be amplified and even perfected. This is the essence of all philosophy and the secret of mysticism.

THE STORY OF LOT'S WIFE

The ancient method of teaching the mystery of life was to give it in the form of a legend. The meaning of the legend of Lot's wife is, that it was owing to the love and intercession of Abraham that two angels were sent to Lot, to warn him of the coming destruction of two cities and to advise him to go to the

mountains. At first Lot was not willing to leave the cities, but in the end he agreed to go. His sons-in-law failed him by not accompanying him, but his wife and his two daughters went with him on the journey to the mountains. And they were told that on no account must they look back; and when his wife did so all the same, she was turned into a pillar of salt. Lot and his two daughters went on, and they reached the cave of the mountain, which was Lot's destination.

The two towns that were to be destroyed represent the North Pole and the South Pole, the two poles of the world. For all the treasure of the earth, all possessions and power and fame that belong to the earth, are subject to destruction. And this was taught to Lot, the human soul, who was related to Abraham, the divine soul, whose name is derived from Brahma, the Creator. The relationship between Lot and Abraham represents the relationship between the human soul and the Creator. The two angels were the angels of light and of reason. When the light comes to man, its first teaching is to warn the soul of the disaster that awaits all that is subject to death and destruction. It is this lesson that is called in Sanskrit the lesson of Vairagya: when man's eyes are opened to see that all that he loves and likes and wishes to hold and possess, is subject to destruction and death.

There are five bodies considered by the mystics of old to be the vehicles of the soul. These are called: *Anandamaya akasha*, body of joy; *Vijnanamaya akasha*, body of wisdom; *Manomaya akasha*, body of mind; *Pranamaya akasha*, body of ether; *Annamaya akasha*, body of earth. This last is the receptacle of food. It lives on earthly food, and if it is starved of that it dies, for it is made of earth; it lives on earth. The one which is the receptacle of ether, and which is called *Pranamaya akasha*, is that part of man's being which lives by breath and by taking in air, and if it is starved of air, it cannot live. These two bodies form the material part, the physical part, of man's being; and it is these two receptacles which are referred to in the legend as the two sons-in-law.

Then there is *Manomaya akasha*, which is mind, the mental body. And this body has its action and reaction on both aspects of man's being; it acts and reacts upon the earthly bodies, and it acts and reacts upon the soul. Therefore when Lot left the two

cities, which represent the physical plane, to journey towards the goal of immortality, his wife was still with him. For it is not necessary for the mental body to stay behind when the journey towards illumination is begun; it is capable of going with the soul towards eternity. And yet its attachment to the earth and the physical plane is great, because it is made, it is built, of physical impressions, of all the impressions that come from the physical world; and it naturally wants to turn to see whether it is the physical being or the spiritual being which is leading it aright. The principal characteristic of mind is doubt, doubt whether one is doing right or wrong; and doubt and faith are enemies. While faith leads to the destination, doubt pulls back, and when the mind, i.e. Lot's wife, was pulled back, attracted by all the impressions of earthly life, it could neither hold on to the earth nor journey further with the spirit, and remained as neither earth nor water, but as salt.

Only two bodies followed the soul. Naturally they would follow, for they are closely related to the soul: Vijnanamaya akasha, the body of wisdom, and Anandamaya akasha, the body of joy. The soul bound for the eternal goal, which is called in the story the top of the mountains, then proceeded towards the mountains, but before it reached the top there was the cave. This signifies heaven; in metaphysical terms it could be called a capacity, and in Sanskrit *Akasha*. It has the power of holding back the soul from going to the top and using it for some purpose.

The soul which was bound for the eternal goal remained there, intoxicated by the ecstasy that it received from the plane of joy and the plane of wisdom. And as everything that happens has its purpose, so this joy resulted in a great purpose in the birth of the messenger, which in Sanskrit is called Bodhisatva. The messenger was born of the soul's experience, its knowledge and its happiness, in order to bring good tidings to the world.

The question may arise why Manomaya akasha should be the mother, and Anandamaya akasha and Vijnanamaya akasha the daughters. And the answer is that they are born, born of mind and soul. If there were only the soul, there would be neither joy nor wisdom. Mind and soul together produce joy and wisdom. Therefore the latter are the daughters, because mind is the

mother. The two lower planes are represented by the sons-in-law, because they were not directly born of mind and soul; it was a separate substance mind and soul had taken into their life.

This story conveys the process by which the soul journeys from mortality to immortality, and what experiences the soul may possibly have to go through on its way. But when the messenger is thus created, then the father, who is the soul, rests in peace. This is the reason why the messenger was called the Son, and the original soul the Father.

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL

The wrestling of Jacob signified the wrestling of the soul with the ego. The awakened soul looks about and asks, 'Who is my enemy?' And while the unawakened soul thinks that it is his neighbour or his relation who is his enemy, the awakened soul says, 'It is my self; my ignorant ego is my enemy; and it is the struggle with this enemy that will bring me light and raise me from the denseness of the earth.' Night is symbolically the time when the darkness of ignorance causes confusion: one feels sorrow, loneliness, depression; one sees no way out; one is burdened on all sides, chained; there seems no freedom for the soul, for this is the time of night. But when the soul can fight the ego, then it rises above the chains and attachments of this world. As it is said in the Bible, Jacob first left all his belongings; he came away from them. This means that he became indifferent to all to which he had once felt attached. The Sufi looks at this from another point of view. He thinks that to leave all one possesses, and to go to the forests or mountains, is not true detachment; true detachment is in the heart of man. One can be surrounded by beauty, comfort, wealth, position, love, all these things, and yet be detached from them, be no slave to them, and rise above them.

Jacob left everything and went into the solitude, into the silence, where he wished to fight the deluded self, the ego, which blinds man to the truth. And what was the result? Daybreak came, and that man or angel who had fought with Jacob, wished to depart. This means that the ego wanted to leave; there was no

more ego, no more I; but with the daybreak came a new light, a new inspiration, a new revelation. The very ego which Jacob saw as his greatest enemy, in the daylight he recognized as God Himself. He bowed before the One with whom he had wrestled all night, and he asked His blessing; he asked His name, for then he saw, 'No longer I, but Thou.' And the name could not be told, for that was the unveiling of the unity of God and man, and in this realization names and forms are lost.

JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER

From a mystical point of view the phenomenon of Christ's walking on the water suggests a great philosophy rather than just a phenomenon. The whole universe in all its forms is one single vision of a constant activity. From beginning to end every aspect of life represents motion, and it is the perpetual motion of the whole universe which is called life. Thus the universe is, so to speak, an ocean of vibrations, and every movement represents a wave. That is why the wise have called it in Sanskrit *Bhava-sagara*, the ocean of life, and the great devotees have constantly prayed to be liberated, that they may not sink in this ocean but may be able to swim in it; this they call *Taran*. And it is the master spirit which can rise above these waves of the immense ocean of life, in which souls are generally drowned. To be in it, and yet to be able to stand above it and to walk on it, is the phenomenon of Christ's walking upon the water.

Christ said to the fishermen, 'I will make you fishers of men.' That meant, 'As you spread the net and the fish come into it, so by becoming more spiritual your personality will spread in the atmosphere, and the hearts of men hungering for love will be attracted to you like fish.' The love of Christ for the lamb expresses symbolically, that the soul which made the greatest appeal to the Master was simple and harmless as a lamb. And the crown of thorns represents tolerance of the thorn-like personalities of which there are so many in the world, constantly pricking with their thorns, consciously or unconsciously; and it is this which makes sensitive people annoyed with life in the world. But the messenger, whose heart represents both the divine Mother and Father, cannot but be tolerant, and is able to accept willingly

all the thorns that come to him; for that is his crown, the sign of his sovereignty in the kingdom of soul.

Christ said to Peter, 'Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.' This explains human nature. The faith of man is generally dependent upon the faith of the multitude; if the multitude should call the pebble a diamond, everyone would begin to consider it so and to say so. And if the multitude thought that the diamond was a pebble, then everyone would follow the belief of the multitude. The soul of the messenger, which comes from above, as is signified by the dove, is a soul which is not made by the world nor known by the world, but remains unrecognized till the cock crows and the sun rises. Then the words of the messenger shine forth and spread the light to the world; and the souls privileged to have some little recognition, though with much doubt, may believe for a moment, impressed by the power and grace of the Master's personality; but they may also deny him a thousand times, and doubt and suspect, being impressed by the influence of the multitude. How true is the Hindustani saying that a soul generally follows the multitude! There are rare souls who believe in their conviction, and remain steady even if the whole world is against their own inner conviction. Verily, to the faithful belongs every blessing.

THE SYMBOL OF THE CROSS

The symbol of the cross has many meanings. It is said in the Bible that first was the word, next came light, and then the world was created. And as the light is expressed in the form of a cross, so every form shows in it the original sign. Every artist knows the significance of the vertical line and the horizontal line, which are the skeleton of every form. This proves the teaching of the Qur'an, in which it is said that God created the world from His own light. The cross is the figure that fits every form everywhere.

Morally the cross signifies pain or suffering. This means that in every activity of life, which may be pictured as a perpendicular line, there come hindrances, which are represented by the horizontal line. This shows the nature of life, and the truth of the saying that man proposes and God disposes. Somebody asked the great master, Ali, what made him believe in God who is beyond

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human comprehension. Ali said, 'I believe in God because I see that when I alone wish, things are not accomplished.' According to the metaphysical point of view, this shows the picture of limitation in life.

The symbol of the cross in the life of Christ not only relates to the crucifixion of the Master, but also the crucifixion that one has to meet with by possessing the truth. The idea behind this, which is to be found in Hindu philosophy, is that life in the world is an illusion, and therefore every experience and knowledge of this life is also illusion. The Sanskrit word for this illusion is *Maya*; it is also called *Mithea*, from which the word myth comes. When the soul begins to see the truth, it is as it were born again; and to this soul all that appears truth to an average person, appears false, while what seems truth to this soul is nothing to the average person; all that seems important and precious in life to that average person has no value or importance for this soul; and what seems to this soul important and valuable, has no importance or value for the average person.

Therefore he naturally finds himself alone in a crowd which lives in a world quite different from his own. Imagine living in a world where nobody uses our language! But he can live in the world, for he knows its language; and yet to him the life in the world is as unprofitable as the world of children playing with their toys to a grown-up person. A human being who has realized the truth is just as much subject to pain and suffering as all other people, except that he is capable of bearing them better than the others. But while in the crowd everyone hits the other and also receives blows, the knower of truth has to stand alone and only receive them; this in itself is a great torture. Life in the world is difficult for everyone, rich or poor, strong or weak, but for the knower of truth it is still more difficult, and that in itself is a cross.

Thus for a spiritual messenger the cross is a natural emblem, which explains his moral condition. But there is a still higher significance of the cross which is understood by the mystic. It is self-denial; and in order to learn this moral, gentleness, humility and modesty should be the first lesson. Self-denial is an effect of which self-effacement is the cause. It means that a

man says, 'I am not; Thou art.' For instance an artist, looking at his picture may say, 'It is Thy work, not mine,' or a musician, hearing his composition may say, 'It is Thy creation; I do not exist.' Then that soul is in a way crucified, and through that crucifixion resurrection comes. There is not the slightest doubt that when man has had enough pain in his life, he rises to this great consciousness. But it is not necessary for pain to be the only means. It is the readiness on the part of man to deny his part of consciousness, and to efface his own personality, that lifts the veil which hides the spirit of God from his sight.

THE SYMBOL OF THE DOVE

The bird represents the wayfarer of the sky, and at the same time it represents a being who though it belongs to the earth is capable of dwelling in the skies. The former explanation of the bird represents the idea of a soul whose dwelling-place is heaven, and the latter represents the dweller on earth being able to move about in the higher spheres; and both these explanations give the idea that the spiritual man, dwelling on the earth, is from heaven. They also explain that the spiritual man is the inhabitant of the heavens and is only dwelling on earth for a while.

