

PART TWO

THE DYNAMICS OF SPIRITUAL ADVANCEMENT

Spiritual advancement begins when there is a radical change in the outlook. The worldly man lives mostly for the body, and even in those pursuits which do not seem to have reference to the body, the ultimate motive is in the desires connected with the body. When a man discovers a value in which the soul is predominant, the maintenance of the body becomes instrumental for the realization of a higher purpose. His body, hitherto a hindrance to spiritual life, becomes instrumental to the release of higher life. A man then attends to his bodily needs without feelings of self-identification.

Quest for the Goal

The beginning of spiritual advancement is conditioned by the quest for that goal for which man lives—the goal for which he loves and hates, and for which he goes through joys and sufferings. But, though he may be moved by this incomprehensible divine destiny, it may take a long time before he arrives at the mountain top of truth-realization; and the path is beset by pitfalls and precipices. Those who attempt to reach this mountain top have to climb, and even one who has succeeded in scaling great heights may by a slight mistake fall from them. Therefore, the aspirant is never safe unless he has the help and guidance of a Master, who knows the path, who safeguards him from a possible fall, and leads him to the goal.

The aspirant carries with him the *sanskaras* which he has accumulated in the past, and in the intensity of his spiritual longing they remain ineffective for the time being. But when there is a slackening of spiritual effort, the *sanskaras* gather fresh strength, and arraying themselves in a new formation constitute formidable obstacles to spiritual advancement.

The help of the Master is most effective when the aspirant surrenders his ego-life in favour of the unlimited life which the Master represents. Complete self-surrender is difficult, but the essential condition of spiritual advancement is the lowering of egoism to its minimum. The objective of spiritual advancement is not so much "works" as quality of life free from ego-consciousness. If the aspirant has great things to his credit, which he has claimed as his, his ego fastens itself upon these achievements and constitutes a formidable hindrance to life unlimited. Hence, the futility of the observance of rituals and ceremonies, and of acts of charity and good works, external renunciation and penances, when rooted in ego-consciousness.

The dilemma

It is, therefore, most necessary for the aspirant to keep free from the idea "I do this; and I do that". This does not mean to keep clear of all activity through fear of developing this form of the ego. He may have to take to the life of action to wear out the ego that he has developed. So he is caught up in the dilemma that if he keeps inactive he does nothing towards breaking through the prison of his ego-life, and if he takes to a life of action, he is faced with the possibility of his ego being transferred to these new acts.

For spiritual advancement, the aspirant has to avoid these extremes and carry on a life of creative action. Treading the spiritual path is not like riding a saddled horse. It requires the utmost attention since the path affords no halting places or room for expansion of the ego-life. He who enters the path can neither remain where he is nor afford to lose his balance, but is like one who attempts to walk on the edge of a sword.

To avoid both inaction and the pride of action it is necessary for the aspirant to construct in the following manner a provisional and working ego devoted to the Master. Before beginning anything the aspirant thinks it is not he who is doing it but the Master who is getting it done through him, and after doing it he does not claim the results of action or enjoy them, but offers them to the Master. By so training his mind he creates a new ego, which, though provisional, is able to become a source of confidence, enthusiasm and energy. This new ego is spiritually harmless,

since it derives its life from the Master, and since when the time comes it can be thrown away. There are thus two types of ego— one belongs to the limitations of the soul, the other helps towards emancipation. The passage through the limiting ego to the egolessness of infinite life lies through the construction of the provisional ego, generated through allegiance to the Master.

Sudden transition impossible

The aspirant has been accustomed to derive zest in life from his limited ego, and an immediate transition from the life of egoistic action to that of ego-less action is impossible. If the aspirant were to be immediately required to avoid all forms of ego-consciousness, he would be likely to revert to a state of negative passivity without any joy of expression, or seek expression through activity of a merely automatic kind, so that he could derive no sense of fulfilment. The real problem is that the aspirant has to abandon his life of the limited ego and enter into the ego-less life, without lapsing into a state of the ebbing of life. Ebbing life may give apparent relief from the limitation of the ego-life, but does not initiate the aspirant into ego-less activity.

This is why spiritual advancement has usually to be very gradual and may take several lives. Where a person seems to have taken long strides in his spiritual advancement, it means either that he has recapitulated the advance already secured in previous lives or that there has been special intervention by the Master. Normally advancement is gradual. The distance between the limited life of the ego and the limitlessness of the ego-life has to be covered by gradual stages of ego-transformation, so that egoism is replaced by humility, desires are replaced by contentment, and selfishness by selfless love.

The ego that is entirely subservient to the Master is not only indispensable and spiritually harmless but directly contributory to the spiritual advancement of the aspirant, because it brings him closer to the Master. The constant inner contact with the Master makes available the special help that the Master can give. The aspirant who renounces the life of the separate ego in favour of a life of self-surrender to the Master, is through this new ego living as an instrument in the hands of the Master. It is the Master who is working through him. "Not I, but thou". Just as an instrument

has a tendency to go wrong while being put to use, so the aspirant may get out of order during his working in the world, so that from time to time, the instrument has to be cleansed, overhauled, repaired and set right; the aspirant who during his work may have developed new entanglements and shelters for the personal ego has to be renewed, regenerated, and purified so that he can go ahead.

The need for recurring contact with the Master

The aspirant who enlists in the service of the Master may be compared to a broom by means of which the Master cleanses the world of impurities. The broom is bound to accumulate the dirt of the world; and unless cleansed and given new strength is bound to become less efficient in the course of time. Each time the aspirant goes to the Master it is with fresh spiritual problems. He might have got caught in new entanglements connected with honour, riches, or other worldly things. He may get them but be far from the goal of experiencing God on whom he had set his heart. It is only through the active intervention of the Master that such spiritual disorders can be cured.

The Master helps the aspirant in his own inner ways, which have no parallel in the ways of the world. To be the recipient of this help, one must make a real effort to surrender to the divine will of the Master. The personal ego renounced in the first surrender may reappear in a new aspect, even within the artificial ego meant to be completely devoted to the Master, and may create disorder in its working. So this resurrection of the limited personal ego of the aspirant requires to be transformed through a renewed act of surrender to the Master.

Progress from one surrender to another is progress from a minor conquest to a major one; and the more complete forms of surrender represent the higher states of consciousness, since they secure greater harmony between the aspirant and the Master, so that the infinite life of the Master can flow through the aspirant. Spiritual advancement is a succession of one surrender after another, until the goal of the final surrender of the separate ego-life is achieved. The last surrender is the complete surrender, equivalent to the attainment of the Truth, which is the ultimate goal of spiritual advancement.

XVI

GOOD AND EVIL

The human mind not only passes through experiences but is constantly evaluating them. These experiences are the opposites created by imagination when meeting life with a particular point of view. An individual's conception of what is acceptable and what is not changes according to the nature of the desires that happen to be dominant at any particular moment. But so long as there is desire, he is impelled to appraise his experiences in relation to it. He divides experience into two parts, one that contributes towards the fulfilment of the desire, the other that prevents its fulfilment. Instead of meeting life without expectation, entanglement or shirking, the mind is divided into opposites.

Of these opposites the division between good and bad is spiritually most significant. It is based upon desire to be free from the limitation of all desires. Those experiences and actions that increase the fetters of desire are bad; those that tend to emancipate the mind from limiting desires are good. But since good experiences and actions exist in relation to any desire, they bind equally with bad experiences and actions. All binding disappears only when desires disappear, and freedom comes when good and bad are reconciled and leave no room for choice.

Animal sanskaras

When consciousness is fully developed, there is still a preponderance of bad elements, since at the sub-human stages of evolution consciousness has been chiefly operating under the limitations of lust, greed and anger. The experiences and actions created and sustained by such ego-centred tendencies have left their imprint on the developing mind, which has stored them in a somewhat similar manner to that in which the cinematic film records movement. If all the accumulated animal *sanskaras* had

been bad and none good, the appearance of good tendencies in human consciousness would have been impossible, but animals do sometimes develop the qualities of self-sacrifice, love and patience.

Though some animal *sanskaras* are good, most are bad, and consciousness finds itself subject to a propelling force, which is mostly bad. From the start of human evolution, the problem of emancipation has consisted in cultivating and developing good *sanskaras*, so that they may overlap and annul the accumulated bad *sanskaras*. Cultivation of good *sanskaras* is achieved by fostering experiences and actions that are the opposite to those that predominate in animal life. The opposite of lust is love; the opposite of greed is generosity; and the opposite of anger is tolerance or patience. By trying to dwell in love, generosity and tolerance, a man erases the tendencies of lust, greed and anger.

The general process of freeing oneself from the limitation of *sanskaras* has, therefore, to be accompanied by the process of renouncing the bad for the good. Whether a person happens to be good or bad at any given time is dependent upon the operation of his *sanskaras*. From this point of view, the sinner and the saint are what they are by necessity. They have the same beginning and the same end. The stigma of eternal degradation does not belong to the sinner, and the saint need not have pride in his attainments. No one, howsoever saintly he may be, has attained moral virtues except after a life of moral failings; and no one is so bad as not to be able to improve. Everyone, however depraved he may be, can gradually become better until he becomes a shining example. None is utterly lost and none need despair.

The limited self can live in good sanskaras

The gradual unfoldment of the good brings love, generosity and peace; and the good *sanskaras* deposited by the manifestations of these qualities overlap and balance the opposite bad *sanskaras* of lust, greed and anger. When there is an exact balancing and overlapping there is a reconciliation and termination of both types of *sanskaras*, and consciousness changes from bondage to freedom. Credit and debit must be exactly equal if the account is to be closed. But mostly either the debit or the credit side is greater, and the account is kept running. It is important to note

That the account remains open not only by the excess of debits but also by the excess of credits. It can be closed only when the two balance. But in the field of *sanskaras* such balancing is rare. At any particular time, either the bad or the good are predominant. And just as an account can be kept running either by the excess of debits or of credits, the life of the limited self is prolonged and sustained either through the excess of bad or of good *sanskaras*. The limited self can persist through good *sanskaras* in the same way as it can maintain itself through bad *sanskaras*.

Balancing of good and bad sanskaras

This problem of balancing *sanskaras* is not a mathematical problem of matching equal amounts. Were it simply a question of equal quantities, the problem could be solved only through persistent accumulation of the good *sanskaras*. If there is the reduction of the accumulation of bad *sanskaras*, and side by side an accumulation of the good *sanskaras* at a greater rate, sooner or later the good would be equal to the bad, and the necessary balancing would be effected. But for the emancipation of consciousness, the good and bad *sanskaras* have not only to balance but there has to be a point to point overlapping of the one opposite the other. So the problem before each centre of consciousness is a specific problem according to the qualitative variety of the nature of accumulated *sanskaras*.

If the accumulation of good *sanskaras* proceeds irrespective of the existing *sanskaras*, there is a possibility of accumulating an excess of good *sanskaras* side by side with the existence of bad ones of a different kind. For example, through self-mortification and asceticism some forms of attachment may be annulled, but other forms may remain. Then the aspirant may not only ignore the forms of attachment that have remained untouched, he may even carry on further the practices of self-mortification and asceticism by the force of the *sanskaras* created by those very practices. When that happens an excess of good *sanskaras* is created without involving the termination of the limited ego; and even if the other forms of attachment, which had remained untouched, are subsequently undone, the ego gets transferred to these new *sanskaras* and continues to live a limited existence through them.

Emancipation is not a matter of accumulation of virtue; it

requires intelligent adjustment of *sanskaras*. Each centre of consciousness is unconsciously gravitating towards the final emancipation of Truth-realization; and there is a tendency in the mind to invite those opposites that meet the spiritual requirements of the situation. But it is not a mechanical and automatic process, independent of intelligent effort on the part of the aspirant. More often than not, the aspirant finds it impossible to arrive at what is necessary unless he has the help of a Master, who has insight into what is necessary.

The prison of the good

It has been said that the good *sanskaras* can be a medium for maintaining the limited self. When a person looks upon himself as good he is experiencing self-affirmation through identification with an opposite. It is a continuation of separative existence in a new form. This new house which the ego constructs for itself is difficult to dismantle because self-identification with the good is often more complete than self-identification with the bad. Identification with the bad is easier to deal with because as soon as the bad is recognized, its grip on consciousness is lessened; but to lose the grip of the good presents a more difficult problem, since the good carries a semblance of self-justification.

The ego changes identification with the evil for identification with the good, because the latter gives a greater sense of expansion. But sooner or later, the aspirant perceives the good to be no less a limitation. The difficulty concerning evil is not so much in perceiving what it is, as in dissociation; the difficulty concerning good is in perceiving that it is a limitation. This difference arises because animal *sanskaras* are firmly rooted owing to ancient origin and long accumulation; but it is important to note that the good binds as much as the evil.