The pigeon is used as a messenger, to carry a message from one place to another, and therefore the symbol of the dove is a natural one to represent the messenger from above. Spiritual bliss is such a wonderful experience that if a bird or an animal were to have it, it would never return to its own kind. But it is to man's credit that after touching that point of great happiness and bliss he comes back into the world of sorrows and disappointments and delivers his message.

This quality can also be seen in the pigeon: when the pigeon is sent it goes, but it faithfully comes back to its master. The spiritual man performs this duty doubly: he reaches higher than the human plane, touches the divine plane, and brings the message from the divine to the human plane. In this way, instead of remaining on the divine plane, he returns to be among his fellow-men for their welfare, which is no small sacrifice. Besides he performs a duty to God, from whom he brings the message which he delivers to humanity. He lives as a human being, subject

to love, hate, praise, and blame; he passes his life in the world of attachment and the life that binds him with a thousand ties on all sides; and yet he does not forget the place whence he has come, and he constantly and eagerly looks forward to reaching the goal for which he is bound. Therefore in both these journeys, from earth to heaven and from heaven to earth, the idea of the dove proves to be the most appropriate of all.

THE TEN VIRGINS

There is a story in the Bible about ten virgins, the five wise virgins and the five foolish. It was said that the bridegroom was to come, and that they were to light their lamps; and five were in time, and brought the oil and lit their lamps; but the other five waited until the bridegroom came, and then they went to the five who had lighted their lamps and asked them for oil, and were refused.

This story is a symbolic expression of receiving the message of God. The virgin means the soul which is awaiting illumination, innocent and responsive to the light; and five means the multitude. And there are two kinds of people; one is those who have prepared themselves and made ready to receive the message of God, which is pictured as the bridegroom; and the five foolish are those who wait and wait until the message has come and gone. In all ages there have been these two kinds of souls: one kind who are called in the scriptures believers, and the others who are known as unbelievers.

In every age the messenger of the time has prophesied the next advent. Sometimes it was said, 'I will come', and sometimes, 'He will come'. 'I will come' was for those who would be able to recognize the same Spirit of Guidance in every coming of the messenger; 'He will come' was for those to whom name and form make a difference, and who cannot recognize the same spirit in another name and another form. For example, the coming of Jesus Christ was the coming of that spirit which was expressed in this parable as the bridegroom; yet how few at that time recognized him, and how few received illumination! Only those whose lamps were ready to be lighted. Oil in this parable is love, and the light is wisdom. And when their lamps were lighted, then many

came afterwards for oil; but by then that blessing and privilege which had come with the personality of the Master had gone. They had to rely on the light that came from those whose lamps were lighted, for the chance of lighting their own lamps was lost.

It is the same with all things in life. Every moment in our lives is an opportunity which brings a benefit and blessing. And the one who knows how to be benefited and how to be blessed by it, receives the benefit and the blessing. Everyone seems alive and awake, but few souls are really awake and living. There are opportunities of benefit and blessing on every plane of one's life, on the physical plane, on the mental plane, and on the spiritual plane; and every opportunity is invaluable. But often one realizes the truth when it is too late. There is no greater and better opportunity than the moment which can give a spiritual illumination, a moment when one can receive the blessing of God. It is a priceless moment. He who knows it and understands it and tries to be benefited by it is blessed.

TONGUES OF FLAME

The symbolic meaning of this legend is that there is a period when the soul of the earnest seeker is still seeking, when it has not yet found the object of its search. During the lifetime of Jesus Christ, the beauty of the Master's wonderful personality and the great intoxication of his presence, the constant outpouring of the message that he had to give, was so overwhelming for his disciples that it soared beyond what may be called joy or happiness, or anything which can be explained. All the blessing that they received and experienced while his presence was among them was overshadowed by the Master's personality; the realization of all that they had constantly received only came to them after that great event when the external person of the Master ascended, and their capacity for realization became available.

But after the fifty days following the Crucifixion, when they had had time to recover from the feeling that had overwhelmed their hearts, the seeming separation from their beloved Lord prepared them, so to speak, at the right moment; it opened the door of their hearts, giving them the capacity to receive the illumination which was constantly pouring out from the Spirit of

Guidance, the Alpha and Omega, who always was and is and will be.

The symbolic interpretation of the tongues of flame rising from the foreheads of the disciples is the light of the message, the rays of the Christ Spirit in the form of thoughts which could be expressed in words. There is a stage in the life of a seer when the tongue of flame becomes not only an interpretation of the mystery, but a reality of his own experience. The head is the centre of knowledge, and when this organ opens, the light which was covered becomes manifest, not only as an idea but even in a form.

The phenomenon which occurred the next day, when the apostles spoke all the different languages, can be rightly interpreted in this sense, that every soul hears its own language. For every soul has its own word, as every soul has its own evolution. This is why one person cannot generally understand another in this world, and it is more than a miracle if we find perhaps one person in the world who can understand us fully. This means that in this world the language of one is not understood by another; and if it happens that someone understands a little, one instantly feels at one with him.

It was the illumination of the Christ Spirit which brought exaltation into the lives of the disciples, so that they began to respond to every soul they met, and they became at one with every soul, inspired by the sympathy and love of Christ. They understood the souls as they saw them, and could speak with souls whose language they had never before understood. They heard the cry of every soul, and they answered every soul's cry.

Every great prophet or teacher had many followers in his life, attracted to his personality, to his words, to his kindness and love; but those who became the instrument of his message, whose hearts became like a flute upon which the Master could play his music, have always been only a chosen few, like the twelve apostles of Christ.

SHAQQ-I SADR, THE OPENING OF THE BREAST OF THE PROPHET

There is a story told in Arabia that the angels descended from heaven to earth and cut open the breast of the Prophet; they took away something that was to be removed, and then the breast was

made as before. It is a symbolic expression, which gives to a Sufi a key to the secret of human life. What closes the doors of the heart is fear, confusion, depression, spite, discouragement, disappointment, and a troubled conscience; and when that is cleared away, the doors of the heart open. The opening of the breast is in reality the opening of the heart. The sensation of joy is felt in the centre of the breast, as is the heaviness caused by depression. Therefore as long as the breast remains choked with anything, the heart remains closed. When the breast is cleared of it, the heart is open. It is the open heart which receives the reflection of all impressions coming from outside. It is the open heart which can receive reflections from the divine Spirit within. Also, it is openness of heart which gives power and beauty to express oneself; and if it is closed a man, however learned, cannot express his learning to others.

This symbolical legend also explains what is needed in the life of man for the plant of divine love to grow in his heart. It is the removal of the element which gives a bitter feeling. Just as there is poison in the sting of the scorpion and in the teeth of the snake, so there is poison in the heart of man, which is made to be the shrine of God. But God cannot arise in the shrine which is as though dead from its own poison; for God to arise it must first be purified, and made real. The soul who had to sympathize with the whole world was thus prepared, that the drop of that poison which always produces contempt, resentment, and ill-feeling against another, was destroyed first.

So many talk about the purification of the heart, and so few really know what it is. Some say to be pure means to be free from all evil thought, but in reality there is no evil thought; and if there is any such thought, which one could call evil or devilish, it is the thought of bitterness against another. No one with sense and understanding would like to keep a drop of poison in his body, and how ignorant it is on the part of man when he keeps and cherishes a bitter thought against another in his heart! If a drop of poison can cause the death of the body, it is equal to a thousand deaths when the heart retains the smallest thought of bitterness. In this legend the cutting open of the breast is the cutting open of the ego, which is like a shell over

the heart. And the removing of that element means that every kind of thought or feeling against anyone in the world has been taken away, and the breast, which means the heart, is filled with love alone, which is the real life of God.

MIRAJ, THE DREAM OF THE PROPHET

A story survives in Islam about the dream of the Prophet, a dream which was as an initiation in the higher spheres. Many take it literally and discuss it, and afterwards go out by the same door through which they came in, but from the point of view of a mystic one can find out the mystery it contains.

It is said that the Prophet was taken from Jerusalem to the Temple of Peace; which means from the outer Temple of Peace, Dar-e Sala'm, to the inner Temple of Peace. A Buraq was brought for the Prophet to ride upon. The angel Jebrael accompanied the Prophet on the journey, and guided him on the path. The Buraq is said to be an animal of heaven which has wings, the body of a horse, and the face of a human being. It signifies the body connected with the mind. The wings represent the mind, and the body of the Buraq represents the human body; the head represents perfection. It also symbolizes the breath. Breath is the Buraq which reaches from the outer world to the inner world in a moment's time. Jebrael in this story represents reason.

It is said that on his way the Prophet saw Adam, who, looking to one side smiled, and looking to the other, shed tears. This shows that the human soul, when it develops in itself real human sentiment, rejoices at the progress of humanity and sorrows over its degeneration. The Buraq could not go beyond a certain point, which means that although breath takes one a certain distance in the mystical realization, there comes a stage when the breath cannot accompany one. When they were near the Prophet's destination, Jebrael also retired, which means that reason cannot go any further than its limit. Then the Prophet arrived at that curtain which stands between the human and the divine, and he called aloud the name of God, saying, 'None exists save Thee', and the answer came, 'True, true.' That was the final initiation from which dated the blossoming of Mohammad's prophetic message.

PART VI

THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGER

i

WHAT IS THE Message? Where does it come from? How is it received by the souls who deliver it? These questions often arise in enquiring minds. And the answer is that the message is like rain, and rain falls where it is needed and when it is needed. But does the rain come from above? It seems to come from above, but it first rises from below. As the vapours rise first from the sea and turn into clouds, so every aspect of knowledge gained by all beings rises upwards like vapour, forming into clouds as ideas, and again falling from above like rain. There are very many names for the seas, rivers, and streams, but they all contain water. And there are various names for religions, but they all contain the wisdom given at different times in different ways. There is lightning, there is thunder, and the rain falls; and there are wars and disasters before the message comes. Storms are very often warnings of what is to follow, and the different kinds of battles and revolutions are often warnings before the coming of peace.

It is sometimes asked why, if God is all-pervading, there is need of the special manifestation of a messenger such as Krishna, Buddha, or Jesus. The answer is given in the words of the Bhagavad Gita, where Shri Krishna says, 'When Dharma is hindered, then I am born.' This means that a manifestation which the people recognize as a saviour or messenger, always comes when the necessity arises. In other words, it is necessity, it is the need of the world which causes the Spirit to arise in its true form.

Scepticism is the germ that causes decay at the heart of the tree of life. But always when one tree dies, another tree springs up; we see in our own lives, and especially at times when we are sunk in depression and sorrow, that some answer comes to the difficulty of the situation. It may come from a friend, from a brother, from parents, from a beloved; one may even get what is necessary at such a moment from one's enemy. But why should

a message only come in time of pain or after a great sorrow? Why should not a message come every day for one's guidance? There are two reasons for this: one is that there is constant guidance from above, but man, so absorbed in his life's activities, does not open his heart to listen to that message and to see where it comes from. And the other reason is that the deeper the sorrow, the higher the voice of the heart rises, until it reaches the throne of God; and that is the time when the answer comes.

In all ages and to all peoples the message of God has been sent. And that message has been kept by those who received it in the form of a scripture, and the name of the messenger and his honour have been held high by those who have followed that particular message. No matter at what time in the history of the world the message came, one thing is sure: that it has always penetrated the heart of man and left its impression and its influence, ever multiplying and spreading, proving it to be the message of God. And there is no better instance of this truth than the coming of Jesus Christ, and the fact that he gave his message to so few, mostly to fishermen. Even though the conditions in which the Master had to deliver his message were difficult, yet the message was God's, and it did not fail to make a lasting impression on the souls of men.

Since it is the message of God, whenever it comes it is from the same source. When it came a thousand years ago it was His message; when it came a hundred years ago it was His message; and if it came today it would be also His message. How ignorant man has been through all the ages! And he shows his ignorance even today, for whenever the message has come, man has fought and disputed and argued. Man has held fast to one prophet and ignored the others, because although he knew his religion he did not know the message. He has taken the book as his religion without recognizing the message. If that were not the general tendency, then how could Jesus Christ with His most spiritual message have been crucified? There had been prophecies, and besides prophecies the Master himself was the evidence of his message, as the saying has it: 'What you are, speaks louder than what you say.' And how thickly veiled man's eyes must be by the religion, the faith, the belief he holds, for him to accept only

one messenger and to reject the message given by other prophets, not knowing that the message is one and the same!

It is one thing to love and another thing to understand. The one who loves the messenger is a devotee; but the one who knows the messenger is his friend. There is a tendency in the human race which has appeared in all ages: it leads man to accept every expression of the message which has been given him, to be won by it, blessed by it, and yet to fail to recognize who the messenger is. The followers of each form of the message profess devotion to their Lord and Master, by whatever name he had in the past, but they do not necessarily know the Master. What they know is the name and the life of the Master that has come down to them in history or tradition; but beyond that they know very little about him. If the same one came in another form, in a garb adapted to another age, would they know him or accept him? No, they would not even recognize him, because it was not the message but the form that they accepted in the past; a certain name or character; a part but not the whole.

There is a story about a great Sufi in India, whose name was Usman Haruni. He was a murshid to whom came thousands of disciples, among them many of the most learned and philosophical people of the time. He taught them the deepest truths of mysticism, and most of all to worship the nameless and formless God. But there came a time when he said to them, 'So far I have worshipped according to tradition, but now I feel that I must go and prostrate myself before the image of the goddess Kali in all humility.' His pupils were aghast. That he, whose conception of God had been so lofty, should go and bow before the hideous image of Kali, to worship whom was to break the law of their religion, was beyond anything they could conceive, and caused them to fear that their master had lost his reason. Some even thought that he was treading the downward path.

So when the teacher went to the temple of Kali, only one of his pupils went with him, a youth whose devotion to his master was very great. As they went, the teacher said to this disciple, 'You should go back. They are many, and are surely in the right; I am perhaps in the wrong.' But the young man still followed. When the temple was reached, the teacher was so greatly moved

by the thoughts that the image of the goddess suggested to him that he prostrated himself in humility. And the disciple, standing by, looked on with sympathy at the thought of how many followers his master had had, and of how in one moment all had turned from him. When the teacher arose he said, 'Do you still follow me?' And when the disciple said that he did, the holy man asked him further, 'But perhaps you do not understand why you follow me?' Then the youth said, 'You have taught me the first lesson of the spiritual path: that none exists save God. How then can I exclude this image of Kali, if you choose to bow and prostrate yourself before it?'

ii

The ways in which the message is given are different because the mentality of mankind differs at each period. Every prophet had to speak in the manner of the time in which he lived, and according to the evolution of that time. Also, the custom of each country differs from that of other countries; the manners and life differ. If the messenger is born in one country and has to give his message in another country, surely he has to consider the way in which the people there look at life, and to give his message accordingly. But the message is always from God. This is the reason why the external study of Buddhism will make one feel that Hinduism is different from Buddhism, and the external study of Christianity and Islam will make one feel that Christianity is different from Islam; but if one saw that underlying thread that connects all religions, one would see that all religion is one, as truth is one, as life is one, as God is one.

Truth is the soul of religion. When Jesus came to earth he did not say, 'I have brought you a new religion never heard of by you or your ancestors.' He said he had not come to give a new law but to fulfil the law; in other words, 'I have come to continue giving you that which you have received before and have not understood.'

There are scriptures that mankind regards as religious scriptures, but imagine how little of that message a book can contain, and how much more must have been given that was never written in a book! If books were sufficient, then the book of Abraham

or the earlier books that were kept as scriptures could be sufficient, but it was not the book. The messenger, whenever he came, came to give the life, the living spirit, the divine light that can shine like the sun during the day, so that no soul with the slightest spark of sincerity could ever doubt the truth and unity of the message.

With all the opposition to the Master, at the time when the Jews demanded his crucifixion, did those who were present sincerely think the Master was guilty? No, each one of them was more or less impressed by the truth of the message, yet torn by convention and custom, bound by laws, held fast by the religious authority that was in power. They could not express their sincere feelings, and so law governed instead of love. And this state of things has existed in all ages. Blinded by conventions and by the laws of his time and the customs of his people, man has ignored and opposed the truth. Yet at the same time the truth has never failed to make its impression upon the soul, because the soul of all is one soul, and truth is one truth under whatever religion it is hidden.

In reality there cannot be many religions; there is only one. There cannot be two truths; there cannot be two masters. As there is only one God and one religion, there is one master and there is one truth. And the weakness of man has been that only what he is accustomed to consider as truth he takes to be truth, and anything he has not been accustomed to hear or think frightens him. Just like a person in a strange land, away from home, the soul is a stranger to the nature of things it is not accustomed to. But the journey to perfection means rising above limitations, rising so high that not only the horizon of one country, of one continent, is seen, but that of the whole world. The higher we rise, the wider becomes the horizon of our view.

Many intellectual people, with their various ideas, differ from one another in their opinions and in their way of looking at things, in their speculations, but do the prophets differ from one another? No, they cannot differ. The reason is that it is the various minds which differ, not the souls. The one who lives in his mind, is conscious of his mind; the one who lives in his soul is conscious of the soul.

Spiritual means spirit-conscious. There is a line of a song, 'The night has a thousand eyes, the day but one.' When a person is living in his mind, he is living through the darkness of the night. The moment he rises above his mind and awakens in the light of the soul he becomes spiritual. And if a thousand spiritual people speak, they will say the same thing, perhaps in different words but with only one meaning, for they have one and the same vision. This is why spiritual realization is called the truth. There are many facts but only one truth. The facts can be put into words but not the truth, for God is truth, the soul is truth, the real self of man is truth. Since truth is unlimited and incomparable, it alone knows, enjoys, and realizes its own existence.

iii

The key to the secret of the messenger is given in the Bible, but very few will ponder upon it and reason it out for themselves. The key is in the words, 'I am Alpha and Omega', 'I am the first and the last.' Can that mean, 'I came only for a time, and then I was called Jesus, and only then did I give a message; I spoke neither before nor after that time'? Alpha and Omega means First and Last; always, continually present; never absent from the beginning of creation to the end.

A question arises in the enquiring mind: who may this Alpha and Omega be? What was he before Jesus Christ? What would he be after the time of Jesus Christ? For those who put the water of the ocean in a pitcher, that water is from the ocean; but really only the ocean is the ocean. When those of various creeds, who have different dogmas and forms of worship, say that only this or that is the teaching of Christ, it may be partly true; but it is not all the teaching of Christ. It is as true as saying, 'This is the ocean', if one brought some water from the ocean in a pitcher.

This shows that there was a personality called Jesus Christ who brought the message; it was the personality that was Jesus. This is the secret of that Alpha and Omega spirit of Christ. If one could only see that spirit hidden behind different personalities one would be constantly in the vision of Christ.

As many souls as there are in the world, so many are their fancies and their phantasies. Many look favourably at a certain

teacher, but as many do not. And there has never been one teacher in the world whom everyone regarded with favour. Praise cannot exist without blame, for nothing has existence without its opposite, just as pleasure cannot exist without pain. No one can be great and not small; no one can be loved and not hated. There is no one who is hated by all and not loved by someone; there is always someone to love him.

If one would realize that the world of God, His splendour and magnificence, are to be seen in the wise and the foolish, in the good and the bad, then one would think tolerantly and reverently of all mankind, knowing that it represents the messenger, as the messenger represents God. For no one has seen God at any time, but if there is anyone who represents God, it is the man who speaks His word. God is seen in the one who glorifies Him. But if our hearts are closed, even if we wait for a thousand years for the messenger to show himself, we shall never find him. For he who is always there has said, 'I am Alpha and Omega. I exist every moment. When you call me, I am there. Knock at the door, and I will answer you.' And those whose eyes are open do not need to go to a church and look at a picture or statue of the Lord. In the eyes of every infant, in the smile of every innocent child, they receive the blessing of Christ.

It only means changing one's outlook on life, and recognizing the divine in man. But man has ignored the divine spirit that manifests in humanity, and always prefers an idol, a painting, a picture, to the living God, who is constantly before him. For the sage, the seer, the saint, and the yogi who begin to see the master, and see him living, there is no place where he cannot be seen. Then everywhere the beloved master is ready to answer the cry of the soul coming from friend, father or teacher. And if we go a little further forward, we will find that the teacher speaks aloud, not only through living beings, but through nature. If the eyes and ears are open, the leaves of the trees become as pages of the Bible. If the heart is alive, the whole life becomes one single vision of His sublime beauty, speaking to us at every moment.

There is also the metaphysical side of this, for it is metaphysics which makes things distinct and intelligible to those whose

reason asks questions; man and the study of man is the study of the whole universe. As Ali says, 'Know thyself, if thou wouldst know God.' The secret of this is the knowledge that when man comes to earth, he is both soul and body, or as others would say, spirit and body, and that the action and reaction of soul and body produce what we call mind. And in the same way it is the action and reaction of God and His creation which have produced the Spirit of Guidance, and it is that spirit which is the soul of Christ.

One may understand this better by an example: in the case of an individual, the affairs of his everyday life bring him to a realization and understanding of what his actions have brought about, and it is this understanding of life which becomes his spirit of guidance which is called *Buddh* in Vedantic terms. Again, the Prime Minister of a country stands between his country and the world; his experience guides him to direct the affairs of the nation.

The medium between soul and body is called spirit. In the collective spirit it is that spirit of the messenger; and that is why the divine message brings an answer to every soul. It is not necessarily a law for the multitude or a religion for the world, but it brings an answer to every existing soul; and before the soul has expressed its cry it has reached the heart of the messenger.

Can anyone claim the message falsely? How could anyone ever dare to do such a thing! If it is already so difficult for the true messenger of God to stand steadfast in all the winds of destruction, how could falsehood ever withstand such a wind? Only the true messenger can stand firm whenever the message is given to the world. Truth alone is victorious.

There is great expectation all over the world just now that the teacher is coming again. And the expectation seems to be as if the teacher will come direct from the sky, and as if the whole world will accept and expect him, that the lawyers, scientists, materialists, and teachers of the different sects will fall on their knees before him when he comes. But if we only think of the coming of Jesus Christ in that humble garb, and how no one accepted him during his life! In his unassuming life, preaching to simple men, was he accepted as Christ, or is he not Christ today? If we look at the lives of different prophets and teachers, were they ever accepted at once? Mohammad was three times

chased out of Mecca, his own city, and had to flee in the night; and during the long life struggle of Moses, in the end he could only work because of the permission of Pharaoh. Krishna passed his whole life unknown, until, in the war described in the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna asked for his blessing and fought; it was only then that the moment of his message came.

In order to recognize a world-message, people in all ages have pointed out and predicted a messenger coming from this or that corner of the world. But can man ever authorize a messenger of God? Has he the power to authorize a man, and say: this will be the Messenger of God, or: this is the Messenger of God? God alone can send His messenger. Things are happening now such as have never happened before; people talking so freely about the messenger and the message. They discuss the most sacred things, things that if one really knew them would keep one's lips sealed. There could not be a worse degeneration of religion than this. Has the messenger ever been advertised? Can any man come forward in the world and make a claim of this kind, and also be true? No, the message is like a spring of water: it rises and falls and makes its way by itself, so that no one can make an imitation of it. If the message is true, it will always make its way to the end of the world. It is always so with the message of God.

But those who wait, may wait. It is their destiny to wait, and one cannot help them. They waited while Jesus Christ came and went, and they still wait and will wait for ever. And yet he has always come; to the individual, to the multitude, to the nation, to the race. He came, and spoke to the whole world; but did he come with drums and trumpets? No, he came in the humblest guise, in the most unassuming manner; as our brother, our servant, our friend, our equal. Man, because of his devotion, has called him Lord; but he said, 'Call me not good. I am like unto you.' It is not his absence that keeps man in ignorance; it is man's own closed eyes. The Master has always been present, but man knew him not.

iv

As to the instrument of the message, in reality the whole universe is an instrument, and every object and every being in it

is an instrument. Through whichever instrument He chooses, God gives His message. There is a saying of Jelal-ud-Din Rumi, 'Fire, water, air, and earth are God's servants, and whenever He wishes them to work for Him, they are ready to obey his command.' If the elements are the obedient servants of God, cannot man be a greater and better instrument?