Beyond good and bad

The ego lives through either the bad *sanskaras* or the good, or through a mixture of good and bad. When there is balancing of the good and bad so that they both disappear, what remains is a clean state of mind which reflects the Truth. Nothing is written on the self. The *sanskaras* are deposited on the mind, the self remains untarnished; but only when the mind is clean can it reflect the

Truth. When the mind sees the self there is Illumination. The mind seeing the self however is not the same as the self knowing itself, for the self is not the mind, but God beyond the mind. Therefore, even after the mind has seen the self it has to be merged in the self if the self is to know itself in Truth. This is Realization. In this state the mind with its good and bad *sanskaras* has disappeared. It is a state beyond the mind and beyond good and evil. There is one existence characterized by infinite love, peace, bliss and knowledge. The strife between good and evil has disappeared because there is neither good nor evil, only the one undivided life of God.

XVII

THE PLACE OF OCCULTISM IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

I. THE VALUE OF OCCULT EXPERIENCES

Spiritual emancipation brings an unfoldment of many psychic capacities latent in the human soul, which increases the scope and range of human consciousness. The new elements often play an important part in helping or hindering the emancipation of consciousness, and the aspirant has to understand the value that belongs to occult experiences such as unusual and significant dreams, visions, glimpses of the subtle world, and astral journeys, and to learn to distinguish realities from hallucinations and delusions.

Though it is easy to exaggerate the importance of occult experiences, it is not unusual to doubt their validity and to treat them with the contempt accorded to characteristic forms of mental aberrations and abnormalities. The attitude of unqualified contempt for occult experience is of course most pronounced in those who are not even abecedarians in the direct knowledge of occult realities. It hurts the ego to admit that there might be unexplored fields of the universe, accessible to a limited number of persons, from the circle of which it happens to be excluded; and the contempt to which occultism is at times exposed is almost always the outcome of ignorance about what it really means. This attitude is of course different from that of the cautious and critical mind. Those who have that attitude are endowed with humility and openness of mind and are ready to admit the existence of occult realities when they come within their reach.

Dreams

The Master usually helps the aspirant through ordinary means,

but when there is a special indication he may use an occult medium to help him. Dreams are among the common media for touching the deeper life of the aspirant. Masters have not infrequently first contacted aspirants by appearing in their dreams. Such dreams, however, have to be distinguished from ordinary dreams. In ordinary dreams, the subtle body is active in exercising its functions of seeing, testing, smelling, touching and hearing, but the soul is not then consciously using the subtle body. As these experiences are received subconsciously, they are subjective, relating to physical activities, and concern physical life and the creations of the nascent *sanskaras* stored in the mind. Sometimes, however, a dream that is indistinguishable from an ordinary dream, may be the reflection in the subconscious of some objective experience of the subtle body, not merely a product of fancy.

Most dreams are the subjective and sub-conscious experiences of the subtle body and have no special spiritual significance, except that they can be the occasion for the forging of new *sanskaras* or the spending of old ones, and that occasionally they shed light upon the complexes and unfaced problems of personality. But such dreams can never include that which is not, in some way, a part of past experience, and they allow scope for novelty only in respect of new combinations of events that have appeared in past experience. The rare types of dreams are those relating to persons and things known not in this life but in some past life, and still more rare are the dreams of what has not appeared in this life but is to appear in future. Ordinary dreams are thus different from dreams possessing occult significance.

The beginning of occult experiences

Very often when the aspirant is experiencing psychic unfoldment, he has experience of the subtle world in the form of visions, lights, colours, sounds, smells or contacts. These experiences are fitful, and the aspirant is likely to treat them as hallucinations. Even so, he finds it impossible to resist their directive influence because of their intrinsic potency. The spiritual journey, however, becomes smoother if the aspirant learns to cultivate the right attitude to these phenomena, which consists in taking them for what they are worth. But this balanced attitude the aspirant in the initial stages finds difficult.

It is possible either to exaggerate the importance of glimpses into inner worlds, and to develop a craving for the repetition of these experiences, or to treat them as abnormal phenomena and underrate their significance. Of these alternatives the attitude of exaggerating the importance of occult experiences is the most common, because novelty charges them with importance.

Craving for occult experiences

In fact, the ego of the aspirant tends to be attracted to this new field, and has the sense of being a rare person admitted to an exclusive privilege. The more such experiences are received the more they are desired, and there may develop the habit of depending upon occult guidance for each step in the Path, in rather the same way as those who take drugs get addicted and require the stimulation even when they could formerly do without it. To avoid this pitfall, the Master takes care not to encourage the craving for occultism. Occult experiences are vouchsafed to the aspirant when they are necessary for spiritual purposes not when he asks for them.

If the aspirant is found to attach undue importance to occult experiences or to develop a craving for them, the Master may weaken and annul them. This is similar to giving relief to a patient by a surgical operation and serves the purpose of protecting the aspirant from forging fresh chains for self-limitation. The aspirant must under no circumstances be allowed to get caught up in false values, which lead only to unnecessary delay in reaching the goal. The introduction of the aspirant to occult realities is necessarily a very gradual and prolonged process, and the Master is never anxious to expedite it, as few persons are really qualified for the expansion of their experience in this dimension.

Validity of occult experiences

As in the initial stages the appearance of occult realities is fitful, the aspirant sometimes doubts their validity and treats them with caution so as to reduce the possibility of being deluded. But occult experiences often bear unmistakable credentials of their validity, and, even when such credentials are not obvious, they compel attention because of the unusual significance, bliss, peace

and directive value with which they are surcharged. It is mainly because of these characteristics that the aspirant can discriminate between occult experiences and delusions.

Hallucinations are erroneous perceptions of things which do not really exist, and remain objects of doubt, though they may have a likeness to normal perceptions. Delusions contain a greater element of falsity because they consist not only in seeing that which does not exist, but in believing it to have real existence with a certainty which leaves no room for doubt. Neither hallucinations nor delusions bring bliss nor peace to the person who experiences them. The bliss and peace that are attendant upon genuine occult experiences are a reliable criterion of their genuineness.

Even when occult experience is such that it can be clearly distinguished from illusion, it may become the object of doubt. This happens when the person who has had the experience discusses the matter with others, who, because of their incapacity to understand such things, shake him in his conviction. It is for this reason that in ancient times the Masters usually required the disciple to maintain strict secrecy about occult experiences. Even a deep experience is likely to become weak through contradiction and scepticism, unless the aspirant has learnt to rely upon his own inner experience irrespective of what others may say. If the aspirant is to make progress and profit through occult help he must develop confidence in himself and the Master. He must not look to others for guidance, because those who will understand his problems or his experiences are few. The aspirant must, indeed, be prepared to face the possibility of his being misunderstood.

If an occult experience at the time of its occurrence has served the purpose of giving a new momentum to spiritual endeavour, it often does not matter if in retrospect the aspirant considers it a form of delusion. However, there are some occult experiences that are vouchsafed to the aspirant as a guidance; and with regard to them it becomes necessary that the aspirant should cease to doubt their validity. But to seek corroboration of occult experience is definitely unhealthy, and the Master gives corroborative confirmation only when he considers it necessary. Further, he takes the initiative himself. Whatever he does arises out of his own discretion, and is in no way dependent upon expectations that the aspirant may have developed. But when spiritually necessary, the Master does increase the efficacy of occult experience, by con-

firming its validity and authority through corroboration from the normal range of the aspirant's experience.

Astral journeys

In the advanced stages of the Path, the aspirant becomes spiritually prepared for the free use of the forces of the subtle world. He may then get used to undertaking astral journeys in his subtle body after leaving the physical body in sleep or wakefulness. Those astral journeys that are undertaken unconsciously are much less important than those undertaken with full consciousness as a result of deliberate volition. This implies conscious use of the subtle body. The conscious separation of the subtle body from the outer vehicle of the physical body has value in making the soul realize its distinction from the physical body and in achieving its control. He can at will put on and off the external physical body as if it were a cloak and use the subtle body for experiencing the subtle world and making journeys through it when necessary.

An aid to intuition

The sights, smells, tastes, contacts and sounds that are experienced through the conscious use of the subtle body are as definite as the experiences gained through the conscious use of the physical body. They are not vague or subjective as in ordinary dreams, but are as objective as any experiences of wakeful consciousness. The power to undertake astral journeys, therefore, involves considerable expansion of the scope of experience, and brings its own opportunities not only for promoting one's spiritual advancement but also for helping others who have not yet entered the Path.

The development of occult forces is not to be regarded as a substitute for the inner effort that the aspirant must make. Occult experiences are gifts from the Masters and in spiritually advanced souls they serve the purpose of unveiling much obscured intuition, removing some of the difficulties on the Path and filling the aspirant with the confidence and enthusiasm necessary to cope with requirements of the Path. But the aspirant makes real progress by putting into practice the best intuitions of his heart not by the passive acceptance of occult experiences.

2. THE OCCULT BASIS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Those who have even preliminary acquaintance with the structure and laws of the inner spheres of existence know that the isolation of human beings is a fiction. Whether they desire it or not, all persons constantly act and interact upon each other by their very existence, even when they have not established contact on the physical plane. There are no limits to the influence of man. The magnetic influence of the subtle spheres knows no barriers of frontiers or distance or any other conventional limitation. Good thoughts as well as evil, cheerful moods as well as gloomy, noble and expansive feelings as well as petty and narrow ones, unselfish aspiration as well as selfish ambition, all influence others, even when not expressed in words or deeds. Thus, the world of mental life is as much a unified system as the world of matter. The physical world as a vehicle of spiritual life has its own importance; but the connections existing between different persons is by no means fully realized by considering only the contacts of the physical world.

Darshana or Presence

The physical presence of Masters does not yield its significance except in the context of the inner planes. The ancient *Rishis* attached great importance to having the *Darshana* of saints and Masters, the source of the flow of love and light which makes an irresistible appeal to the inner being of the aspirant even when he receives no verbal instruction. The effect of *Darshana* is dependent upon the receptivity of the aspirant, whose reaction is determined by his own *sanskaras* and past connections. Often the aspirant is satisfied with the *Darshana* of the Master and has no desire for anything else from him. To derive bliss from the mere *Darshana* of the Master is a great thing because it indicates that the aspirant has desirelessness and love, the two essentials of spiritual life. Having had the *Darshana* of the Beloved, the aspirant naturally desires nothing except to have more and more *Darshana*: and he is thus impelled to have as much *Darshana* or company of the Master as possible, which results in drawing the aspirant closer to the Master on the inner plane of life.

The feet of the Master

Like *Darshana*, falling at the feet of the Master also has a value of its own. The feet, which are physically the lowest part of the body, are from the spiritual point of view, the highest. Physically, the feet go through everything—good and bad, beautiful and ugly, clean and dirty, yet remain above everything. So, spiritually, the feet of the Master are above everything in the universe, which is dust to them. When people come to a Master and touch his feet with their hands, they lay the burden of their *sanskaras* on him. He collects the *sanskaras* from the universe, as an ordinary person collects dust on his feet. There is a custom that after the aspirant has the *Darshana* of the Master and falls at his feet, he washes his feet with milk and honey, and places a coconut near him as his offering. Honey represents the red *sanskaras*; the milk represents the white *sanskaras*; and the coconut represents the mind. Thus the convention, which, in some parts has become established in connection with the greeting of the Master, really symbolizes the throwing of the burden of *sanskaras* on him and surrendering the mind to him. The adoption of this inner attitude constitutes the most critical and important step which the aspirant takes for initiation into the Path.

Mental contact

Once the aspirant has the bliss of the *Darshana* of a Master, even when he is unable to establish frequent personal contact with him, his mind turns to the Master. This process of establishing mental contact is essentially different from the imaginative revival of past incidents. In the activities of the imagination, the recall of past incidents is not necessarily animated by a definite purpose, whereas in establishing mental contact there is a definite purpose. Owing to the directive power of purpose, imagination, ceasing to be a mere revolution of ideas, reaches the Master through the inner planes, and establishes contact with him. Such mental contact with the Master is as fruitful and effective as his physical *Darshana*. The inward repetition of such mental contacts is to construct a channel of communication between the Master and the aspirant, so that the aspirant becomes the recipient of the grace, love and light flowing from the Master, in spite of the apparent distance between them. Thus the help of the Master goes

out not only to those who happen to be in his physical presence but to those who establish mental contact with him.

Special precautions

The Master devotes attention to the individual needs of the disciple, and the first thing he does is to protect the disciple from such influence as will divert his attention from the Path or interfere with his progress. Often the Master requires the disciple to accept some kind of temporary isolation so that his mind is guarded against impacts that might impede his spiritual progress. The ancient *Yogis*, under instructions from their Masters, prepared their own food and did not allow anyone to remain present at the time of eating it. They wanted to avoid the impressions of the sight of bad persons. A disciple is also likely to catch the impressions of another's desires, and be affected by them. In the earlier stages, the aspirant must guard against complications that might arise through association with others who are not on the Path. But the Master gives instructions for the severance or avoidance of certain connections and contacts only when they are specially indicated. Usually, however, all that is necessary is secured by the constant company of the Master and need does not arise to submit the disciple to isolation. But although the disciple may be outwardly in touch with the world, he is mentally detached through inward connection with the Master.

Helpful contacts

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

The Master utilizes spiritual forces

The unity of the inner plane makes it possible for the Master to use his disciple as a medium for his work even when the disciple is unconscious of serving the purpose of the Master. This is possible because the disciple through his love and understanding of the Master and his obedience and surrender establishes a rapport between himself and the Master. Those who come into direct contact with the Master receive his direct help; and those who are closely connected with his disciple receive his indirect help.