In point of fact God Himself is the messenger. In the aspect of God He is God, but, in the form of the messenger, He is the messenger. The tide of the sea surges, and when the sea has that motion it is called tide, but in reality the tide is the sea itself.

It is not solid wood that can become a flute, but the empty reed. It is the perfection of that passiveness in the heart of the messenger which gives scope for the message from above; for the messenger is the reed, the instrument. The difference between his life and the life of the average man is that the latter is full of self. It is the blessed soul whose heart is empty of self, who is filled with the light of God.

The messenger has five aspects to his being: the divine, the ideal, the prophet, the message-bearer, and the teacher. Four of these aspects have already been mentioned, so there remains only the last, which is the aspect of the teacher.

The claim of Risalat in man's lifetime is a great burden, heavier than earth and larger than heaven. It is the fulfilment of the message which must identify his name with the Spirit of Guidance. Man, however great, should never claim perfection, for the limitation of his external being limits him in the eyes of men. The claimant of Christhood, living on earth, must be searched by numberless searchlights constantly falling upon him. Most men can only see the limitations of his human life, and can never probe the heights of his divinity; comparatively few can do this.

The claim of Christhood seemed to the people too great for Jesus; that is why he was crucified by the intolerant world. Christ was not crucified because the people of his time were unevolved, but because it is always difficult to live among people above whose standard of goodness one has risen. If Christ appeared today with the claim of Christhood, even today he would be crucified. Christ cannot be without the cross, nor can the cross be without Christ. Christ and cross both stand together.

What is asked of a messenger is to be as fine as a silken thread, that he may tune his lute as high as he chooses; and yet to be as strong as the gut string, so that he may endure the wear and tear of life in the world. To be so tender as to respond to every call for sympathy, and to be so firm as to bear all things. To be in the world and yet not of the world. To live and not to live, for the Lord God alone lives.

What does the prophet bring? Does he bring new doctrines, new teachings, and new laws? He does, and yet he does not; for there is nothing new under the sun, and it is ever the same law which he comes to fulfil. When the need is there, the prophet cries aloud that which has always been whispered gently by the lips of the wise of all ages. Beyond and above the words, he brings the light which clears things, making them simple and as if they had always been known to the soul on earth; he brings life, revivifying the hearts and souls which otherwise are like dry bones in the grave of the human body. Yes, the prophet brings a religion, but that is not all: what he really brings to earth is the living God, who is otherwise hidden in the heavens.

And who is the Master? He is seen by all, and yet not really seen. He is known to many, and yet recognized by few. He speaks to all; yet his silence quickens every soul. Most attached is he, and yet detached; most interested, and yet indifferent. Sad of disposition, and yet most joyful; poor as man can be, and yet so rich. King in his soul, he yet walks with the bowl of the beggar in his hand from door to door. Warning of danger and consoling the broken-hearted; comrade of the youthful and friend of the aged. Master of life within and without, yet the servant of all. Such is the being of the Master. He is man in the sight of man, but God in the Being of God.

v

The message is the answer to the cry of individual and collective souls. The voice of God is speaking all the time, but no one listens; therefore God has manifested as man, that He might speak with a yet louder voice. But even then man does not listen. In the time of Christ the inspiration was there, the voice was there and the divine power; but how few were those who listened

and understood! It has always been so, and it always will be so. It is no wonder that Jesus had so few disciples, and even among them perhaps not one who had a true understanding of the Master. At the hour when Mohammad was passing away, when hundreds of his disciples were there, he pointed out one and said, 'I am wisdom and Ali is the door.' Great perplexity has arisen as to why this was so when the Master had the power to make everyone understand. But it was not meant to be so. Each has his own puzzle to solve. How uninteresting the world would be if all men were perfect; it would be like a piano in which all the notes were the same.

Whenever the spirit of God has come forth in its true form, the world has been against it. Why has this been so? It is because man has two sides to his nature, one false and the other real; and before the true messenger can penetrate to the reality of a man's being, he first touches the false or unreal part, and that revolts. And in the case of a man who does not revolt, even though the light reaches him his heart is covered, and it only touches the cover. Such a man is attracted, yet he doubts.

There are egos who are not willing and ready to accept all that attracts them. The more something attracts them, the more they rebel against it, suspecting it of being a temptation. Even if they see the reality of something that attracts them they consider the tendency of being attracted to be a weakness. There are egos who refuse to accept what their friend has accepted, and refuse to admire fully what that friend has admired. And even if they really wish to accept something that their friend has accepted, they will refuse to do so. For the tendency of that ego is to swim against the tide; it is the strength of that ego. Against this strength Christ has said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' It is mostly this same strength of mentality which has stood out against the messengers, building a fortified wall between the messenger and the souls who long for guidance. There are, however, those who are like lighted candles: they can light other candles and they can inspire others. But the other candles must be of wax; if they are of steel they cannot be lighted. The heart must be like wax; it must melt; if it is like steel, it cannot be illumined.

It is easier for the idealistic devotee to enhance his ideal when the ideal is not present; its presence often hinders the devotee in strengthening his ideal. For the ideal which grows and expands in the imagination of the devotee will always excel the ideal personality who is living the life of limitations on earth.

The souls who believe in a messenger because of his miraculous powers, or because they see the belief of his adherents, are followers; but the souls to whom the presence of the messenger is the evidence, to whom his words are a proof, and to whom their own belief is a conviction, are the foundation of the world's new temple.

His disciples are to the teacher as all the objects of heaven and earth are to the sun. Some are responsive to the light of the sun, and become hot or cold. Some grow and thrive, and bring out their colour and fragrance. Some close their eyes or become blind in the light of the sun. Some begin their life's activities as the sun rises; and some await the rising of the sun during the dark, depressing night in pain and suffering. Some look forward to the clearing of the clouds and the smiles of the sun. But the stars and planets in heaven are still more responsive and more closely connected with the special current of the sun; and so are the disciples who are close to the spirit of the teacher. They are his special apostles; they give out the light of the sun that is reflected in their heart.

There are three stages of action which the sincere followers of the message have to pass through, and the difficulty is that each stage has a tendency to hinder them from going on to the next stage. And the reason is that there is no end of interest and happiness at every stage that they have to go through in their lives. Another reason is that one stage is quite different from another, and therefore each stage has a kind of contrary action to the previous one.

These three stages may be called receiving the message, assimilating the message, and representing the message. For a sincere mureed the first stage can be so interesting that he may think he can never have enough of it, the receiving of that endless knowledge; and the heart of the seeker after truth which is never full may receive it for ages and yet it is never enough. When

the receiver of the message is at that stage, then the activity of the further stages remains unaccomplished.

The next stage, which is the stage of assimilation, is most necessary, and very few can imagine how long it takes for the spirit to assimilate knowledge of truth. One assimilates it by the power of contemplation. It is by pondering over the subjects that one has heard, by practising the teachings in one's life, by looking at the world from the point of view which one has been taught, by observing one thing in its thousand different aspects, that one assimilates. Many people before assimilating the knowledge wish to reason about it, wish to discuss it, wish to justify it and see how it fits in with their own preconceived ideas. In this way they disturb the digestive fire of the spirit, for just as the mechanism of the body is always working to help to assimilate food, so the spirit is constantly working to assimilate all that one learns throughout life. Therefore it is a matter of patience, of taking life easily without troubling the mind too much over things, and of allowing the knowledge which one has received as a food of the spirit to have time to be assimilated. By trying to assimilate knowledge too soon, man loses his normal health; it is just like taking drugs to help to digest food, which is not beneficial in the end.

But the third process is also necessary, and those who care little for this stage, the one of representing, miss a great deal in life. A person who, alone, has seen something beautiful, who has heard something harmonious, who has tasted something delicious, who has smelt something fragrant, may have enjoyed it, but not completely. The complete joy is in sharing one's joy with others. For the selfish one who enjoys himself and does not care for others, whether he enjoys things of the earth or things of heaven, his enjoyment is not complete. So it is only in this third stage that the following of the message is fulfilled, when a soul has heard and has pondered upon it, and has passed the same blessing on to others.

THE SUFI MESSAGE

THE WORD Message in itself conveys a different meaning from that of an intellectual philosophy. There are two ideas prevailing in the world: one is that man has evolved through years and centuries, and the other that, as Solomon has said, there is nothing new under the sun. And this explains to us that divine truth has always been and always will be the same. No one can improve upon it, and nobody can give a new message. It is the divine tongue which at times has spoken louder, and at times in a whisper, and it is the consciousness of the divine spirit which made Christ say, 'I am Alpha and Omega.' Those who limit Christ to the historic period of the life of the Prophet of Nazareth surely limit the message, in spite of his open declaration that he is the first and the last.

According to this point of view, the message has been given each time in a form suited to the evolution of the people in that particular age. Man divides, God unites, humanity. Man takes pleasure in thinking and feeling, 'I am different from you; you are different from me' in nationality, race, creed, or religion. In animals this feeling is still more pronounced. But as man evolves, his tendency is to unite, to become one. Did Jesus Christ come to form an exclusive community called Christian, or Buddha to found a creed called Buddhism? Or was it Mohammad's ideal to form a community called Mohamman? On the contrary, the Prophet warned his disciples that they should not attach his name to his message, but that it should be called Islam, the Message of Peace.

Not one of the masters came with the thought of forming an exclusive community, or to give a certain religion. They came with the same message from one and the same God. Whether the message was in Sanskrit, Hebrew, Zend, or Arabic, it had one and the same meaning. The difference between religions is external; their inner meaning is one.

If man had only understood this, the world would have

avoided many wars, for war has mostly been caused by religion, religion which was given to the world to establish peace and harmony. What a pity that war and disaster should come from the same source!

The Sufi message is a reminder to humanity, not to any one nation but to all; not to one but to every creed. It is a reminder of the truth taught by all the great teachers of humanity: that God, truth, religion are one, and that duality is only a delusion of human nature. Think then what a great task lies before this message, at this time when nation is against nation and race against race; when the followers of one religion are constantly working against the followers of another religion, and class against class; competition, hate, and prejudice prevailing everywhere. What will be the outcome of it all? What can poison produce? Not nectar; only poison. The message is not for one nation, race, or community; it is for the whole of humanity. Its one and only object is to bring about a better understanding between the divided sections of humanity by awakening their consciousness to the fact that humanity is one family. If one person in the family is ill or unhappy, this must certainly cause unhappiness to the whole family. Yet even this is not the most appropriate simile. Humanity is one body, the whole of life being one in its source and in its goal, its beginning and its end. No scientist will deny this. And if part of the body is in pain, sooner or later the whole body is affected; if our finger aches, our body is not free from pain. Thus no nation, race, or community can be considered as a separate part of humanity.

Today in education, in politics, in all directions of life, there seems to be an individualistic view, but where will such a tendency end, where will it lead humanity? If each one thinks he must get the better of another, where will be the harmony and peace for which all are longing, no matter to what race or religion they belong?

No doubt this condition has been brought about by a long-continued materialism and commercialism, which have taught every soul the spirit of competition and rivalry, the whole life of each being absorbed in guarding his own interests, and in trying to take the best in life for himself. Life is one continual

battle, and only one thing can ease this battle: consideration for others, reciprocity, unselfishness instead of selfishness.

With selfishness as the central theme, the world's progress will never lead to the soul's desire and aim. It must culminate in destruction. At one time the call was to guard self-interest; now the moment has come for mankind to be given a message of understanding and consideration for one another, since individual peace and happiness depend upon the peace and happiness of the whole of humanity.

What is missing in modern education, in art and science, in social, political, and commercial life, is the ideal, the ideal which is the secret of heaven and earth, the mystery hidden behind both man and God. With all he possesses in the objective world, man is poor in the absence of the ideal, and it is this poverty which creates irritation, conflicts, and disagreements, thereby causing wars and disasters of all kinds. Man's greatest need today is for the exploration of the human personality, in order to find there the latent inspiration and power upon which to build the whole structure of his life. For life means not only to live, but to ennoble oneself and reach that perfection which is the innate yearning of the soul. The solution to the problem of the day is the awakening of the consciousness of humanity to the divinity of man. The undertone of all religions is the realization of the one life which culminates in the thought of unity. It is towards raising humanity to this consciousness that the efforts of the Sufi Movement are directed.

Very often people divide the esoteric or inner part of life from the exoteric or outer form of religion. But although to divide them in a conception is possible, to divide them in reality is like separating the head from the body. As the head linked with the body makes the form complete, so religion together with inner life makes the spiritual ideal perfect. Nevertheless, the thoughtful and wise of all ages, with their philosophical minds, with their scientific tendencies, with their intellectual strife, often thought of separating religion from the inner life. But when they are separated, it is just like bread without butter, it is like milk without sugar, it is like food without salt. And the reason why this tendency often appears, especially among thoughtful people,

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is a natural one. When life leaves the body, even those who loved the one who died begin to think that they should bury the body as soon as possible; for the one whom they loved is gone from it, and what is left is only a corpse. And so when the inner life, which is just like the breath in the body of religion, departs from it, then the religion becomes like a dead body; then even its most faithful adherents begin to feel that it is a corpse.

In all ages and in all periods of history we notice that there has been a limit to the number of years that a religion has lasted. During that time the religion prospered and was of benefit to humanity. Why? Because it had breath, it had spirituality. But when that inner life departed it was left like a corpse. Still the faithful kept to it, but those with intelligence could not do so any longer.

As the rain falls year after year, and gives new life and new sustenance to the earth, so it became necessary that the new message of spiritual upliftment should come. But whenever it has come, people have fought against it, not knowing that it is the same truth, the same breath, the same soul of religion that had come again, not understanding the secret of religion. The rainfall of last year is not different from this year's; it is the same water, the same sustenance, the same energy. As vapour it rises and as raindrops it falls. It has always been the same message, only brought in different bottles and with new labels.

The most important philosophical point in religion is that besides all the moral principles and ethics that religion teaches, there is the central theme which can be traced as the nature of life, of spirit, and that is to make the perfect Being intelligible to the limited mind of man. To do this the ideal of God is preached. The central theme of every religion the messengers have brought was the God-ideal, and every one of them has tried his best to make a picture of that ideal, in order that the people of that time could easily grasp it and benefit by it, to fulfil the purpose of spiritual perfection.

It is true that the different pictures that the great prophets of the world have drawn very often differ from one another. But one finds that in order to make one clear photograph there have to be many different processes; a platé has to be made and

has to be developed, and then the picture is transferred to paper; then it is touched up, and all these different processes go to make a photograph complete.

And so it has been with those who have tried to make a picture of the Deity, a picture which cannot be made fully, because it is beyond man's power to do so. They have done their best; artists have painted that picture. When three artists paint the portrait of one person, the three pictures are different. They only differ because they are different artists; and so it is with the prophets, though all have one and the same motive: to make that picture intelligible to the limited mind of man, who only knows what he knows about himself and about his fellow-man. Thus the best picture he can make of God is that of a man. In the ancient religions of the East, God was first pictured in the form of man; then in the pictures of later days man was pictured as God. After that came a reformation by which man and God were separated in order to break with the confusion caused by these two opposite ideas, that God was man and man was God.

But the present message, which comes from the need of humanity, is that God is in man and man in God, and yet God is God and man is man.

SUFISM

i

ONE OF THE words to which the term 'Sufi' is related is the Greek *Sophia*, meaning wisdom; wisdom which is a knowledge acquired both from within and without. Therefore Sufism is not only an intuitive knowledge nor is it only a knowledge acquired from the outer life of the world. Sufism in itself is not a religion nor even a cult with a distinct or definite doctrine. No better explanation of Sufism can be given than by saying that any person who has a knowledge of both outer and inner life is a Sufi. Thus there has never in any period of the world's history been a founder of Sufism, yet Sufism has existed at all times.

As far as we can find out there have been esoteric schools since the time of Abraham; and many of them may be called Sufi schools. The Sufi schools of Arabia absorbed Arabic culture and were largely metaphysical; the Sufi schools of Persia developed more the literary aspect, and the Sufi schools of India developed the meditative faculty; but the truth and the ideal have remained the same, as the central theme of Sufism, in all these schools. Several exist even now, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that there are millions of souls, the followers of different religions, who are benefited by the wisdom of these schools.

No doubt every school has its own method, and every method has been coloured by the personality of its leader. There are the schools of dervishes and there are the schools of faqirs; and there are the schools of the Salik, who teach moral culture together with philosophy.

The present-day Sufi Movement is a movement of members of different nations and races united together in the ideal of wisdom; they believe that wisdom does not belong to any particular religion or race, but to the human race as a whole. It is a divine property which mankind has inherited; and it is in this realization that the Sufis, in spite of belonging to different nationalities, races, beliefs, and faiths, still unite and work for humanity in the ideal of wisdom.

Another word which has a connotation with Sufism is the Arabic word *Sáf*, which means pure. All the tragedy in life comes from the absence of purity, and as pure really means to be natural, the absence of purity means to be far from being natural. Pure water means that no other substance is mixed with it, in other words that it is in its natural condition. Sufism, therefore, is the process of making life natural. One may call this process a religion, a philosophy, a science, or a mysticism, whatever one wishes. All the religious teachers who have come to this world at different times have brought this process of purification in the form of a religion. It is not a new process, it is the same ancient process that the wise of all ages have bestowed. If anything new is given in it, it is the form in which it is presented to suit a certain period of the world.

One may perhaps think that by spirituality it is meant that one must learn something which one did not know before, that one must become extraordinarily good, that one must acquire some unusual powers or have experiences of a supernatural kind. None of these things does Sufism promise, although on the path of the Sufi nothing is too wonderful for him. All these things, and even more, are within his reach; yet that is not the Sufi's aim. By the process of Sufism one realizes one's own nature, one's true nature, and thereby one realizes human nature. And by the study of human nature one realizes the nature of life in general. All failures, disappointments, and sorrows are caused by the lack of this realization; all success, happiness, and peace are acquired by the realization of one's own nature. In short, Sufism means to know one's true being, to know the purpose of one's life, and to know how to accomplish that purpose. Through disappointment many say, 'I shall probably never be successful in my life', not realizing the fact that man is born to do what he longs to do, and that success is natural while failure is unnatural. When man is himself, the whole world is his own; when he is not himself, then even this self does not belong to him. Then he does not know what he is, where he is, nor why he is here on earth; then he is less useful to himself and to others than a rock.

It is in self-realization that the mystery of the whole of life is centred. It is the remedy of all maladies; it is the secret of success

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in all walks of life; it is a religion and more than a religion. And at this time when the whole world is upset, the Sufi message conveys to the world the divine message. What is wrong with humanity today is that it is not itself, and all the misery of the world is caused by this. Therefore nothing can answer the need of humanity save this process of the sages and the wise of all ages, which leads souls to self-realization.

ii

Very often the Sufi message, in its form of beneficence, is taken to be what is nowadays called pacifism, and those who do not favour the idea of pacifism say that it means peace at any price. Sufism does not teach that. Sufism does not mean goodness, kindness, or piety; Sufism means wisdom. All things in life are materials for wisdom to work with, and wisdom cannot be restricted to any principles. Among Sufis there have been great souls who were kings, and others who were in the position of beggars, saints, workmen, commanders, generals, businessmen, statesmen, or prophets; and in all ages the Sufis have practised Sufism in all walks of life. This shows that no one can point out a particular belief or tenet and say it is a Sufi doctrine.

In music there are two things: sound and notes. Notes indicate the degree of the sound, but sound can be all notes, no note in particular. So it is with Sufism: it is all beliefs and no belief in particular. There is no action which the Sufi calls right or wrong, for every action can become right and can also become wrong. It depends upon the use or abuse of the action, its fitness or unfitness. Right or wrong depends upon the attitude and the situation, not on the action. This naturally gives the Sufi tolerance towards others and makes him ready to forgive them, and he is unwilling to form an opinion about the action of another person. This attitude keeps the Sufi far removed from saying that peace is good or war is good. The Sufi will prefer to say that war is good at the time of war, and that peace is good at the time of peace.

But, if all things are right in their proper place, what then has Sufism to do in life? The principal mission of Sufism is to dig the soil under which the light of the soul has become buried. It is

the same as the teaching of Christ, who has said that no one should hide his light under a bushel, and also that one should raise one's light on high.

The condition of the world today is such that humanity has become abnormal. Man is not only scared of badness but also of goodness; man not only dreads war but also peace; he is not only tired of enmity but also of friendship; he not only suspects his adversary but even his own brother. It seems as if the mind of the world is not only tired but ill: as if humanity has had a nervous breakdown. Individually or collectively man does not know his life's purpose or goal. The Sufi message warns humanity to get to know life better and to achieve freedom in life; it warns man to accomplish what he considers good, just, and desirable; it warns him before every action to note its consequences by studying the situation, his own attitude, and the method he should adopt.

Sufism not only guides those who are religious, mystical, or visionary, but the Sufi message gives to the world the religion of the day: and that is to make one's life a religion, to turn one's occupation or profession into a religion, to make one's ideal a religious ideal. The object of Sufism is the uniting of life and religion, which so far seem to have been kept apart. When a man goes to church once a week, and devotes all the other days of the week to his business, how can he benefit by religion? Therefore the teaching of Sufism is to transform everyday life into a religion, so that every action may bear some spiritual fruit.

The method of world reform which various institutions have adopted today is not the method of the Sufi Movement. Sufis believe that if evil is contagious, goodness must be even more so. The depth of every soul is good; every soul is searching for good, and by the effort of individuals who wish to do good in the world much can be done, even more than a materialistic institution can achieve. No doubt for the general good there are political and commercial problems to be solved; but that must not debar individuals from progress, for it is the individual progress through the spiritual path which alone can bring about the desired condition in the world.

THE SPIRIT OF SUFISM

SUFISM CANNOT be called a religion because it is free from principles, distinctions, and differences, the very basis on which religions are founded; neither can it be called a philosophy, because philosophy teaches the study of nature in its qualities and varieties, whereas Sufism teaches unity. Therefore it may best be called simply the training of the view.

The word 'Sufi' implies purity, and purity contains two qualities. Pure means unmixed with any other element, or in other words that which exists in its own element, unalloyed and unstained. The second quality of purity is great adaptability.

Such is also the nature of the Sufi. In the first place he purifies himself by keeping the vision of God constantly before him, not allowing the stains of earthly differences and distinctions to be mirrored upon his heart, nor good or bad society, nor intercourse with high- or low-class people. Nor can a faith or a belief ever interfere with his purity.

The Sufi shows his universal brotherhood in his adaptability. Among Christians he is a Christian, among Jews he is a Jew, among Muslims he is a Muslim, among Hindus he is a Hindu; for he is one with all, and thus all are with him. He allows everyone to join in his brotherhood, and in the same way he allows himself to join in any other. He never questions, 'What is your creed or nation or religion?' Neither does he ask, 'What are your teachings or principles?'

Call him brother, he answers brother, and he means it. With regard to principles, the Sufi has none, for sweetness may be beneficial to one and harmful to another. Thus it is with all principles, good and bad, kind and cruel. If we ask a soldier to be merciful during the battle, he will at once be defeated. This shows that everyone has his own principle for each action or situation. One person may believe in a certain principle, while another may hold quite a contrary opinion. What one person may call good another may call bad. One says a certain path is the right one,

while another takes the opposite direction. The Sufi, instead of becoming centred in his likes and dislikes and limiting himself to a certain faith or belief, reasoning out right and wrong, focuses his view on that of another, and thus sees the reason why he believes and why he does not, why something is right to one and wrong to another. He also understands why that which is called good by some people may be called bad by others, and thus by keeping his point of view under control he arrives at the true height of wisdom.