Sharing of spiritual work is by no means one-sided for even the disciples who merely think of the Master or meditate upon him share the spiritual work in which the Master may be engaged. As one who is one with Eternity the Master is beyond time, but as one who is interested in the spiritual upliftment of humanity he assumes many of the limitations of time and is capable of being helped in his work by the voluntary co-operation of his disciples. The Master feeds upon the love of his disciples and utilizes the spiritual forces released by them for his universal work. To love the Master is to love all, not merely symbolically but actually; for what the Master receives on the subtle planes, he spiritualizes and distributes; thus he not only strengthens the personal links which the disciples may have with him but gives them the privilege of sharing his divine work.

The internal eye

By infinite ways, the Master draws the aspirant into his own being, so that he may get disentangled from the mazes of the universe and come to desire God. This longing for God is present in the aspirant from the beginning; but the Master makes this longing more intense and articulate by opening the internal eye of the aspirant. When the internal eye is opened, God who is the object of search and longing is sighted. As the gaze is turned inward and fixed upon the supreme reality, the desire for union becomes more ardent than when groping for God through speculation or imagination. When the time is ripe, the Master opens this internal eye.

The aspirant has to realize that God is the only reality and that he is really one with God. This implies that he should not be overpowered by the spectacle of the universe. The universe in the

self springs into existence from the tiny point in the self which is referred to as "Om", but the self has become habituated to experience through various media and experiences the universe as a rival to or even an enemy of the self. Those who have realized God constantly see the universe as springing from this "Om-point", which is in everyone.

The process of perception of reality runs parallel with the process of creation, and the reversing of the process of perception without obliterating consciousness amounts to realizing the nothingness of the universe. The self sees first through the mind, then through the subtle eye, and lastly through the physical eye, and the self appears to be vaster than all that it perceives. All the self perceives is finite; but the self is infinite. When the self retains full consciousness and yet sees nothing, it has crossed the universe of its own creation and has taken the first step to know itself as all.

Occult powers as obstacles

The process of withdrawing consciousness from the universe and becoming conscious of the self is accompanied by an increasing control of the vehicles of consciousness. Such control is made possible by the vivification and activation of unused centres of control; and the functioning of these new centres brings a number of occult powers. These new powers are dangerous because they too often come before the aspirant has become spiritually perfect. In fact, egoism can flourish through the acquisition of such occult powers, and the aspirant may not only take delight in possessing them, but may use them for earthly purposes from which he may not have freed himself. They are, therefore, rightly regarded as obstacles to the attainment of realization. When God is realized, all occult powers dwindle in importance. They have their existence in the nothingness which is the universe, and the one who realizes God is established in the supreme reality. But while the universe is zero to the God-realized, he may voluntarily assume responsibility towards those souls who are enmeshed in the tangles of the universe; he can then freely make use of occult powers for the spiritual good of others.

There is nothing that does not admit of direct or indirect control by the Masters of wisdom. Large social phenomena such as wars, revolutions, and epidemics, as well as physical phenomena such as earthquakes, floods and other changes are amenable to their control and direction through the release of the great forces of the exalted planes on which the Masters are. They can also use occult forces for securing co-operative and co-ordinated spiritual work; and they frequently hold meetings on the higher advancement of humanity. The Eternal Being in all is one, and functions as a unity. Those who have become conscious of this unity become fit for unlimited responsibilities, because they have shed the limitations of the human mind and have become impersonal and universal in their interests so that they are effective vehicles for the execution of the Divine Plan on earth.

3. OCCULTISM AND SPIRITUALITY

Occultism is a branch of knowledge concerned with the study of the universe and human personality; and in this respect there is no difference in principle between occultism and other sciences also concerned with the study of these subjects. The difference arises because other sciences are concerned with such aspects as are directly or indirectly accessible to ordinary observation. The development of occult knowledge is conditioned by the unfoldment of the latent and hidden powers of the human spirit.

A Psychical Research Society approaches occult knowledge in the same attitude as that in which other forms of knowledge are approached, because, in principle, there is no reason why such knowledge should be looked upon as either less or more valuable than other forms of scientific knowledge. Such societies pursue the study of occult knowledge in an organized and co-operative form. The Masters also have, at times, deemed it desirable to reveal to mankind theoretical knowledge about certain important features of the occult world such as the facts of immortality and reincarnation, the existence of different bodies and planes and the laws concerning evolution and the operation of *Karma*, because it gives the right background for spiritual aspiration and effort and brings the perspective of man as near to truth as is possible. But the Masters have consistently preferred to attach minimum import-

ance to detailed knowledge about occult realities and have withheld information upon them.

In occultism, more than in any other science, there is a sharp division between those who know and those who do not know. In other sciences indirect knowledge can to a certain extent take the place of direct knowledge. But in occultism indirect knowledge can in no way replace direct knowledge. Therefore, though occultism is an important science, the spread of theoretical information can have little importance. Without first-hand experience of occult realities, acquaintance through others with occult facts has no value; they remain more or less in the same category as descriptions of unseen lands or works of fancy.

Occultism as an art

Occultism as a science may be considered to be more or less on the same footing as other sciences, but occultism as an art stands by itself. Even the spread of purely theoretical information about occult facts may be attended with mischief, since it may arouse curiosity and stimulate the desire for acquiring control over unknown forces for selfish ends. There is nothing spiritual about occult power as such. Like any other earthly powers or scientific inventions, it is capable of being used for good or bad ends. It gives immense scope for co-operative work on the higher planes, but this necessarily implies spiritual preparedness for special responsibility.

The misuse of occult powers

The novice may seek occult powers, and within certain limits even succeed in acquiring them; but this will prove to be a curse rather than a blessing if he is not spiritually prepared for the fulfilment of the responsibility involved in the acquisition of these powers. Even the slightest misuse of occult power has severe reaction and creates a binding for the soul. Sometimes, it may retard the progress of the aspirant and may even lead to a considerable set-back; and apart from the spiritual ruin that the novice may invite upon himself he may be a source of harm to others, against whom he has succeeded in gaining so formidable an advantage.

In the hands of the Masters of spiritual wisdom occult power is

not only safe but has immense capacity for being harnessed in the service of humanity; but (it is repeated), even they are sparing and economical in its use. By its very nature, occultism as an art, has its own limitations. It cannot be widely used for the material needs of humanity or for helping men in their earthly purposes. The introduction of the uncertain and incalculable factor, which the exercise of occult power involves, may create much confusion and disturbance in the ordinary pursuits of men, who must be left to their own limitations, resources and possibilities, for the working out of the law of *Karma*. The use of occult power, therefore, has to be restricted to the furtherance of spiritual purposes.

The saints sometimes fulfil the earthly desires of their devotees; this is not done because they are interested in earthly affairs, but because they desire to wean their devotees from material desires.

Worldly people are so immersed in material desires that nothing interests them unless it has direct bearing upon the fulfilment of those desires, though they may come to saints and serve them with the expectation of being helped in these matters. When a person approaches a saint with respect, it becomes the duty of the saint to help him spiritually even when the person has some other motive. The saint with his understanding of the human mind may decide to help the person materially so that he may be won to spirituality. But such action for spiritual purposes is an exception rather than a rule, and dangerous for the recipient, so that the saints discourage people from approaching them for material advantage.

Occult powers used to promote purification of humanity

Occultism as an art derives its justification from its use for spiritual purposes; any diversion of occult power from this end is a misuse. Its function is in securing the purification of the human heart.

As an art occultism is relevant and necessary to those who are about to unfold their latent psychic powers or who are already possessed of psychic powers but are not fully alive to the material world owing to the withdrawal of their consciousness to the higher planes. They have to be spoken to in a language they can understand. Many advanced aspirants develop occult powers, but are often as much in need of spiritual help as ordinary humanity.

Since they are in possession of occult powers they can be helped by the Masters irrespective of distance. When the Master's help can be consciously received on the higher planes it becomes more fruitful than the help given through the physical medium.

Coming down

One of the characteristics of advanced aspirants is to become so much established in happiness that they are reluctant to work in the physical sphere. This must not be confused with the return to normal consciousness after the seventh plane experience, which is the state of God-realization of Perfect Ones. The Masters' return after Realization, is actuated by altruistic motives and is the result of *Prarabdha*, which they utilize for the spiritual uplift of humanity in accordance with the authority with which they are invested. Mahommed placed himself after God-realization in the seventh plane, Buddha in the fifth, and Moenuddin Chisti of Ajmer in the fifth planes, respectively.

The coming down of advanced aspirants is with a view to accelerating their forward movement on the Path when they find themselves held up between the planes. For example should an aspirant get held between the third and fourth planes, a Master may bring him down to the third plane prior to raising him to the fourth plane. Such coming down from their high station for the sake of others is often necessary in the interests of those who have not even entered the Path. The Master may decide to get spiritual work done through an advanced aspirant and may require him to postpone his efforts for individual advancement. Such coming down eventually turns out to be a spiritual preparation for traversing the next stage of the Path smoothly and quickly; even so, the aspirant may find it difficult to renounce the advantages of attainment for the purpose of helping others. Coming down is particularly difficult for a person on the fifth plane, where the soul has sighted the Infinite and has illumination. In Sufism, this state is known as *Hairat*. In this state, the aspirant finds it extremely difficult to keep away from illumination. Yet it may be necessary that he should resist getting lost in illumination and come down for the sake of others in the world. The Master has his own way of dealing with an advanced aspirant, and can bring him to acceptance of any such action.

The story of Ganjay Shakkar

This is illustrated in the story of a famous Wali, whose tomb at Ajmer is a well-known place of pilgrimage. He could not close his eyes, which were always open, and he would not eat. He was on the fifth plane. His Master, the Khwaja of Ajmer, wanted him to keep away from attachment to illumination and come down; but he found it difficult to obey. Then the Master turned the key and brought him round in the following manner. He inwardly inspired five thieves to sit within five spaces from this Wali and to share what they had stolen. Soon they began quarrelling with each other and two killed the other three. The two then divided the loot between them and ran away. But in running away they passed by the Wali who, as soon as they came near, got normal consciousness. The vicinity of these criminals was a sufficiently crude stimulus to bring him down and to make him conscious of what was happening around him. He first saw some sparrows, and his impulse was to try his powers upon them. He said, "O sparrows, die"; and the sparrows died. Then he said, "Sparrows, rise up", and they lived again. The two thieves who saw this were amazed and requested the Wali to raise the three thieves whom they had killed in anger. On this, the Wali addressed himself to the three dead thieves and said, "Rise up"; but they did not rise. He was aghast at the thought that he had lost his powers, and, repenting for the frivolous use of these powers, he went to his Master. When he came near the Master he saw the three thieves massaging the Master's feet. The Wali then went back, indifferent to food or drink. He became lean and remained stationed in the same spot for ten years, until white ants began to eat his body. People came and placed near his body large quantities of sugar which the ants ate. Since his body was always surrounded by heaps of sugar, he came to be known as Ganjay Shakkar or the treasury of sugar. His story shows how even the most advanced aspirants need the help of the Master to proceed on the way to realization.

Occultism must be distinguished from spirituality

No occult phenomena have any intrinsic value in themselves, for the value that seems to belong to phenomena—occult or non-occult—is either illusory or relative. Illusory values arise when anything acquires importance because it stimulates or promises to

fulfil desires and the purposes born of ignorance. If the thing is taken out of the context of these desires it is immediately deprived of the meaning with which it seemed to be surcharged. Relative values arise when a thing acquires importance because it serves the realization or the expression of the Truth. The importance of such things is derived from their being the essential conditions of the game of divine life, and though it is relative it is real and not illusory.

Most persons consciously or unconsciously attach undue importance to occult phenomena and mistake them for spirituality. For them, miracles and spirit-phenomena are of absorbing interest and this is taken to be an indication of interest in the true life of the spirit. But, there is a very clear distinction between occultism and mysticism, spiritualism and spirituality, and any failure to grasp this difference leads to confusion.

All miracles belong to the phenomenal world, which is the world of shadows. As phenomena they are subject to change, and nothing that changes has lasting value. Realization of the Eternal Truth is initiation into the unchangeable Being, which is the supreme Reality; and no acquaintance with the occult world or capacity to manipulate its forces is equivalent to the realization of the Truth. The occult phenomena are as much within the domain of false imagination as any other phenomena of the material world. The one important thing is to realize the Divine Life and to help others to realize it by manifesting it in everyday life. To penetrate into the essence of all being and to release the fragrance of that inner attainment for the sake of the guidance and benefit of others by expressing in the world of forms, truth, love, purity and beauty alone has intrinsic worth. No other happenings, incidents or attainments have importance.

XVIII

REINCARNATION AND KARMA

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH

The worldly man identifies life with the manifestations and activities of the physical body; and for him, therefore, the beginning and end of bodily existence are also the beginning and end of a man. All his experience speaks to him about the transitoriness of the physical body, and he has witnessed the disintegration of physical bodies once vibrant with life. So he is impelled to believe that life is conterminous with bodily existence.

As the worldly man takes death to be the cessation of life, he gives great importance to death. There are a few who contemplate death for prolonged periods. Most persons, however, engrossed in worldly pursuits are impressed by the incidence of death only when confronted by it in their lives.

Death is among the most dreaded and most lamented events; it is also what people in malice or anger try to inflict upon each other as a last penalty or the worst revenge; and it is what they rely upon as the surest means of removing aggression or interference. People also invite death upon themselves in tokens of supreme self-sacrifice; and at times they seek it with the hope of putting an end to worldly worries and problems, which they are unable to face or solve.

This importance is derived from attachment to particular forms; but death may lose much of its importance, even for the worldly man, if he takes a broader view of life. He can realize that in spite of the transitoriness of forms, there is an unbroken continuity of life, for old forms are discarded and new ones created. Death is matched by birth; despite death, life continues to flourish; old generations are replaced by new; life is incessantly renewing and refreshing itself: the stream of life is ever moving through forms like the waves of the ocean.

So even within the limits of worldly experience there is much

that mitigates the thought of death as irreparable loss. Yet a sane attitude to death is possible only if life is considered impersonally without attachment to particular forms; but this is the very thing the worldly man finds difficult. For him one form is not as good as another; the form with which he identifies himself is by far the more important. The general preservation and advancement of the stream of life has for him no real interest; what the worldly man craves for is a continuation of his own form and of the particular forms with which he is entangled. With the vanishing of the forms that are dear to him he becomes a victim of sorrow, though life may have elsewhere replaced lost forms with new ones.

The sorrow of death turns out to be rooted in selfishness. The person who loses his beloved may know that life has elsewhere compensated for the loss; but his feeling is, "What is that to *me*?" Death becomes a cause of sorrow when a man looks at it from his personal point of view; though from the point of view of life in general it is an episode only.

Problems of the impersonal intellect

Impersonal considerations fortify the mind against the personal sorrow of death; but they do not by themselves solve the problems that confront the impersonal intellect of man when he considers some of the implications of death within the limits of ordinary experience. If death is to be regarded as the annihilation of individual existence, there seems to be irreparable loss, for each individual may be in a position to give to the universe something unique. And there is often the cutting short of an earthly career before its completion; all struggle towards the ideal, all enthusiasm for the great, the good and the beautiful, and all aspiration for things divine and eternal, end in death.

The implication of death as the termination of individual existence contradicts the expectations of rationalized intuition; thus there arises a conflict between the claims of intuition and the deliverance of the impure intellect, which assumes death to be the termination of individual existence. Such conflict is often the beginning of pure thinking, which challenges the accepted belief that death is the termination of individual existence. Death as the extinction of life can never be acceptable to the spiritual aspirations of man; and therefore, the belief in the immortality

of the individual soul is often accepted without much resistance, even in the absence of direct supersensible knowledge about the existence of life after death.

Those who know of immortality from personal experience are few. Supersensible knowledge of the existence of life after death is inaccessible to the vast majority of persons; for them, immortality must remain a belief but nothing more. It becomes a part of personal knowledge for those who through spiritual advancement have automatically unfolded certain latent perceptual capacities of the inner vehicles of consciousness.

Three worlds

Immortality is possible because the individualized soul is not identical with the physical body. The individualized soul continues to exist with its *sanskaras* in the inner worlds through the medium of its mental and subtle bodies even after it has discarded its physical body at death. For life through the medium of the gross body is only a section of the continuous life of the self; other sections of its life have expression in other worlds.

Nature is much more than what a man perceives through the senses of his physical body. There are hidden aspects of nature that have finer matter and forces. But there is no unbridgeable gulf separating the finer aspects of nature from its gross aspects. All interpenetrate each other and exist together. Though the finer aspects are not perceptible by ordinary men, they are nevertheless continuous with the physical aspect which is perceptible. They are not remote, yet they are inaccessible. This is due to the fact that human consciousness functions through the physical senses, which are not adapted for perceiving those aspects of nature that are finer than the physical aspect. Ordinarily, man is unconscious of the inner planes, just as a deaf man is unconscious of sounds. For all practical purposes, therefore, the inner planes are other "worlds". The hidden elements of nature have two divisions, viz., the subtle and the mental, corresponding to the subtle and mental bodies of man. The whole of nature may, therefore, be divided into three parts—(i) the physical (or gross) world, (ii) the subtle world and (iii) the mental world. When the self has incarnated itself in a physical body, it expresses its life through each of these parts; but when it drops the outer sheath of the physical body, it

continues to have its expression of life in the subtle world through the subtle body, and in the mental world through the mental body.

Untimely death

Life in the physical body is terminated only when the *sanskaras* which are released for expression in that incarnation, are worked out, though in some exceptional cases the soul gives up its physical body before the working out of the *sanskaras*. For example, the man who commits suicide cuts short the period of his life and prevents the working out of *sanskaras*. When the *sanskaras* released for fructification are withheld from expression, the discarnate soul remains subject to their propelling force even after the physical body has been discarded. The momentum of the *sanskaras* which were prevented from being worked out is retained after death, with the result that the departed spirit desires the things of the physical world.

Then the discarnate soul experiences an irresistible impulsion towards the physical world and craves for physical objects so that it seeks gratification through the physical bodies of souls that are still incarnate. Thus the soul may want to drink wine, and, finding some person in the physical world in the act of drinking wine, may satisfy its desire through that person by possessing his physical body and attaching himself to it. In the same way, if it wants to experience anger, it may do so through a person who is feeling angry. Such souls wait to meet and obsess some incarnate persons of similar *sanskaras*, and so try to maintain their contact with the gross world through others as long as possible. In life after death, any lingering entanglement with the physical world is a serious hindrance to the life of the soul, and those who are subject to this condition must be looked upon as unfortunate, since they invite upon themselves and others much unnecessary suffering. Compared with these unfortunate souls, the posthumous life of other souls is much smoother.

Death the interval between two lives

When the physical body is dropped, normal souls reconcile themselves with the severance of connection with the physical world, acquiesce in the limitations imposed by their changed

conditions, and sink into a state of subjectivity in which begins a new process of mental digestion of the experiences on earth by the revival of the *sanskaras* connected with them. Thus, death inaugurates a period of comparative rest consisting in a temporary withdrawal from the physical sphere of action; it is the beginning of an interval between one incarnation and another.

2. HELL AND HEAVEN

After death there is no consciousness of the physical world, since that consciousness is directly dependent on the physical body, but though that consciousness is lost the impressions of the experiences of the physical world are retained in the mental body, and continue to express themselves through the semi-subtle sphere. During the interval between death and the next incarnation, the consciousness is turned towards these impressions so that they are revived with the corresponding experiences. Man is not aware of the subtle environment. He is in complete subjectivity, absorbed in living through these revived impressions.

States of the mind

In life after death, the experiences of pain and pleasure become more intense than in the earthly life. These subjective states of intensified suffering and joy are called hell and heaven. Hell and heaven are states of the mind, not places; and though, from the subjective point of view, they mean much to the individualized soul, they are illusions within the illusion of the phenomenal world.

In the hell-state as well as in the heaven-state, desires become more intense, since they no longer require to be expressed through the physical medium and their fulfilment or non-fulfilment also becomes intensified. In the earthly career, desires, as well as the pleasures and the sufferings they bring, are experienced through the physical body, though the self uses its higher bodies even in its earthly career. But in that career, consciousness is bound up with the physical body, and therefore, the process of consciousness has to pass through an additional veil, and gets lessened in force, liveliness and intensity, just as rays of light get dimmed when passing through glass. During the habitation of the body, desires

and experiences suffer deterioration but when the bodily habitation is given up, they undergo increase of intensity. In the heaven-state, the fulfilment of desires is not as in the physical sphere dependent upon the object of desire; fulfilment of desire comes through thinking. For example, if a person is desirous of hearing music he gets the pleasure of hearing it merely by thinking about it; the imaginative idea of music is a substitute for the physical sound vibrations. The pleasure the soul derives from the thought of music is much greater than the pleasure derived in its earthly career from the physical sounds. In the heaven-state, there are no obstacles between desires and their fulfilment; and the pleasure of self-fulfilment through thought or feeling is constant.

Even in the earthly sphere some persons develop the capacity of making their pleasures independent of physical objects. The deaf Beethoven could through the exercise of imagination enjoy his own compositions. So even on earth he may have been said to be in the heaven-state. Thus, one who meditates on the Beloved derives happiness through the thought of the Beloved, without requiring the physical presence. After death, in the heaven-state, imaginative fulfilment is greater because consciousness is then disburdened of the veil of the physical body.

Some desires have a direct relation to the possession of the physical objects through the physical body. Lust, gluttony and the craving for wine are of this type. In these desires there are not only the sensations derived from contact, but the response of the body itself. These desires are the hell-state.

In contrast with the finer desires, the coarser desires are dependent upon sensation, apart from any intellectual meaning or aesthetic or moral value. In the finer desires, such as the desire for music, there is an element of sense-contact with the physical sounds, but these sounds in themselves express beauty. In the same way, a desire to hear speech exists not only because of the sound of the words but because of their intellectual meaning and emotional appeal.

Almost the entire significance of experiences brought about by the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of what are here called coarser desires is by the bodily sensations themselves; they can rarely, like the finer desires, yield the experience of fulfilment through the exercise of thought and imagination. It is characteristic of the coarser desires to long for the possession and assimilation of the

physical object; the imaginative idea of the physical object accentuates that urge. Since the physical object of the coarser desires is not available in the subtle world, there arises an intensified experience from the suffering of non-fulfilment. The revived experiences in connection with the coarser desires are the sufferings of the hell-state.

The sufferings of Hell and the pleasures of Heaven

Just as in this world the presence of coarser desires leads to the balance of suffering over pleasure, in the life after death also the revived experiences lead to a balance of suffering over pleasure, thus bringing into existence the hell-state; and just as in this world, the presence of finer desires leads to a balance of pleasure over suffering, in the life after death too, the revived experiences lead to a balance of pleasure over suffering, thus bringing into existence the heaven-state.

But hell and heaven are both states of bondage subject to the limitations of the opposites of pleasure and pain; both are states whose duration is determined by the nature, amount and intensity of accumulated impressions. Time in the subtle world is not the same as time in the physical world, owing to the increased subjectivity of consciousness, but it is none the less determined by the impressions accumulated in the physical world. However, the important fact is that the hell-state and the heaven-state are not lasting; after they have served their purpose, both come to an end.

Reliving experiences

The coarser sensual desires such as lust, and their emotional products such as hate and anger, contribute to the life of delusion and suffering in the hell-state; and the finer desires such as idealistic aspirations, aesthetic and scientific interests, or goodwill towards others, and their emotional products, such as personal love or fellow-feeling, contribute to the life of enlightenment and pleasure in the heaven-state. These states for most persons consist in reliving the experiences of earthly life by means of the verification of the impressions left by those experiences and their duration and nature are dependent upon those experiences through which the person passed during his life in the physical body.

Heaven and hell would, however, serve no purpose if they were but merely the revival of the earthly past. That would mean bare repetition of what has once occurred. In these after-death states, consciousness makes a more effective survey of the record of earthly life through the intensification of experiences. On earth, the consciousness of most persons is mainly objective and often dull, and under the pressure of unspent *sanskaras* is mostly concerned with the possible fulfilment of *sanskaras* through the present or the future. But after death, the consciousness of most persons is predominantly subjective and retrospective, and in the absence of forward-goading *sanskaras*, is mostly pre-occupied with reviewing and assessing the significance of the past.

Immediate responses to the changing situations of earthly life are replaced by a state free from the urgency of immediate action; and the accumulated experiences of the earthly career is available for reflection. The recording of earthly life has been taken on the film of the mind, and it is now time to study earthly life through the magnified projections of the filmed record on the screen of the subjective consciousness.

Thus the hell-state and the heaven-state become instrumental for the assimilation of experience acquired in the earthly phase so that the individualized soul can start its next incarnation in the physical body with the advantage of digested experience. The lessons learnt through such reflection are by the power of their magnified suffering or happiness confirmed on the mind-body, and become for the next incarnation part of the intuitive make-up of the active consciousness. The truths absorbed by the mind in the life after death become in the next incarnation a part of inborn wisdom. Developed intuition is nothing but consolidated understanding distilled through the multitude of experiences gathered in previous lives.

Different souls start with different degrees of intuitive wisdom, which is their initial capital for the adventures of their earthly career. This intuition is to be looked upon as an unfoldment of what was latent in the self. Thus the experiences of earthly life as well as the reflective and consolidatory processes to which they are subjected in life after death are both instrumental in releasing the intuitive wisdom latent from the beginning of creation. As with the earthly career and experiences, the states of hell and heaven in the life after death are incidents of the journey of the self, which

is meant to arrive ultimately at the source of all things, the Eternal Self.