The Sufi is a true Christian in regard to charity, brotherhood, and the healing of his own soul as well as the soul of another. He is not bigoted in his adherence to a particular Church, or in forsaking the other masters and their followers who came before and after Christ, but his at-one-ment with the Christ and his appreciation and practice of his truth are as keen as those of a true Christian.

It is in the lives of the dervishes that one sees the real picture of the life and teachings of Christ, especially in their sharing of their roof and food with another, whether friend or foe. Even up to the present day they continue in their pure ways. The Sufi is a Catholic in that he produces the picture of his ideal of devotion in his soul, and he is a Protestant in giving up the ceremonials of the cult.

The Sufi is a Brahmin, for the word Brahmin means 'the knower of Brahma', of God, the only Being. His religion lies in believing in no other existence save that of God, which the Brahmin calls *Advaita*. The Sufi has as many grades of spiritual evolution to pass through as the Yogi. There is very little difference to be found even in their practices, the difference lying chiefly in the names. No doubt the Sufi chooses a normal life in preference to that of an ascetic, yet he does not limit himself to either the former or the latter. The Sufi considers the teachings of the Avatars to be true manifestations of the divine wisdom, and he has a perfect insight into the subtle knowledge of the Vedanta. The Sufi appreciates the Jain conception of harmlessness, and considers that kindness is the true path of purity and perfection. In the past Sufis have led lives of renunciation, and in the East most of them still lead a very harmless life, just like the Jains.

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The Sufi is a true Christian in regard to charity, brotherhood, and the healing of his own soul as well as the soul of another. He is not bigoted in his adherence to a particular Church, or in forsaking the other masters and their followers who came before and after Christ, but his at-one-ment with the Christ and his appreciation and practice of his truth are as keen as those of a true Christian.

It is in the lives of the dervishes that one sees the real picture of the life and teachings of Christ, especially in their sharing of their roof and food with another, whether friend or foe. Even up to the present day they continue in their pure ways. The Sufi is a Catholic in that he produces the picture of his ideal of devotion in his soul, and he is a Protestant in giving up the ceremonials of the cult.

The Sufi is a Brahmin, for the word Brahmin means 'the knower of Brahma', of God, the only Being. His religion lies in believing in no other existence save that of God, which the Brahmin calls *Advaita*. The Sufi has as many grades of spiritual evolution to pass through as the Yogi. There is very little difference to be found even in their practices, the difference lying chiefly in the names. No doubt the Sufi chooses a normal life in preference to that of an ascetic, yet he does not limit himself to either the former or the latter. The Sufi considers the teachings of the Avatars to be true manifestations of the divine wisdom, and he has a perfect insight into the subtle knowledge of the Vedanta. The Sufi appreciates the Jain conception of harmlessness, and considers that kindness is the true path of purity and perfection. In the past Sufis have led lives of renunciation, and in the East most of them still lead a very harmless life, just like the Jains.

The Sufi is a Buddhist, for he reasons at every step forward on his spiritual journey. The teachings of the Sufi are very similar to the Buddhist teachings; in fact it is the Sufi who unites the believers and the unbelievers in the God-ideal and in the knowledge of unity.

The Sufi is a Muslim, not because many Muslims happen to be Sufis, nor because of his use of Muslim phraseology, but because in his life he proves what a true Muslim ought to be. Muslims have such a sense of devotion that no matter how great a sinner or how cruel a man may be, the name of Allah or Mohammad at once reduces him to tears. Similarly the practices of Sufism first develop the heart qualities which are often overlooked by many other mystics. It is the purification of the heart which makes it receptive to the illumination of the soul. The Sufis are the ones who read the Qur'an from every experience in life, and see and recognize Mohammad's face in each atom of the manifestation.

The Sufi, like a Zoroastrian or a Parsi, looks at the sun and bows before the air, fire, water, and earth, recognizing the immanence of God in His manifestation, taking the sun and moon as the signs of God. The Sufi interprets fire as the symbol of wisdom, and the sun as the celestial light. He not only bows before them but also absorbs their quality. As a rule in the presence of dervishes a wood fire and incense burn continually.

The Sufi is an Israelite, especially in his study and mastery of the different names of God. The miraculous powers of Moses can also be found in the lives of the Sufis both past and present. In fact the Sufi is the master of the Hebrew mysticism; the divine voice heard by Moses on Mount Sinai in the past is audible to many a Sufi today.

THE SUFI'S AIM IN LIFE

THE AIM OF every individual is the same in the end, though it may be different in the beginning. In the end man arrives at a stage when his object becomes the object of his soul, and until he has reached this stage he has several objects before him. But the accomplishment of any motive concerning these objects is not satisfactory for long.

According to the philosophy of the Hindus there are four motives in life: one motive is what they call *Dharma*, which means duty. Some consider that virtue lies in performing their duty, and when they perform the particular duty which is before them, they feel that this is the due accomplishment of their life. But when one duty is accomplished another is waiting; life is full of duties. When a girl is young she says that her mother or her father is her duty; then a time comes when the pleasure of her husband becomes her duty, and as time goes on hers will be the duty of the mother towards her children. But even there it does not end; afterwards comes the duty of the grandmother. There is no phase of life in which duty expires; it begins in one form and goes on in another.

For the one who considers duty a virtue, it is a virtue; but for the one who considers it a captivity or a pain, it is a pain. That which becomes a virtue and a privilege for one, may become a crime for another.

In Sanskrit the second motive is called *Artha*, which means the acquisition or collecting of wealth. It begins with the need for daily bread, and it culminates in millions, but it never ends. The more one has, the less one feels one has. The attainment of wealth is never fully satisfying; there is always a lack somewhere.

A third motive is *Kama* which is pleasure, love, or attachment. For this one neglects things and makes sacrifices; it is the main object in life. Yet pleasure is such that the desire for it is never satisfied, and the more one experiences the pleasures of this

earth, the more one wants to experience them. This pleasure is not lasting and it usually costs more than it is worth.

The fourth desire, *Moksha*, is of a different character. It is the desire for some reward in the hereafter, for the attainment of paradise. It is a desire for some kind of gain or happiness, some bliss or exaltation which one does not know but which one hopes to experience one day. But even that desire, if it were granted, would not be fully satisfactory.

From this the Sufi deduces that in all these four different things that humanity is pursuing there is no stage where he can say it is finished; there is no end to it. Therefore his effort is to rise above these four desires, and the moment he rises above them there remains only one desire, and this is the search for truth. Not only a Sufi, but every person who is disappointed in this world or who has been through disillusionment, suffering, or torture, has only this desire.

The seeker after truth goes out into the world and he finds innumerable different sects and religions. He does not know where to start. Then he desires to find out what is hidden under these sects, these different religions, and he begins to seek the object which he wishes to gain through wisdom. Wisdom is a veil over truth, and even wisdom cannot be called truth. God alone is truth, and it is truth that is God. And truth can neither be studied nor taught nor learned; it is to be touched, it is to be realized; and it can be realized by the unfoldment of the heart.

For a Sufi belief in God is not sufficient. A belief which has no foundation is just like a scrap of paper floating in the air: when there is no breeze it will fall to the ground. How many in this world hold to their belief when they are exposed to a strong influence from someone who does not believe? If belief is something which can be erased, then of what use can this belief be? In point of fact belief is not enough; the next step one takes after belief is the love of God. In the one who only believes in God, God is not living; it is in the one who loves God that God is living. But even that is not sufficient, for what is human love? The human being is limited, and so his love is limited. The more one has seen of the world, the more one knows human nature, the better one knows the falseness of human love. How can one

who cannot be constant in his feeling for a human being who is near him, be true in his love for the Beloved whom he has never seen? Therefore even what man calls the love of God is not sufficient; what is necessary is the knowledge of God, for it is the knowledge of God which gives the love for God, and it is the knowledge and the love of God which give a perfect belief in God. No one can have knowledge of God and have no love for God, but one can have a love for God and no knowledge of God. No one can have knowledge of God and love for God, and yet no belief in God; but it is possible to have a belief in God but no love for God.

Thus for a Sufi these three stages are necessary for the attainment of his aim in life. In the first place by his belief he attains respect for the beliefs of others. A complete believer is he who not only believes himself, but respects the beliefs of others. For a Sufi there exists no one in this world, neither heathen nor pagan, who is to be despised, for he believes in that God who is not the God of one chosen sect but the God of the whole world. He does not believe in a God of one nation, but in the God of all nations. To him God is in all the different houses where people worship Him. Even if they stand in the street and pray, it makes no difference to him. The holy place is wherever He is worshipped. The Sufi leaves sectarianism to the sects. He has respect for all; he is not prejudiced against any and he does not despise any; he feels sympathy for all.

The Sufi is convinced that the one who does not love his fellow-man cannot love God. He believes in what Christ has said, that one should love one's neighbour, even one's enemy. And what does this mean? It does not mean that we should love our enemy because we consider him as such, but because we are related to him in God. If humanity had believed in this simple and most valuable teaching, these wars would not have taken place. It is not for political or commercial people to make humanity understand this; it is for the Church, for religion; but as long as the religious authorities establish different sects and divide religion and look upon each other with prejudice, this truth taught by Christ will not be practised.

We should realize that every change that takes place in the

multitude in time also takes place among individuals. For instance, if two nations are opposed to one another, working to hurt one another, what will be the consequence? The result will be that in those nations there will be parties which will oppose each other; and then the same opposition will arise between families, and in time this spirit will be found in a family of two people—two people living in one house and each in conflict with the other. And it will culminate in every individual being in conflict with himself.

Where does the Sufi learn this? He learns it from the wisdom of God. The man who does not recognize God in His creation will never recognize the God in heaven. It was all right for those simple believers in God and religion who went quietly to church and said their prayers, and came back with a feeling of exaltation and did not meddle with the world. But now conditions have changed, and a great battle is going on between truth and life. The illusion of matter lies in the fullness of the part it is performing in life, that is why the battle that life is fighting with truth is greater than any that religion has ever had to fight. On one side science cries: matter, matter, matter! On the other side politics are crying: self, self, self-interest! The religions are crying: sect, sect, sect! And where can man stop to think of the ultimate truth, which is the only thing that the soul seeks?

The Sufi message, therefore, is not for a particular race, nation, or Church. It is a call to unite in wisdom. The Sufi Movement is a group of people belonging to different religions, who have not left their religions but who have learned to understand them better, and their love is the love for God and humanity instead of for a particular section of it. The principal work that the Sufi Movement has to accomplish is to bring about a better understanding between East and West, and between the nations and races of this world. And the note that the Sufi message is striking at the present time is the note which sounds the divinity of the human soul. If there is any moral principle that the Sufi Movement brings, it is this: that the whole of humanity is like one body, and any organ of that body which is hurt or troubled can indirectly cause damage to the whole body. And as the health of the whole body depends upon the health of each part, so the

health of the whole of humanity depends upon the health of every nation. Besides, to those who are awakening and feel that now is the moment to learn more of the deeper side of life, of truth, the Sufi Movement extends a helping hand without asking to what religion, sect, or dogma they belong. The knowledge of the Sufi is helpful to every person, not only in living his life rightly but in regard to his own religion. The Sufi Movement does not call a man away from his belief or Church: it calls him to live it. In short, it is a movement intended by God to unite humanity in brotherhood and in wisdom.

THE IDEAL OF THE SUFI

SUFISM HAS NEVER in any period of history been a religion or a certain creed; it has always been considered as the essence of every religion and of all religions. Thus when it was given to the world of Islam, it was presented by the great Sufis in Muslim terminology. Whenever the Sufi ideal was presented to a certain people, it was presented in such a way as to make it intelligible to those people.