3. THE MEMORIES OF PAST LIVES

Those who have immediate access to the supersensible truths concerning the life of self and its reincarnation, know through perception that birth is an incarnation of the individualized soul. The continuity of the life of the reincarnating soul is punctuated by the incidents of birth and death, which are both comparable to the gateways of the stream of life advancing from one type of existence to another. Both are equally necessary to the life of the soul, and the interval between death and birth is as necessary as the interval between birth and death.

Those who consider death to be the termination of individual existence, in common with those who consider the birth of the body to be its beginning, are confronted with a conflict between their false assumptions, and the claims of intuition. From the point of view of justice the lot of the good and the bad in respect of material happiness or prosperity seems to deny the rationality of the entire scheme of the universe; for the virtuous in the throes of suffering and the vicious in possession of pleasure create difficulties for many minds.

Unless there is some explanation, the mind is riddled with perplexities that may embitter the outlook and foster cynicism, which may be worse than the deepest personal sorrow that death may cause. But in spite of appearances to the contrary, the human mind has an inborn tendency to restore to itself a deep faith in the intrinsic sanity and value of life.

Those who have direct access to the truth of reincarnation are fewer than those who have direct access to the truth of immortality. The memories of all past lives are preserved in the mind-body of the individual soul; but they are not accessible to consciousness, because a veil is drawn over them. When the soul changes its physical body, it gets a new brain; and its normal waking consciousness functions in close association with the brain-processes. Under ordinary circumstances, only the memories of the present life appear in consciousness, because the brain acts as a hindrance to the release of the memories of those experiences gathered through the medium of other brains in past lives. In rare instances, memories of past lives enter the present life

in the form of dreams. A man may see in his dreams persons whom he has never met in his present life; it may happen that they were those he had encountered in past lives. But, of course, such dreams cannot be regarded as memory of past lives; they merely indicate that the imagination was influenced by past lives. The real memory of past lives is clear, steady and sure, and when it comes a man has no longer any doubt about his having existed before.

Release of the memory of past lives

The number of persons who remember their past lives is small compared with those who are so bound to the gross sphere of existence as not even to suspect supersensible realities. The release of these memories is conditioned by the limitations of the brain as long as consciousness is subject to the physical body and its brain processes. But when consciousness is emancipated from the limitations imposed by the brain it recovers and re-establishes the memories of past lives stored in the mental body. This requires a degree of detachment and understanding that only spiritually advanced persons have. The memory of past lives is enjoyed by those who are crossing the inner planes but have not yet become spiritually perfect.

Loss of this memory does not affect spiritual progress, and is not necessary for guidance in the course of spiritual evolution. Spiritual evolution consists in living in the light of the highest values perceived through intuition and not allowing it to be obscured by the past. Even the memory of the present life may act as an obstacle. Emancipation may be said to be a problem of securing freedom from the past, which for those who are bound to the wheel of birth and death inexorably shapes the present life.

Conditions of safety in the release of memory

Life would be much more complicated were those not spiritually advanced burdened by the conscious memory of past lives. They would get unsettled by the diversity of settings in which they and others would appear in the light of such a memory. But they are not called upon to face such confusion, because they are now shielded from the resurrection of the past. Things and persons exist in a limited and definite context, with the result that they

find it possible to determine actions and to feel responses in the light of what is known from the present life. This does not mean that actions and responses are entirely determined by such knowledge, for all that has happened in past lives has an unconscious share in determining present actions and responses. But in spite of the influence of past lives, the fact remains that shielded from the resurrection of memory, consciousness is not subjected to that confusion which would result if conscious memory of past lives existed.

The memory of past lives is without confusion only when a person has become desireless and has lost the feeling of "mine" and "thine". Those whom he once looked upon as belonging to him might in the present life seem to belong to someone else; and if he were to carry on old attachments and claims into the present life there would be great complications, misery and confusion for himself as well as for others. Possessiveness has to be purged from the mind, if the aspirant is to be spiritually prepared for withstanding the disturbing influence of memory from past lives.

A spiritually prepared man becomes desireless and has impersonal love; the entanglements of the personal ego have disappeared from his mind; he looks upon old friends and enemies with the same equanimity; and he is free from the idea of claims against others or of others against himself, because he has realized the truth of the unity of life.

Only when a person is thus spiritually prepared is he unaffected by revived memory and only then is it worth while for him to have access to it, for only then has he that cool judgment and pure incorruptible love which enable him to make right use of the new knowledge. This knowledge opens to him information about his own incarnations and about the incarnations of others connected with him and not only enables him to advance further on the path by conscious *karmic* adjustments, but also to help others by directing them in the light of what he knows of their past lives.

The speed of spiritual evolution quickens after the recover of memory of past incarnations. Disentanglement from earthly things is facilitated by conscious knowledge of the history of the development of such entanglements. Evolution, which so far was mostly unconscious, now becomes conscious; the obstacles as well as the facilities created by the past are now in the reach of consciousness, and therefore, are capable of intelligent handling. Inarticulate

intuition is supplemented by rationalized thought; therefore, action has less possibility of error.

The Masters of wisdom have no special interest in past incarnations; for they are among the many unimportant facts of earthly existence. If they make use of their knowledge of the past lives of a person, it is only for helping him onwards towards the eternal Truth. The details of the Path may be determined by (i) the incidents of the past, (ii) the manner in which the aspirant has sought the highest Truth in his past lives, and (iii) the obstacles or the facilities that he has created for himself through his past doings. All these things hidden from the aspirant are open to the perception of the Master, who uses his knowledge to accelerate the spiritual progress of the seeker of the Truth.

4. SPECIFIC CONDITIONS OF AN INCARNATION

The self has its source in the infinite, formless, sexless and indivisible being of God, who is beyond all forms of duality or evolution. With the beginning of the individualized soul there is the beginning of duality and evolution, though the specific form of duality consisting in the distinction and attraction based upon sex makes its appearance at a later stage. Duality exists as soon as there is subject and object, a centre of consciousness (howsoever dim) and its environment. Sex is a specific kind of bodily attraction, which presupposes differentiation of forms, a specific kind of psychic entanglement with the forms, and a specific expression of life and energy.

Sex as duality

In the mineral kingdom, there is no sex. In the kingdom of plants and trees the bodily differentiations of sex with specialized biological functions have come into existence. But plants and trees do not generate sex-consciousness, since the development of consciousness in plants and trees is rudimentary and its expressions are not influenced by bodily differentiations. The possible contact between the male and the female in plants and trees is due to their being fixed in the ground, and are indirect only through the intermediate agency of the wind and insects. Therefore, though sex-differentiation may be said to have begun to emerge with the

evolution of forms, even at the level of plants and trees, they cannot be said to have sex-consciousness.

The evolution of sex is the evolution of the consciousness of duality. In this evolution, plants and trees are midway between minerals, who have no sex, and birds and animals who have it in its complete form. Just before the self incarnates itself in a human form, it arrives in the animal forms as consciousness and energy; it then takes a human body. Reincarnation of the individualized soul through human forms, is preceded by its transmigration through the sub-human forms. Thus the soul has experience of all existence.

Sex in animals not only expresses itself through bodily differences and activities but is a deep-rooted factor that affects consciousness. Since human beings inherit their bodies as well as their consciousness from highly evolved animals, human beings also find themselves subject to sex-duality. In human beings, however, sex is so completely developed that it is no longer a matter merely of the body, for it substantially modifies the psyche, which seeks expression through the body, according to whether the form is male or female.

After attaining the human form, there is (except in rare instances) no reversion to animal forms. The normal course for the soul is to go through countless reincarnations in the human form, sometimes male and sometimes female, according to the *sanskaras* and the spiritual requirements of the soul.

The female form has the prerogative that even *Sadgurus* and the *Avatars* have to be born through the female form; but the male form has the prerogative that the majority of *Sadgurus* appear in a male form. Women can, indeed, become saints and *Sadgurus*; but the *Avatar* always appears as a male.

The facilities and handicaps of an incarnation are determined by the *sanskaras*, which the individual soul has accumulated in the past. The needs of the further development of the soul are relative to the nature of its accumulated *sanskaras*, which determine whether the soul takes its incarnation in the East or the West, and whether in the male or female form, or whether in one cycle of existence or another.

East and West

In general, the East has developed more on spiritual than material lines, with the result that the Eastern mind has a spontaneous aspiration for God; and the West, on the whole, has developed more on material than spiritual lines, with the result that the Western mind has a spontaneous urge towards intellectual and artistic things. An incarnation in the East usually brings a greater tendency towards spiritual life than an incarnation in the West; and an incarnation in the West usually brings a greater tendency towards material life than an incarnation in the East. But the soul has to experience the material as well as the spiritual aspects of life before it is freed from the fetters of divided life; therefore the same soul has to incarnate in both East and West.

Change of sphere

If a soul has had many successive incarnations in the East, and then takes an incarnation in the West, it carries with it the impressions of its lives in the East, and, though living in the West, it leads a life that is essentially in conformity with the Eastern pattern. If a soul has had many successive incarnations in the West and then takes an incarnation in the East, it carries with it the impressions of its lives in the West, and though living in the East, leads a life that is in conformity with the Western pattern. So sometimes we have the European soul in an Indian form or an Indian soul in the European form; but it must be borne in mind that this distinction is relative only to past incarnations and *sanskaras* and that the soul, as such, is beyond such distinctions.

Cycles of existence

The facilities afforded by male and female incarnations respectively are not invariable. They change according to the cycles of existence as well as according to whether the incarnation is in the East or West. In some ages, men are more active, energetic and materially-minded than women; in other ages, the reverse. In the past, the women of the East were brave and intellectual. They considered no sacrifice too great for the happiness and well-being of the husband; and their spiritual humility went to the extent of looking upon the husband as God. But now in the Eastern hemi-

sphere the average man has greater spiritual inclination than the average woman, just as in the West the average woman of today has greater spiritual inclination than the average man. A man living in the East is different from a man living in the West; and a woman living in the East is different from a woman living in the West. In comparison with members of the opposite sex, the same soul shows varying degrees of superiority, inferiority, or equality in spiritual or material matters, according to the cycle of existence, the sex of its body, and the earthly sphere, in which it takes an incarnation.

5. THE NEED FOR MALE AND FEMALE INCARNATIONS

Though the facilities afforded by each sex are variable, according to the age and place in which the incarnation takes place, it remains true that each sex affords facilities for the development of experience along specific lines. The lessons that are readily learnt in male incarnations may not be easily attainable through female incarnations; and the lessons that are readily learnt in female incarnations, may not be easily attainable in male incarnations. Men as a rule excel in the qualities of the head and will; they are capable of sound judgment and steadfast purpose. Women as a rule excel in the qualities of the heart; they are capable of intense love, which makes them welcome any sacrifice for the loved one. It is owing to this capacity for love that in devotional references the name of a female has an invariable precedence, as when the *Bhaktas* sing of Radha-Krishna or Sita-Ram. In the qualities of the heart, women are usually superior to men; and in the qualities of the head and will, men are usually superior to women. The interesting point is that the same soul excels in the qualities of the heart or in the qualities of the head and will, according to whether it takes an incarnation in a female or a male form. The alternate development of specific spiritual qualities goes on through the alternation between the male and female forms, until development is all-sided.

Since male and female incarnations are equally necessary for self-knowledge, it is not right to look upon one as being more important than the other. Though there are differences between their natures, they are equally indispensable. The soul must go through male incarnations as well as female incarnations to

acquire that richness of experience that is a condition of attaining the realization of the self that is beyond all forms of duality, including the duality of sex.

The unity of the subject and the object of experience is unattainable as long as there is in the object any aspect or element that is not fully covered by experience.

Since the soul identifies itself with the body, the psychological tendencies that harmonize with the sex of the body provide a suitable medium for expression, and the psychological tendencies characteristic of the opposite sex ordinarily get suppressed into the unconscious psyche, because they do not harmonize with the sex of the body, and thus find the medium of expression obstructive. When the soul takes a female body, the male tendencies are held in abeyance, the female tendencies are released for expression; in the same way, when the soul takes a male body the female tendencies are held in abeyance and the male tendencies are released.

Sex entanglement

Identification with the body involves identification with the sex of the body; it therefore implies a free play only for that limited part of the psyche that is in tune with the sex of the body; and since the other part of the psyche is repressed and latent in the unconscious, there arises in the consciousness a feeling of incompleteness as well as a tendency to restore completeness, through attachment to persons of the opposite sex. By association with the opposite sex the buried part of psyche, which did not go well with the body, is seeking some kind of expression through another; from this point of view, sex-attraction might be said to be a result of the effort that the mind makes to unite with its own unconsciousness.

Sex is a manifestation of the attempt of the conscious mind to compensate for psychic fragmentariness entailed by identification with the sex of the body; but this attempt is bound to be futile, because it is not only based upon identification with the body, but accentuates it, by setting into opposition the body of the opposite sex, and getting entangled with it through attachment and possessiveness.

When the soul endeavours to overcome sex-duality through detachment towards the opposite sex, it is paving a way for

understanding the experience associated with the opposite sex from within. Then a man tries to understand a woman, not through the eyes of the male, but through the imaginative reaching out towards what the woman feels herself to be in her own personal experience. In the same way, a woman tries to understand a man not through the eyes of the female but through the imaginative reaching out towards what a man feels himself to be in his own personal experience. So, paradoxical though it may seem, the form of the opposite sex prevents the true understanding of experience associated with the opposite sex; and detachment from the form of the opposite sex facilitates the true understanding of the experience associated with the opposite sex, because it removes the barrier created by sex-obsessed imagination.