Sufism is neither a dogma nor a doctrine; it is neither a form nor a ceremony. This does not mean that a Sufi does not make use of a doctrine, a dogma, a ritual, or a ceremony. He makes use of them while at the same time remaining free from them. It is neither dogma, doctrine, ceremony, nor ritual that makes a Sufi a Sufi; it is wisdom alone which is his property, and all other things he uses for his convenience, his benefit. But a Sufi is not against any creed, doctrine, dogma, ritual, or ceremony; he is not even against the man who has no belief in God or spirit, For a Sufi has a great respect for man.

The God of the Sufi is the God of all, and He is his very being. The Christ is his ideal, and therefore no one's saviour is foreign to a Sufi, for he sees the beauty and greatness and perfection of a human being in everyone's ideal. He does not mind if that ideal is called Buddha by one person, Krishna by another, and Mohammad by yet another; names make little difference to the Sufi; his ideal does not belong to history or tradition, but to the sacred feelings of his heart. So how can he compare the ideals of the different creeds which dispute in vain about historical and traditional points of view, without making any impression upon each other? The ideal of the Lord, the Lord in the form of man, is the outcome of his heart's deepest devotion. One cannot dispute and argue about an ideal like this, nor can it be compared; so the Sufi believes that the less spoken about this subject the better, for he respects that one ideal which people call by different names.

Life, human nature, the nature around us, are all a revelation to a Sufi. This does not mean that a Sufi has no respect for the sacred scriptures revered by humanity. On the contrary, he holds them as sacred as do the followers of those scriptures; but the Sufi says that all scriptures are only different interpretations of that one scripture which is constantly before us like an open book—if we could only read and understand it.

The Sufi's object of worship is beauty. Not only beauty in form and line and colour, but beauty in all its aspects, from gross to fine.

What is the moral of the Sufi? Every religion, every creed, has certain moral teachings: that this particular principle is right, and that particular principle is wrong. No principle or action is in itself labelled by a Sufi as being either; it is its application which makes it right or wrong. The light which guides the Sufi on the path is his own conscience, and harmony is the justification which guides him onward step by step to his idealized goal. To harmonize with oneself is not sufficient; one must also harmonize with others in thought, speech, and action; that is the attitude of the Sufi.

The highest heaven of the Sufi is his own heart, and that which man generally knows as love, to a Sufi is God. Different people have thought of the Deity as the Creator, as the Judge, as the King, as the Supreme Being; but the Sufis call him the Beloved. Are there any dogmas, are there any rituals or ceremonies which may be called Sufi? There is nothing which restricts a Sufi, so that he can only be a Sufi by doing it. At the same time he is free to make use of any ritual, any ceremony that he thinks suited to his purpose.

How can the Sufi idea be made intelligible? Truth is that which can never be spoken in words, and that which can be spoken in words is not the truth. The ocean is the ocean; the ocean is not a few drops of water that one puts in a bottle. Just so truth cannot be limited by words: truth must be experienced, for it is natural that the knowledge of truth should come sooner or later. The disputes and discussions and arguments that people of different communities and creeds have with one another, do not interest the Sufi, for he sees the right in all things, and the wrong of certain things also.

There is no right that has no wrong side to it, nor is there any wrong that has not a right side to it. Very often a wrong turned inside out may appear right, and very often the right turned inside out may appear wrong. Therefore, as Christ said: judge not. The Sufi, if he judges at all, judges himself instead of others; his only concern is whether he himself is doing right. Nearly everyone judges others, but that is where people make a mistake. Few judge themselves, but the one who really does so has no time to judge others; there is too much to judge in himself, and this occupies him fully.

What the Sufi strives for is self-realization, and he arrives at this self-realization by means of his divine ideal, his God. By this he touches that truth which is the ultimate goal and the yearning of every soul. It is not only realization; it is a happiness which words cannot explain. It is that peace which is yearned for by every soul.

And how does he attain to it? By practising the presence of God; by realizing the oneness of the whole being; by continually holding, every moment of the day, consciously or subconsciously, the truth before his vision, in spite of the waves of illusion which arise incessantly, diverting the glance of man from the absolute truth. And no matter what may be the name of any sect, cult, or creed, so long as the souls are striving towards that object, to a Sufi they are all Sufis. The attitude of the Sufi to all the different religions is one of respect. His religion is the service of humanity, and his only attainment is the realization of truth.

THE SUFI MOVEMENT

SUFI THOUGHTS*

1. There is one God, the Eternal, the Only Being; none else exists save He.
2. There is one Master, the Guiding Spirit of all souls, who constantly leads his followers towards the light.
3. There is one Holy Book, the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader.
4. There is one Religion, the unswerving progress in the right direction towards the ideal, which fulfils the life's purpose of every soul.
5. There is one Law, the Law of Reciprocity, which can be observed by a selfless conscience together with a sense of awakened justice.
6. There is one Brotherhood, the human brotherhood, which unites the children of earth indiscriminately in the fatherhood of God.
7. There is one Moral Principle, the love which springs forth from self-denial, and blooms in deeds of beneficence.
8. There is one Object of Praise, the beauty which uplifts the heart of its worshipper through all aspects from the seen to the Unseen.
9. There is one Truth, the true knowledge of our being within and without, which is the essence of all wisdom.
10. There is one Path, the annihilation of the false ego in the real, which raises the mortal to immortality and in which resides all perfection.

THE OBJECTS OF THE SUFI MOVEMENT

1. To realize and spread the knowledge of unity, the religion of love and wisdom, so that the bias of faiths and beliefs may of itself fall away, the human heart may overflow with

* A commentary on the Sufi Thoughts is given in 'The Way of Illumination'. See *The Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, Vol. I, pp. 13-22.

- love, and all hatred caused by distinctions and differences may be rooted out.
2. To discover the light and power latent in man, the secret of all religion, the power of mysticism, and the essence of philosophy, without interfering with customs or belief.
 3. To help to bring the world's two opposite poles, East and West, closer together by the interchange of thought and ideals, that the Universal Brotherhood may form of itself, and man may see with man beyond the narrow national and racial boundaries.

THE SYMBOL OF THE SUFI MOVEMENT

The symbol of the Sufi Movement is a heart with wings. It explains that the heart is between soul and body, a medium between spirit and matter. When the soul is covered by its love for matter, it is naturally attracted to matter. This is the law of gravitation in abstract form, as it is said in the Bible, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' When man treasures the things of the earth, his heart is drawn to the earth. But the heart is subject not only to gravitation, but also to attraction from on high, and as in the Egyptian symbology wings are the symbol of spiritual progress, so the heart with wings expresses that the heart reaches upward towards heaven.

The crescent in the heart suggests the responsiveness of the heart. The crescent represents the responsiveness of the crescent moon to the light of the sun, for naturally it receives the light, which develops it until it becomes the full moon. The principal teaching of Sufism is that of learning to become a pupil, for it is the pupil who has a chance of becoming a teacher, and once a person considers that he is a teacher, his responsiveness is gone. The greatest teachers of the world have been the greatest pupils. It is this principle which is represented by the crescent: the crescent in the heart signifies that the heart which is responsive to the light of God is illuminated.

The explanation of the five-pointed star is that it represents the divine light. For when the light comes, it has five points; when it returns, it has four, the former suggesting creation, the latter annihilation. The five-pointed star also represents the natural

figure of man, though that with four points represents all forms of the world. But the form with five points is a development of the four-pointed form. For instance, if a man is standing with his legs joined and arms extended he makes a four-pointed form, but when a man shows activity—dancing, jumping, or moving one leg—he forms a five-pointed star, which represents a beginning of activity; in other words, a beginning of life.

It is the divine light which is represented by the five-pointed star, and the star is reflected in the heart which is responsive to the divine light. The heart which by its response has received the divine light is liberated, as the wings show. In brief, the meaning of the symbol is that the heart responsive to the light of God is liberated.

The Sufi message is the answer to the cry of humanity today; for it is in agreement with science, and it stands in defence of all religions. Our movement renders service to God and humanity, without any intention of forming an exclusive community, but of uniting in this service people of all the different religions. This movement, in its infancy, is only beginning its work, but its culmination will be a world movement. It is the world message, and the religion which will be the religion of the whole of humanity; a religion which does not distract the mind of any person from his own faith, but makes it more firm, more enlightened, more sympathetic to his own religion. It is a religion which teaches tolerance towards the faith of another; a religion which opens the heart to words of wisdom, no matter what direction they come from. This is not only a church, but a school in which to learn a lesson, the lesson of tolerance; to learn to revere all teachers and to respect all scriptures; a lesson which teaches us that we need not give up our own religion, but that we should embrace all religions in order to make the sacredness of religion perfect.

Was it not the wish of Krishna and of Buddha that wisdom in all its aspects should be understood, and was it not the desire of all those who have sacrificed their lives and energies in the service of man that humanity might be blessed and benefited by what they brought? Was it not the wish of Rama that all men in the world should come together in the understanding

that there is only one religion? It was the unification of religion that was the dream of Jesus and the inspiration of Mohammad, that was the object of Abraham and the desire of Moses. That which the prophets of the past could not bring about, owing to the difficult conditions in their time, is brought about today as the fulfilment of their prayers offered for thousands of years. The blessing which we receive in this service is the blessing of all the great teachers and prophets and illumined souls, all in one.

The Universal Worship, therefore, is the religion of the future, which brings to humanity the ideal of the unification of religion; the ideal of getting above the sectarianism and the limited outlook of communities and groups. And we must remember that no political or social efforts will be complete without holding fast the ideal of truth, of uniting in God. This is the only source in which ultimately humanity must unite.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SUFI MOVEMENT

The purpose of the Sufi Movement is to work towards unity. Its main object is to bring humanity, divided as it is into so many different sections, closer together in the deeper understanding of life. It is a preparation for a world service, chiefly in three ways. One way is the philosophical understanding of life; another is bringing about brotherhood among races, nations, and creeds; and the third way is the meeting of the world's greatest need, which is the religion of the day. Its work is to bring to the world that natural religion which has always been the religion of humanity: to respect one another's belief, scripture, and teacher. The Sufi message is the echo of the same divine message which has always come and will always come to enlighten humanity. It is not a new religion; it is the same message which is being given to humanity. It is the continuation of the same ancient religion which has always existed and will always exist, a religion which belongs to all teachers and all the scriptures. It is the continuation of all the great religions which have come at various times; and it is a unification of them all, which was the desire of all the prophets.

The Sufi Movement is constituted of those who have the same ideals of service to God and to humanity, and who have the ideal

of devoting a part or the whole of their life to the service of humanity in the path of truth. This Movement has its groups, the members of which belong to all the different religions, for all are welcome, Christians, Buddhists, Parsis, Muslims. No one's faith or belief is questioned; each can follow his own church, religion, creed; no one need believe in any special creed or dogma. There is freedom of thought. At the same time personal guidance is given on the path, in the problems of both outer life and inner life.

Those who belong to the esoteric school of the Sufi Movement, are given besides personal guidance, the studies which are entrusted only to those who are fitted to receive them. There are subtleties of ideas, of spiritual, moral, or philosophical ideas, which cannot be given to everyone at first, but they are given gradually to those who are serious enough to walk in the path of truth. But every seeker after truth must remember one thing: that the first step in the path of truth is to become true to oneself.

In the service of the Sufi Universal Worship all services—Christian, Muslim, Hebrew, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Hindu—are included. Therefore the blessing of Christ is given from the altar to the seeker for Jesus Christ's blessing; the one who seeks for the blessing of Moses, to him is given the blessing of Moses; for the one who seeks the benediction of Buddha there is the benediction of Buddha; but those who seek the blessing of all these great ones who have come at different times are blessed by all.

We do not interfere with anyone's ideal, nor with his devotion to his teacher; it would be as absurd as to think that a child should love another child's mother more than its own. And who has the right to compare and to place the great teachers or the scriptures? No one; it is in our heart's devotion to the ideal we adore that we can place our ideal; and it is our own concern; no one can interfere with it.