If a man is transcending sex-duality and trying to understand the experience associated with the opposite sex, he sometimes exhibits the psychological traits usually associated with the opposite sex. Thus, some aspirants, in the male body, at one phase or another, actually put on the clothes of the female, talk like them, feel like them and take on their psychic traits and habits. But this is only a passing phase; and when the inner understanding of the relevant experiences is complete, they neither experience themselves as male alone nor as female alone, but as being beyond the distinction of sex. The experiences connected with both male and female forms are accessible to the aspirant who has transcended sex-distinction; he remains unaffected by the limitations of either, because through understanding he has freed himself from the limiting obsessions characteristic of imagination.

Reconciliation of conscious and unconscious mind

The completeness that the mind seeks is not attainable through attachment to other forms, it is to be sought within by recapturing the lost unity of the mind. Reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious mind is possible not through sex-attraction or other forms of possessiveness but through non-identification with the body. Non-identification with the body removes the barrier that prevents the integration of the total experiences deposited in the psyche of the soul.

To be free from attachment to the opposite sex is to be free from the domination of the sex of the body, in which the soul has in-

carated itself; and to be free from the domination of the sex of the body, amounts to the annihilation of the major part of those *sanskaras* that compel the soul to identify itself with the body. The transcending of sex-duality does not itself amount to the overcoming of all duality; but it goes a long way towards facilitating the transcendence of duality in all its forms. On the other hand, the problem of sex-duality is a part of the problem of duality as such, and its complete solution comes when the wider problem of all duality is solved through Divine Love, in which there is neither "I" nor "You", neither man nor woman. The purpose of male and female incarnations is the same as the purpose of evolution itself: it is to enable man to arrive at his own undivided and indivisible existence.

6. THE OPERATION OF KARMA THROUGH SUCCESSIVE LIVES

In successive incarnations there is not only a thread of continuity and identity (as manifested in the personal memory revived in advanced souls), but there is uninterrupted reign of the law of cause and effect, through the persistence and operation of *Karma*. The successive incarnations, with all their particulars, are closely and unfailingly determined by a rational law, so that it becomes possible for the individual soul to mould its future through intelligent action. The actions of past lives determine the conditions and circumstances of the present life; and the actions of the present life have their share in determining the conditions and circumstances of future lives. The successive incarnations yield their full significance, only in the light of the operation of the law of *Karma*.

Persistence of Karma through the mental body

Incarnations in the physical world are only apparently disconnected. *Karma* persists as a connecting link and determining factor through the mental body, which remains a permanent and constant factor through all the lives of the soul. The law of *Karma* and its manner of operation cannot be fully intelligible as long as the physical body and the physical world are considered to be the only facts of existence. *Karmic* determination is made possible by the existence of subtle and mental bodies and worlds.

The plane on which one possesses physical consciousness is the

physical world. The planes on which one possesses consciousness of desires are the subtle world. And the planes on which one has mental consciousness are the mental world. The source of desire is in the mind, which is on the mental planes. Here, the seed of desire is attached to the mind; the desire exists here in an involved form, in the same way as the tree is latent in the seed. The mental body, which is the seat of the mind, is often called *Karana Sharira* or the causal body, because it stores within itself the seeds or the causes of all desires. The mind retains all impressions and dispositions in a latent form. The limited "I" or the ego is composed of these *sanskaras*. However, the actual manifestation of *sanskaras* in consciousness, as expressed through different mental processes, takes place in the subtle body.

The self which is one and undifferentiated, gets apparently individualized through the limitations of the mental body, which is the seat of the ego-mind. The ego-mind is formed by the accumulated impressions of past experiences and actions; and it is this ego-mind that constitutes the kernel of the existence of the reincarnating individual. The ego-mind as a reservoir of latent impressions is the state of the mental body; the ego-mind experiencing activated and manifested impressions is the state of the subtle body; and the ego-mind as descended in the gross sphere for creative action is the state of a physical incarnation. Thus, the ego-mind, which is seated in the mental body, is the entity that has all the phases of continued existence as a separate individual.

The ego-mind takes lower bodies according to the impressions stored in it. These impressions determine whether a person will die young or old, whether he will experience health, illness or both, whether he will be beautiful or ugly, whether he will suffer from physical handicaps such as blindness, or will have bodily efficiency, whether he will have a sharp or dull intellect, whether he will be pure or impure of heart, fickle or steadfast in will, and whether he will be immersed in the pursuit of material gains or will seek the inner light of the spirit.

The game of duality

The ego-mind in its turn becomes modified through the deposited impressions *of Karma* (which include not only gross and

physical action, but thought and feeling), and the circumstances of each incarnation get adjusted to the composition and the needs of the ego-mind. Thus, if a person has developed certain special capacities or tendencies in one incarnation he carries them on to the succeeding incarnations; and things that have been left incomplete in one incarnation get completed in the incarnations that follow. Through the persistence of impressions the *Karmic* links, which have been forged in one incarnation, are carried on and developed in succeeding incarnations, so that those who have been closely associated with each other, through good or bad dealings, have a tendency to have recurring contacts and to carry on the game of duality far enough to gather so much experience of the opposites that the soul, out of the fullness of its experience, eventually becomes ripe for dropping the ego-mind, and turning inwards to know itself as the Eternal Self.

Give and take between persons forges *Karmic* and *sanskritic* ties between them and creates claims and counter-claims. They have to come together to meet these claims and counter-claims. That which a person gives with a selfish motive binds him as much as what he takes with a sense of separateness. Give or take which thus binds need not be purely on the material plane; it may consist of the exchange of views or feelings.

Karma of interference

One who pays respect to a saint on the higher planes creates a claim against him, so that if the saint is himself crossing the inner planes and treading the Path, he has to tarry and give such help as will bring the devotee to that point on the Path that he himself has reached. Paying respect to a saint is thus the *Karma* of interference. Though respect as such is good to receive, in receiving it the saint may thus have to stop on the Path.

The quick and unfailing responsiveness of souls is expressed in the law that hate begets hate, lust begets lust, and love begets love. This law operates not only during a single life-time, but through several lives. A man feels impelled to hate or fear an enemy of past lives, although his present life may not have provided any apparent reason for this attitude; and in the same way, without any apparent reason, he is impelled to love and help a friend of past lives. The person may not be aware of the reason for his

attitude, which does not mean that there is no reason for it. Many things that seem to be inexplicable become intelligible when they are considered in the light of the *Karmic* links from past lives.

The law of Karma

The law of *Karma* is the law exhibiting itself through continuously changing mutual adjustments in the individual souls that seek self-expression in a common world. It is an outcome of the responsiveness of ego-minds. The rhythm on which two souls start a relationship tends to perpetuate itself, unless the soul through fresh *Karma* changes the rhythm and raises it to a higher level. As a rule accumulated *Karma* has a certain inertia; it does not change its momentum unless there is a special reason for it. Before *Karma* is created, the individual has freedom to choose what it shall be, then *Karma* becomes a factor that cannot be ignored; it has either to be expended through its results, or counteracted by fresh *Karma*.

Pleasure or pain experienced in life on earth, the success or failure which attend it, the attainments and obstacles with which it is strewn, the friends and foes that make their appearance in it, are determined by the *Karma* of past lives. *Karmic* determination is called fate. Fate, however, is not an oppressive principle. It is man's own creation pursuing him from past lives; shaped by past *Karma*, it can also be modified, remoulded and even undone through *Karma* in the present life.

Creative Karma possible only in the physical body

If *Karma* on earth is determined by the impressions stored in the ego-mind, the impressions stored in the ego-mind are, in their turn, determined by the *Karma* in earthly life. The impressions in the ego-mind and the nature of *Karma* are interdependent. The *Karma* on earth plays an important part in shaping and reshaping the impressions in the ego-mind and giving it momentum, which decides the future destiny of the individual. It is in the arena of earthly existence that creative and effective *Karma* can take place through the medium of the physical body.

The proper understanding and use of the law of *Karma* enables

man to become master of his own destiny. Each person has become what he is through his own accumulated actions; and it is through his actions that he can mould himself according to the pattern of his heart, or finally emancipate himself from the reign of *Karmic* determination.

Unbinding Karma

In a general sense, *Karma* is of two kinds: there is the *Karma* that binds, and the *Karma* that helps towards emancipation and self-realization. The good as well as the bad *Karma* binds so long as it springs from the ego-mind and feeds it; but *Karma* becomes a means of emancipation when it springs from right understanding. Right understanding in this respect is best imparted by the Masters, who know the soul as the self in its true nature and destiny, along with the complications created by *Karmic* laws.

The *Karma* that counts comes into existence after the person has developed the sense of the distinction between good and bad. During the first seven years of childhood, the impressions that are released for expression are very faint, accompanied by consciousness that is correspondingly less responsive to the distinctions of the world. Therefore, the actions of children under seven years, do not leave strong impressions on the ego-mind, and do not play any important part in shaping their future. Effective *Karma*, which moulds the ego-mind and its future, begins after the soul develops a sense of responsibility, which is dependent upon the sense of distinction between good and bad, which dawns after the age of seven

The law of *Karma* is the counterpart of the law of cause and effect, which operates in the physical world. If there were no law of cause and effect in the physical world there would be chaos. In the same way, if there were no law of *Karma* in the world of values, there would be uncertainty in values, and people would not know whether they were to expect good or bad from their actions. In the physical world there is the law of conservation of energy, and in the world of values, there is the law that once *Karma* comes into existence, it persists until it bears its own fruit or is undone through counter-*Karma*.

*The law of Karma maintains the moral order of the
Universe*

It is through the connection between cause and effect in the world of values that the moral order of the universe is sustained. If the law of *Karma* were to be subject to any relaxation, there would be no moral order in the universe; and without moral order human existence would be precarious. In a universe of no moral order human endeavour would be fraught with doubt. There cannot be any serious pursuit of values without connection between means and ends and without the certainty that the law of *Karma* cannot be set aside. The inflexibility of *Karma* is a condition of significant action; significant human action would be impossible if *Karma* could be ignored.

However rigorous the operation of *Karma* it does not operate in the soul as the oppressiveness of some external power, but as that which is inherent in the rationality of the scheme of life. *Karmic* determination is the condition of responsibility. It means that a man reaps as he sows.

**7. THE DESTINY OF THE REINCARNATING
INDIVIDUAL**

The series of incarnations that the soul is impelled to take through *Karmic* determination has a tendency to become endless. Through innumerable lives the aspirant has come into contact with countless persons. He is entangled in a web of debts to pay and dues to recover, and according to the *Karmic* law he can neither avoid the debts nor the dues, since both are the outcome of desire. He keeps incarnating to pay off his debts and to recover his dues, but even when he means to clear up the account he is often unable to do so.

Debts and dues

Those other persons with whom a man has *Karmic* links of debts or dues may not be in incarnation when he has taken a body; or he may, owing to the limitations imposed by his own capacities and circumstances, be unable to meet all the requirements of a situation. When he is trying to clear up accounts he cannot help creating fresh claims and counterclaims, even to create new debts and dues with new persons, and to get involved with them. A man goes on adding to his debts and dues with the result that there is no getting out of his *Karmic* entanglements.

The carrying on of *Karmic* debts and dues would be endless were there no provision for release from them through the help of the Master, who can not only initiate the aspirant into the art of unbinding *Karma*, but can directly become instrumental in freeing him from his *Karmic* entanglements. The Master has attained unity with God, whose cosmic and universal life includes all persons, and he can in his representative capacity become for the sake of the aspirant the medium for clearing up the debts and dues he has incurred in his incarnations

Relation between Master and disciple carried on through several lives

When the good *Karma* has secured for the aspirant the benefit of contacting a Master, he should surrender himself to the Master and serve him. Through surrender the aspirant throws the burden of his *Karma* on the Master, and through service of the Master he gets an opportunity to get clear. The relation between Master and disciple may be carried on from one life to another for several reincarnations. If the Master who has given instruction and help to a group of disciples takes an incarnation for his work he usually brings them with him as his group of disciples to help them further on their Path. Those who have been connected with him in past lives are drawn to him by an unconscious magnetism. There is usually a long history to the unaccountable devotion that a disciple feels for his Master; the disciple is often beginning where he had left off in the last incarnation.

When the disciple invites the grace of a Master it is not without reason. Sometimes the Master seems to impart spirituality to a disciple without any apparent effort or sacrifice on the part of the disciple, but the right to this favour has been earned by his endeavours in past lives. The love and devotion felt for the Master through past lives have formed a deep connection between him and the Master, so that the awakening of spiritual longing has its counterpart in the grace which flows from the Master. It is through his own past unbinding *Karma* that a person invites the grace of the Master, just as it is through his own binding *Karma* that he invites upon himself the pleasure and pain as well as the good and evil of which he is the recipient.

Danger of falling back

Sooner or later the logic of experience drives every one to seek the highest goal and enter the Path. As he advances on the Path, the aspirant may develop certain capacities which enable him not only to have conscious experience of the inner subtle and mental worlds but also to use the forces and powers available on the higher planes. The first two planes are dangerous, and there are many who in some life have been through them. There are many pit-falls on the Path, and without the guidance of a Master, the aspirant is in danger of falling back.

Yoga-bhrasta

After the first few planes, the aspirant may have such setbacks that he may retrogress. Indeed, sometimes the aspirant may, through *Karma*, invite a fall that takes him back so far that ages may pass before he can return to his first point of progress. The aspirant who has such a fall is known as a *yoga-bhrasta*. Even the *yogis* are subject to the unyielding law of *Karma*, which knows no exceptions, concessions or preferences. Only when the aspirant has the guidance of a Perfect Master is his spiritual journey safe; only then is there no possibility of a fall or retrogression. The Master wards him from wrong *Karma*, in which he might otherwise get involved.

The treading of the spiritual Path continues for several incarnations before the aspirant attains the goal. Centuries of sacrifices, service, self-purification, suffering, and determined search are passed through for the final realization of God. God-realization, which is the goal of the reincarnating individual, is never attained in a single life; it is always the culmination of continued endeavour through a succession of lives. The *Karma* of many lives has created the bindings of the individual soul, which have to be undone by the creation of intelligent and unbinding *Karma*, which also has to be carried on for many lives.

Power in reincarnations is craving

The power that keeps the individual soul bound to the wheel of life and death is its thirst for separate existence, which is craving, connected with the objects of the world of duality. It is for the

fulfilment of cravings, that the ego-mind incarnates itself. When craving disappears the impressions, which create and enliven the ego-mind, disappear; and with the disappearance of these impressions, the ego-mind itself is shed, with the result that there is the realization of the one eternal, unchanging Oversoul or God, the only reality. God-realization is the end of the incarnations of the ego-mind because it is the end of its very existence; as long as the ego-mind exists, there is an irresistible urge for incarnations. When there is the cessation of the ego-mind, there is the cessation of incarnations.

The drama of destiny

The life of the reincarnating individual has many phases. The wheel of life makes its ceaseless rounds, lifting the individual to the heights or bringing him down; it thus contributes to the enrichment of his experience. Ideals left unattained in one life are pursued in the next; things left undone are finished; the edges left by incomplete endeavour are rounded off; wrongs are set right. The give and take between persons receives adjustment by the repayment of *Karmic* debts and the recovery of *Karmic* dues. In the end, out of the ripeness of experience, the soul through the dissolution of the ego-mind enters into the unity of Divine Life. In this Divine Life, there is neither the binding of giving nor the binding of taking, because the soul has completely transcended the consciousness of separateness or duality.

The drama of the continued life of the individual soul has many acts. From the point of view of the worldly existence of the soul, a curtain may be said to be drawn over its life after the closing of each act. But no act yields its real significance if regarded as complete; it has to be taken in a wider context as a link between the acts that have passed and the acts that are still to come; its meaning is in the theme of the whole drama, of which it is a part. The end of the act is not the end of the theme. The actors disappear from the stage of earth only to reappear again in new capacities and new contexts.

The actors are so engrossed in their respective roles that they treat them as the be-all and end-all of existence, and for the major part of their continued life (running into innumerable incarnations) they are unconscious of the truth that the author of the

drama, in his imaginative production, himself became all the actors and played the game of hide and seek, so as to enter into full and conscious possession of his own creative infinity. The author has to play the parts of the actors to know himself in the great drama worked out through the cycles of creation.

XIX

MAYA AS FALSEHOOD

1. FALSE VALUES

Everyone wants to know and realize the Truth; but truth cannot be known and realized unless ignorance is known and realized as ignorance. Hence arises the importance of understanding *Maya* or the principle of ignorance. People read about *Maya* without understanding what it is. To understand it is to know half the Truth of the universe. Ignorance in all its forms has to disappear if the soul is to be established in self-knowledge; therefore it is necessary for man to know that which is false, to know it as false and so to get rid of it.

What is the essential nature of a falsehood? If the true is known as true or if the false is known as false, there is no falsehood, only a form of knowledge; falsehood consists in taking the true as false or the false as true, i.e., in considering something to be other than what it is. So falsehood is an error in judging the nature of things.

Two kinds of knowledge and valuation

There are two kinds of knowledge, (i) intellectual judgments about the facts of existence and (ii) judgments that imply the appreciation of the worth or importance of things, i.e., valuation; surely intellectual judgments derive importance from their being related to values in some way; divorced from values they have no importance. Intellectual knowledge is important when it enables values to be realized by giving control over the means, or when it enters into valuation itself, modifying or in some other way affecting it.

Falsehood the creation of Maya

Just as there are two kinds of judgment, there are two kinds of falsehood: (i) mistakes in taking as a fact that which is not a fact;

and (ii) mistakes in valuation. Mistakes in valuation can be committed in three ways:

- (a) in taking as important that which is unimportant;
- or
- (b) in taking as unimportant that which is important;
- or
- (c) in giving to a thing an importance that is other than the importance it really has.

All these falsehoods are creations of *Maya*.

Although *Maya* includes all falsehoods, there are some falsehoods that count and others that do not count. If a person takes a chair to be higher than it is, it would be a falsehood, but one that possibly, does not much matter. On the other hand, if a person takes the use of the chair to be important to his life, that would be a falsehood that affects his life. Mistakes in valuation are far more effective in misguiding, perverting and limiting life, than mistakes in judgments about objective facts.

*False values arise through the influence of subjective
wants*

Mistakes in valuation arise owing to the influence of subjective desires. True values are values that belong to things in their own right: they are intrinsic, and are absolute and permanent, not liable to change from time to time or from person to person. But false values are derived from desires and are dependent upon subjective factors; being dependent, they are relative and impermanent, liable to change from time to time and from person to person.

The value of sense-objects is great or small according to the intensity or urgency with which they are desired. If desires increase, the objects assume importance; if they subside, the object lose importance; if the desires are intermittent, the objects retain possible value; when the desires are latent, and actual value when they are manifesting themselves. All these are false values, because they do not belong to the objects themselves. When in the light of true knowledge all desires disappear, objects that had importance through these desires are deprived of importance.

Just as a coin that does not have currency is treated as false though it has a kind of existence, the objects of desires when seen in their emptiness are treated as false, though those objects might continue to have some kind of recognition. They are there and they may be known but no longer mean anything.

When a beloved one dies there is sorrow and sense of loss, but the sense of loss is due to attachment to the form of the loved one. It is the form which has vanished, not the self of the loved one. The self is not dead; in its true nature, it has not even passed away, for it is everywhere. But through attachment to the body, all longings, desires, emotions, thoughts were centred upon the form, and when through death the form disappears, there is emptiness. If the form, as such, had not come to be regarded with false importance, there would be no sorrow for one who has passed away. The feeling of loneliness, the longing that he should still be present, the tears of bereavement and the sighs of separation are due to false valuation; they are the working of *Maya*. When an unimportant thing is regarded as important, we have one manifestation of the working of *Maya*. From the spiritual point of view it is a form of ignorance.

On the other hand, the working of *Maya* also expresses itself by making an important thing look unimportant. From the spiritual point of view, only God has importance. But very few persons are interested in God. If the worldly minded turn to God at all it is visually for selfish and temporal purposes; they seek the gratification of desires, hopes and revenges through the intervention of the God of their imagination; they do not call on God as Truth. They long for all things except the Truth, which they regard as unimportant. This again is the blinding caused by the working of *Maya*.

The working of *Maya* also expresses itself by giving to a thing an importance that is not the importance it really has. This happens when rituals, ceremonies and other religious practices are considered as ends in themselves. They have their own value as means, as vehicles of the inner life, as a medium of expression; but as soon as they are allowed to exist in their own right they are given an importance other than that which belongs to them. Then they bind life instead of expressing it. When the inessential is allowed to predominate there is the third principal form of ignorance concerning valuation. This again is the working of *Maya*.

2. FALSE BELIEFS

The soul is held in bondage chiefly by wrong values or falsehoods concerning valuation. But some falsehoods of the nature of

wrong beliefs also play an important part in holding the soul in bondage. False beliefs implement false values, but they also gather strength from false values. All false beliefs are as much creations of *Maya* as are false values.

Maya becomes irresistible in the seat of knowledge, which is the human intellect. It is thus difficult to surmount *Maya* because with the intellect under its sway false beliefs and illusions are created and upheld. Barriers to the realization of the Truth are the results of attempts to justify erroneous beliefs. The intellect functioning in freedom prepares the way to the Truth, but under the influence of *Maya* it creates obstacles to understanding.

The false value of the physical body

The false beliefs by *Maya* are so deep-rooted and strong that they seem to be self-evident; they appear to be veritable truths, and are accepted without question. For example, men believe that they are their physical bodies, and it does not occur to them that they may be other than these bodies. Identification with the physical body is assumed without proof; and they hold the belief all the more strongly because it is independent of rational proof. Man's life has been centred upon the physical body and its desires. To give up the belief that he is the physical body involves the giving up of desires pertaining to the physical body and the false values which they maintain. Therefore, the belief that he is his physical body appears to be natural; it is easy to hold and difficult to uproot. On the other hand, belief that he is something other than his physical body, calls for proof; it is difficult to hold and easy to resist.

The false value of the subtle body

Even when the false belief that he is the physical body is discarded, a man may still hold to the false belief that he is his subtle body. To give up this belief means the giving up of the desires pertaining to the subtle body and the false values maintained by them. So the belief that he is his subtle body becomes natural, and that he is something other than his subtle body calls for convincing proof. But when the mind is unburdened of desires and attachments pertaining to the subtle body, the false belief that he is his subtle body is given up as readily as the false belief that he is his physical body.

The false value of the ego-mind

But this is not the end of false beliefs. Even when the false belief that he is his subtle body is abandoned, there is the illusory belief that he is his ego-mind or mental body. Man cherishes false belief because he relishes it. Throughout his life as an individual soul, he has fondly clung to the false idea of his separate existence; all his thoughts, emotions and activities have assumed and confirmed the existence of the separate "I". To surrender the false belief that he is the ego-mind is to surrender all that has seemed to constitute his very existence. To shed this last vestige of falsehood is the most difficult task. But this falsehood also has its ending; it comes to be shed when the soul renounces its craving for separate existence.

The self beyond thinking and doing

When the self knows itself to be different from the physical and psychic bodies as well as the mind, it knows itself to be infinite; as self it merely IS. With the mind the self appears to think, with the subtle body it appears to desire and with the physical body it appears to be engaged in actions. But these appearances are false. Though a man believes that he is thinking, in fact it is the mind that is thinking. The idea that the self is thinking is due to identifying it with the mind. It is the mind that thinks and the self is neither engaged in thinking nor in any physical actions.

Of course, it is not mere mind or mere body that does the thinking or other physical actions: for, mere mind and mere body do not exist. They are illusions and only when the self falsely identifies itself with them, does there arise thinking or doing. The soul, the mind and the body taken together are the agent of actions and are the limited "I". But the self is neither responsible for thinking nor for actions. The illusion that the self is the mind or the body and the illusion that the self is the agent of thinking or actions is the work of *Maya* or the principle of ignorance.

In the same way, the belief that the self experiences the pleasures and pains of life or is going through the opposites of experience is false. The self is beyond the opposites of experience. But it does not know itself as such, and takes on the experiences characteristic of the opposites because of identification with the mind and the body. The self that is confused with the mind and

the body becomes the recipient of pains and pleasures. When a man thinks that he is the most miserable person in the world, he is entertaining an illusion that comes into existence through ignorance or *Maya*. He is really not unhappy, but imagines it because of the confusion with the mind and the body that can have any experience of the opposites. It is the soul, the mind and the body together that become the subject of dual experience; but the self in its true nature, is beyond the opposites of experience.

Thus, it is the mind and the body that constitute the agent of activities and the subject of dual experiences. However, they do not assume this double role in their own right, but only when they are taken along with the soul. It is the ensouled mind and body that become the agent of activities or the subject of dual experience. But the process of ensoulment is based upon ignorance; the self in its true nature is eternally unqualified, unmodified and unlimited; it appears to be qualified, modified and limited through ignorance or the working of *Maya*.

3. TRANSCENDING THE FALSENESS

Countless are the falsehoods that a *Maya*-ridden man endures in the stupor of ignorance; but falsehoods carry within themselves their own insufficiency. The acceptance of falsehood is always a compromise. Even in the depths of ignorance, the soul gives some kind of challenge to falsehood, and however feeble it may be in its initial stages, this is the beginning of that search for the Truth which annihilates falsehood and ignorance. In the acceptance of falsehood there is restlessness, deep suspicion and fear. When a man considers himself to be identical with the physical body, he does not fully reconcile himself to this belief. Man is aware of his own insecurity. He knows that something is wrong and that he has false hopes.

Two types of falsehoods.