Some girls were playing one day, and each girl said in turn, 'My mother is best.' The others said, 'No, my mother is best.' And they were all arguing. But a girl among them who was wiser said, 'O, no; it is the mother who is adorable, whether it is your mother or my mother.' Does the Sufi Movement, therefore, interfere with anybody's devotion to his teacher? Never. But at

the same time, it invites souls to see the source and goal of all wisdom to be one, and it is in this truth that all the blessing that the soul is longing for will be bestowed.

On the altar are placed the scriptures of the religions mentioned above, and there are also candles representing all these religions. The different candles which are lighted mean our adherence and respect to all the different teachers, religions, and scriptures. They teach us that there is one light and many lamps. It is not the lamps which should first be taken to the mind; it is the light which should first be taken to heart.

It is this religion of unification which Jesus Christ came to teach; the teachings of Moses and the efforts of Mohammad were all towards this one object. All that Buddha has taught, all that Krishna has said, is summed up in one thing: that it is one light that is the divine light, and it is the guidance coming from that light which becomes the path for humanity to tread.

But although the Sufi ideal is expressed through so many forms, the Sufis also have the formless ideal of worship. The form is to help those who need to see the form, for all education is really an education of names and forms.

If there were no names and no forms we would not have learned them. But the form is only suggestive of what is behind it, of one and the same truth which is behind all religions. Therefore the Sufi service is also a teaching, yet every Sufi is free either to take up a form or not to take up a form. A Sufi is not bound by any form. Forms are for his use, not to make him a captive.

In the Sufi Movement there is no priesthood in the ordinary sense, the priesthood is only to conduct the service and to answer the need of a priest which always exists in our everyday life. Those ordained in the Sufi Movement are called Sirajs and Cherags. There is no distinction between women and men. The worthy soul is ordained; this gives an example to the world that in all places—in the church, in the school, in parliament, in court—it is woman and man together who make evolution complete. But at the same time every Sufi is a priest, a preacher, a teacher, and a pupil of every soul that he meets in the world.

The Sufi prayers such as Saum and Salát are not man-made prayers. They have descended from above, just as in every

period of spiritual reconstruction prayers were given. And there is every power and blessing in them, especially for those who believe.

What is real prayer? Praise to God. And the meaning of praise? Appreciating; thus opening the heart more and more to the divine beauty one sees in manifestation. One can never be too grateful. Children, and also the servants in the house, should be taught appreciation, not for one's own sake, but for the benefit they derive from learning to value and to appreciate things. By not teaching them this, one deprives them of a great virtue; for joy and happiness lie in the appreciation of certain things or conditions. Prayer trains the soul to be more appreciative of God's goodness.

One can pray silently; but sensation is psychological, and saying words aloud penetrates the akashas of the body and reaches to the inner plane of our being. So prayer repeated aloud has a greater effect on the soul than silent prayer. Prayer is offered for our own benefit and not for God's benefit.

Action is also psychological; it makes pictures in every atom of the body of the thought which is behind it. Every atom of the body prays, even the blood-cells; the whole being becomes a prayer. Thus the movements of the prayer are a psychological action. With every movement, we make as it were a kind of picture which impresses every atom of our body. This affects our circulation, and by the circulation the whole being is affected; it is even registered on the skin.

THE UNIVERSAL WORSHIP

THE RELIGIOUS activity of the Sufi Movement is called the Universal Worship, or the Church of All. Why is it so named? Because it contains all different ways of worship and all Churches.

This Universal Worship which has been organized in the Sufi Movement was the hope of all prophets, the prayer and the desire of all great souls: that the light given in all the different forms such as the Buddhist scriptures, the Qur'an, the Bible, or the teachings of Krishna or Zarathushtra, should be known by everyone. The work of the Sufi message is to spread the unity of religion. It is not a mission to promote a particular creed or any Church or religion; it is a work to unite the followers of different religions and faiths in wisdom, so that without having to give up their own religion they may strengthen their own faith and focus the true light upon it. In this way a greater trust, a greater confidence will be established in mankind. Behind all wars there is a suggestion of religion. Whenever there has been a war, and even now in such wars as we have gone through, we always see the finger of religion. People think that the reason for war is mostly political, but religion is a greater warmonger than any political ideas. Those who give their lives for an idea always show some touch of religion.

This religious channel which is Sufism exists in order to avoid greater catastrophes, and to gather together the followers of different religions in the understanding of the one truth behind them, so that they may hold in respect all the teachers of humanity who have given their lives in the service of truth. Instead of doing as the theologians in colleges who only want to find what is the difference between Moses and Buddha, one should look behind all religions to see where they unite, to find out how the followers of all the different religions can be friends, how they can come to that one truth. To say that the whole world must belong to one Church, one religion, is as absurd as for all people to wear one kind of dress. The world would become uninteresting. Le

the people have Churches, beliefs, faiths; let them have different conceptions of things as long as they are brought closer to the realization of truth. Then they will naturally understand better that it is true wisdom which is the real light, that it is the central wisdom which brings them together and which is the inspirer of humanity.

Religion is something which touches the depths of the heart; and everyone has his own conceptions of religion which he holds as sacred. By expressing one's opinion too freely one may easily hurt that conception which another holds as sacred. Nevertheless, the need of a Universal Worship, a Church of All, has been felt at all times. It has been the ideal of the great prophets to bring the whole of humanity into one religion; but as humanity has a great variety of conceptions, this has never been easy.

Religion consists of five principal elements: belief in God, adoration of the spiritual ideal, the moral conception, the form of worship, and the philosophy of life. When we consider the variety of religions in the world, we find that some believe in one God, some in many gods; some are monotheists, some pantheists. In this way the conception of God changes among the civilized peoples of the world, and we may be thankful that it is no longer the case that every family has its own God.

How does the Sufi think of God? Does he believe in one God? If he believes in one God, then how can he tolerate the belief in many gods? The answer is that the aim of the Sufi is to bring peace among the different believers. He does not wish to differ from them; he sees their point of view. He sees that those who have many gods also worship one God; it is simply that they worship the different attributes of God. The great ones, in order to make God intelligible to man, have given Him different names. In that way they made man see the divine manifestations clearly, and that is also why some of the teachers have distinguished between the different gods. There is a saying, 'To understand all is to forgive all', and it is in accordance with this saying that the Sufi looks upon life.

One might say that one can be either a pantheist or a monotheist, but that one cannot be both. Yes, many who look at theology from the outside say that these are two distinct ideas about

God, and they are willing to accept one of them but not both. In point of fact it is most necessary that these two opposing ideas should exist. When we look at the centre of a line it is one; when we look at the ends there are two. Monotheism is as important as pantheism. No one can be a pantheist if he was not once a monotheist; and if one began by being a pantheist, one would never understand the conception of God. The monotheistic idea is necessary in order to realize fully the beauty of the pantheistic idea.

Then there is the idea of God being a personal God. Some find it very difficult to imagine God as a person; they feel it is like limiting God, whereas another will think that if God is not a person He no longer exists for him, and that He might just as well be air, space, or time. Both of these have their reasons, and the Sufi prepares himself to look at both from their own point of view. He comes to the conclusion that from the personal ideal one can rise to the complete ideal; the complete ideal embracing the seen and unseen, within and without, the Absolute. Therefore the Sufi has no difficulty either with the worshipper of one God or the worshipper of many gods, because he can see both their points of view. He gives their point of view a place in his life; he sees the natural development of human conception, expanding from the narrow perception to the highest ideal. But if someone asks the Sufi, 'You Sufis who tolerate all these different conceptions, what is your own conception?', he says, 'There is no such thing as the Sufi conception, although I have my personal conception. The God who is considered by people as the Judge and the Creator, as the Lord of heaven, is to me my Beloved. He is my beloved Ideal who alone deserves all my devotion. He is all the beauty that is to be loved.'

Therefore the Sufi establishes his relationship with God as the relationship between him and the Beloved. His worship of God is the expansion of the heart; his love for all beings and for every being is his love for God. He cannot find anyone to love except God, because he sees God in all. If his love is shown in devotion to parents, to wife, to children, if it is shown to neighbours, to a friend or in tolerating enemies, the Sufi considers this as an action of his towards God. In this way he fulfils in his life the teaching

of the Bible, 'We live and move and have our being in God.'

The second aspect of religion is the spiritual ideal in man. If ever man has found God manifest on earth it is in the godly. Whenever humanity touches the height of civilization we see the divine manifested in a human being, a human being who in his life expresses God fully. To some that great ideal has appeared and they have called it Jesus Christ. In other parts of the world, among other races and in other times, this same manifestation which human beings felt to be divine was called Buddha or Moses or Mohammad. People followed them, loved them, adored them, helped them in their difficulties. Through them a certain way of living, a harmonious life was given to their followers; the world has always received different manifestations like these whenever it was needed. But the limitation of mankind made them quarrel about the great personalities they each adored, and they have tried to question the greatness and goodness of the teachers of other communities. In this way humanity has become divided into sects.

The Sufi looks at this from a tolerant point of view. He believes that to have devotion for a spiritual ideal, just as for a human personality, is an individual matter. And because he thinks that the ideal of the teacher who is revered by someone is too sacred to interfere with, he unites it with all others. If one asks the Sufi, 'Which ideal do you hold?' he says, 'One Teacher; the only one who has always been there, who claimed to be Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. All these different names which the world holds in esteem are the names of one personality.' Whatever name it is, the Sufi feels exaltation; he sees one sacred personality behind all those names.

The third aspect is the moral conception. The followers of one religion dispute with the followers of another for not having the same standard of morals. But it is presumption on the part of a man to judge another by his own standard of morals. It is unjust to try to judge another community from one's own point of view; there is no action which one can point out as being sin or virtue, nor right or wrong. Things become right or wrong according to the place or the time. Good and evil are understood by a natural insight of the soul. The soul is beautiful and it looks

for beauty; what is lacking in beauty is that which may be called evil, and what is beautiful is that which may be called virtue. No doubt at a certain time a certain rule of life was given; but it is not right to judge the religion of different people according to that rule of life. Thus the work of the Sufi is to awaken in his heart the sensitiveness which will enable him to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil; and in this way, with the ever-increasing awakening of this spirit of sensitiveness, the Sufi builds his character. The Sufi is ready to tolerate others, to forgive others. He takes himself to task if he lacks beauty in expression, in thought, in speech, or in action.

The fourth aspect is the form of worship. The forms of worship of all the different religions are necessarily different; it depends upon what one is accustomed to, what is akin to one's nature. One cannot make a common rule and say that this form is wrong and that form is right. One person will perhaps feel more exaltation in a form of worship which includes some art; it stimulates his emotional nature. Music, pictures, perfumes, colours, light, all these have an effect upon such a person. Another can concentrate better if there is nothing in the place of worship to catch his attention. It is all a matter of temperament; it is not wrong to prefer the one or the other. The Sufi sees the variety of forms as different ideals; he does not attach importance to the outer expression. If there is a sincere spirit behind it, if a person has a feeling for worship, it does not matter what form of worship it is. In a church, in an open place, everywhere there is an answer to the feeling for worship.

The Universal Worship is not another Church to be included among the variety of existing Churches. It is a Church which gives an opportunity to those belonging to different religions to worship together. Also it gives practice in paying respect to the great ones who have come from time to time to serve humanity. The different scriptures of those who have taught wisdom are read at the altar of the Church of All. Nevertheless, no Sufi is compelled even to attend this Church of All; a Sufi, to whatever church he goes, is a Sufi. Being a Sufi is a point of view; it means having a certain outlook on life but not necessarily going to a particular church.

And finally there is the fifth aspect, the philosophical side of religion. One gathers through the Universal Worship that there is one source from which all scriptures have come, and that in spite of beliefs in many gods there is only one God. And in this way we come to the realization which we seek through worship, through devotion: that there is only one truth. For anyone who has ever reached it or will ever reach it, it is one and the same truth. Truth can be traced in all the great scriptures of the world and is taught by all the great ones who have come from time to time. Nothing, no community, Church, or belief, should keep one back from that realization in which lies the purpose of life. Verily, truth is the seeking of every soul and it is truth which can save.

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