False beliefs are of two types: (i) those which arise from careless thinking, and (ii) those which arise from vitiated thinking. Falsehoods of the first type are less harmful than those of the second. Untruths of an intellectual nature arise from intellectual mistakes, but the falsehoods that count spiritually arise from the vitiation of the intellect, through the operation of blinding desires.

The difference between these two types of falsehoods may be

brought out by a physiological analogy. Some troubles of the vital organs of the body are functional, others structural. Functional diseases arise because of some irregularity in the functioning of an organ; there may be nothing seriously wrong with its structure, and it needs merely stimulation or correction. Structural diseases come into existence because of the development of some deformity, which may be grave, causing the organ to be damaged or rendered inefficient. Both types of troubles can be corrected; but it is far easier to correct functional than structural troubles.

The purifying intellect

Falsehoods that arise from some fault in the use of the intellect are similar to functional troubles, while those that arise from the vitiation of the intellect are similar to structural troubles. Falsehoods of the first kind are easier to correct than falsehoods of the second kind. When false beliefs derive their vitality from deep-rooted wishes, they are nourished by false seeking. If the error in false beliefs is purely intellectual, it is easy to set it right, but the false beliefs nourished by false seeking are the citadels of *Maya*; they involve much more than intellectual error, and are not diminished by mere counter-assertions of an intellectual kind.

God as Truth after transcending falsehoods

Not until the stripping off of the last vestige of *Maya*-created falsehood, is God known as the Truth. When God is considered as divisible, it is due to *Maya*. There are different ego-minds, different bodies, different forms, but only one self. When the one self has different ego-minds and bodies, there are different individualized beings, but this does not introduce multiplicity within the self. The self remains indivisible. The one indivisible self is the origin of different ego-minds, which do the thinking and doing, and go through numberless experiences, but the one indivisible self remains beyond thinking and doing and beyond all experiences.

Different opinions or different ways of thinking do not introduce multiplicity within the one indivisible self for the reason that there are no opinions or any ways of thinking within the self. All the activity of thinking is within the ego-mind. Thinking, and the knowledge that comes through thinking, are both possible in the

state of imperfect and incomplete knowledge, which belongs to the finite ego-mind. In the self there is neither thinking nor the knowledge that comes through thinking.

The self is infinite thought and infinite intelligence; in this infinite thought and intelligence there is no division of the thinker, the thinking and the conclusions of thinking, nor duality of subject and object. The self does not have activity of the intellect; in the completeness and sufficiency of the infinite intelligence there is no need for the intellect or its activities.

With the shedding of the last vestige of falsehoods created by *Maya*, the self not only knows its reality to be different from the physical, the subtle or the mental body, but knows itself to be God, the only reality. It knows that the mind, the subtle body and the physical body were the creations of its own imagination.

4. GOD AND MAYA

God is infinite by being above the opposites of duality. He is above the aspects of good and evil, small and great, right and wrong, virtue and vice, happiness and misery. If God were good rather than evil or evil rather than good, or if he were small rather than great or great rather than small, or if he were right rather than wrong or wrong rather than right, or if he were virtuous rather than vicious or vicious rather than virtuous, or if he were happy rather than miserable or miserable rather than happy, he would be finite.

Whatever is infinite transcends duality; it cannot by definition be one term among others. God cannot descend within duality. So the existence of the duality as an Infinite God and the finite world is illusory.

The world a creation of Maya

How does the false world come into existence? Why does it exist? It is created by *Maya* or the principal of Ignorance. *Maya* is not illusion; it is the creator of illusion. *Maya* is not false; it is that which gives falsity. *Maya* is not unreal; it is that which makes the real appear unreal and the unreal real. *Maya* is not duality; it is that which causes duality.

Maya is not finite. The finite is limited in space. *Maya* does not exist in space. *Maya* cannot be limited in space, because space is

itself the creation of *Maya*. Space with all that it contains is an illusion, dependent upon *Maya*; *Maya* is in no way dependent upon space. So *Maya* cannot become finite through space.

Nor can *Maya* become finite because of time. Though *Maya* comes to an end in the state of super-consciousness, it is not finite for that reason. *Maya* cannot have a beginning or end in time, because time itself is a creation of *Maya*. Any view that makes *Maya* a happening that takes place at some time and disappears after some time, places *Maya* in time and not time in *Maya*. Time as well as all the happenings in time are the creations of *Maya*, time comes into existence because of *Maya* and disappears when *Maya* disappears. God is a timeless reality and the realization of God and the disappearance of *Maya* are one timeless act.

Maya God's shadow

In whatsoever manner the intellect endeavours to understand *Maya*, it falls short of understanding. It is as unfathomable as God. *Maya* is "God's shadow". Where *Maya* is, there is God. The enigma is not cleared up until after realization, when it is seen that *Maya* does not exist.

In the original unconscious state of Reality there is no *Maya* and in the self-conscious or super-conscious state of God there is no *Maya*. *Maya* exists in God's consciousness of the phenomenal world when there is the consciousness of the physical world, or the consciousness of the subtle world, or the consciousness of the mental world. *Maya* exists when there is no self-consciousness but only the consciousness of the imagined other.

It is only for illusion that *Maya* exists as a creator of unreal and finite things. When the illusion of finite things has vanished, with it has also vanished *Maya* or the creator of illusion.

Self-knowledge comes to the self by looking within, and by crossing *Maya*; in that self-knowledge, it not only knows that the different ego-minds and bodies never existed, but also that the entire universe and *Maya* itself never existed as a separate principle. The self knows itself to be what it has always been, eternally self-realized, eternally infinite in knowledge, bliss, power and existence, and eternally free from duality. But this self-knowledge is inaccessible to the intellect and incomprehensible except to those who have attained realization.

XX

THE STAGES OF THE PATH

All have to pass through the stage of bondage, but bondage is not a meaningless episode in the evolution of life. It is necessary to experience being caged to appreciate freedom. If, in the entire span of its life, the fish does not come out of the water even once, it has no chance of appreciating the value of water. From birth till death it has lived only in water, and is not in a position to understand what water means for its being. But taken out of water even for a moment it longs for water and becomes by that experience able to appreciate the importance of water. In the same way, if the life of man had been free throughout and had never known bondage, mankind would have missed the significance of freedom. The experience of spiritual bondage and the intense desire to be free are a preparation for the freedom that is to come.

The Path begins with conscious longing

As the fish out of water longs for water, the aspirant who has perceived the goal longs for God. In truth, the longing to return to the source is present in each being from the time it gets separated from the source by the veil of ignorance; but the longing is unconscious till the aspirant enters the Path. It is possible to become accustomed to ignorance, just as one may get accustomed to darkness; but there still exists discomfort and restlessness due to the feeling that something is missing. In the stages of dense ignorance, this "something" is often identified with the things of the world, but when experience of the world is mature, disillusionment puts the man on the track for what is missing. From that moment he seeks a Reality deeper than the changing forms, and that moment might be described as initiation. From the moment of initiation, the longing to unite with the source from which he has been separated becomes articulate.

Veil of ignorance

On the spiritual Path there are six stages, the seventh being the goal; each intermediate Path is an imaginative anticipation of the goal. The veil which separates man from God consists of false imagination: a veil that has many folds. Before entering the Path the man is shrouded in a veil of imagination with the result that he cannot entertain the thought of being other than a separate individual. The ego-consciousness crystallizes out of the working of the false imagination, and the conscious longing for union with God is the first shaking of the entire structure of the ego. The traversing of the spiritual Path consists in the undoing of the results of this false working, and the dropping of the several folds of the veil which has created the sense of separateness and isolation. So far, the man had firmly clung to the idea of his separate existence and had secured it behind the formidable walls of ignorance, but now he enters into communication with Reality. The more he communes with Reality the thinner becomes the veil of ignorance, and with the gradual wearing out of the ideas of separateness and egoism there is increasing sense of the Reality.

The building up of aloofness or separateness is a result of concentrating upon the false personality, and the way in which to break through this self-created sense and to strengthen the new sense of unity with the Reality is to say "No" to the false working of imagination. The act of getting rid of false imagination may be compared with the act of awakening from deep sleep; and the different stages in the process might be compared with the dreams between deep sleep and wakefulness. The process of getting rid of the working of false imagination is gradual and has seven stages. The shedding of one fold of the veil of imagination is decidedly a movement towards the Light, but does not amount to becoming one with Reality because it is but to renounce a rather more false imagination in favour of a rather less false imagination. There are degrees of falseness of the imagination according to the degrees of the sense of aloofness possessed by the ego-consciousness. Each stage in the process of getting rid of false imagination is a definite wearing out of the ego or false personality. But intermediate stages on the Path until the final realization of the goal consist of leaving one flight of imagination and having another, they are not the cessation of imagination.

The intermediate stages are forms of imagination

These changes of imagination do not bring about any change in the self. What changes is not the self but the idea of the self. The gradual non-identification with the body and the identification with the Universal Being is comparable with the traversing of the Path, though the intermediate stages on the Path are all creations of imagination.

At each stage, breaking through the growth of the sense of aloofness and attainment of the sense of merging with Reality are both so definite that the person often has a false sense of realization. Just as one climbing a mountain comes upon a deep valley and may be so fascinated with its beauties that he forgets the goal and believes he has arrived, so the aspirant may mistake intermediate achievements for the goal. But one who is really in earnest about climbing the mountain realizes that the valley is to be crossed, and the aspirant in like manner realizes that the intermediate stage is meant to be transcended. The false sense of realization which comes at the intermediate stages is like dreaming that one has become awake from sleep without being awake. After awakening one realizes that the former feeling was still a dream.

Planes and states

Each stage of advancement is a state of consciousness; and advancement from one state of consciousness to another proceeds with the crossing of the inner planes. Thus, there are six intermediate planes and states of consciousness to be experienced before reaching the seventh plane, which is the end of the journey where there is realization of the God-state.

The nature of Samadhi—Istighraq

After entering a new plane of consciousness a person usually takes some time to function on that plane. As there is a radical change in the conditions of mental life, he may experience a sort of paralysis of mental activity, which is known as *Samadhi*. When the aspirant enters upon a new plane he merges into the conditions of that plane before he can experience what is characteristic of it. Just as a pilgrim who is tired by the journey goes to sleep, consciousness which has made the effort of ascending to a new

plane goes through a period of lowered mental activity comparable to sleep. But the *Samadhi* is fundamentally different from sleep, because in sleep a person is unconscious, whereas in *Samadhi* he is conscious of bliss or light or power, although unconscious of his body or its surroundings. After a period of comparative stillness, the mind begins to function on the new plane, and experiences a state of consciousness utterly different from that which has been left behind.

The first three Fanas

When the aspirant enters a new plane along with the lowering of mental activity he experiences a substantial diminution in his ego-life. This curtailment of the ego-life is different from the final annihilation of the ego, which takes place at the seventh plane. But these different stages of the curtailment of the ego at the intermediate six planes deserve special mention. In the *Sufi* spiritual tradition, the final annihilation of the ego is described as *Fana-Fillah*; and the earlier *Samadhis* of the six planes of duality have been recognized as kinds of *Fana*, since they also involve a partial annihilation of the ego.

Each of these *Fanas* of ascending order has its own characteristics. When the aspirant arrives at the first plane he experiences his first merging of *Fana*, which consists in the minor annihilation of the ego. He is temporarily lost to his limited individuality and experiences bliss. Many aspirants think they have realized God and get stuck in the first plane. But if the aspirant keeps himself free from self-delusion or comes to realize that his attainment is transitional, he advances and arrives at the second plane. The merging into the second plane is called *Fana-e-Batili* or the annihilation of the false. The aspirant is now absorbed in bliss and infinite light. Some think that they have attained the goal and get stranded in the second plane; but others who keep themselves free from self-delusion enter into the third plane. The merging into the third plane is called *Fana-e-Zaheri* or the annihilation of the apparent. Here the pilgrim loses for days all consciousness of the body and the world and experiences infinite power. But since he has no consciousness of the world, he has no occasion for the expression of his power. This is *Videha Samadhi* or the state of divine coma. Consciousness is now completely withdrawn from the world.

The dangers of the fourth plane

If the aspirant advances further he arrives at the fourth plane. The merging into the fourth plane is called *Fana-e-Malakuti* or the annihilation leading towards freedom. The aspirant now experiences a peculiar state of consciousness since he not only feels infinite power but also has occasions for its expression. He can know everything. He can know what anyone in any part of the globe is thinking or doing. Further, he has not only occasions for the use of his powers but has an inclination to express them. If he falls prey to this temptation he goes on expressing powers and gets caught in the alluring possibilities of the fourth plane. The fourth plane is for this reason difficult and dangerous. The aspirant is never spiritually safe and has always the possibility of a reversion, until he has crossed the fourth and arrived at the fifth plane.

The Fanas of the fifth and the sixth plane

The merging into the fifth plane is called *Fana-e-Jabaruti* or the annihilation of all desires. Here the incessant activity of the intellect comes to a standstill. The aspirant does not "think" in the ordinary way; and yet is indirectly a source of thoughts in others. He sees, but not with the physical eye. Mind speaks with mind and there is neither worry nor doubt. He is now spiritually safe and beyond the possibility of downfall; and yet many who reach this exalted plane find it difficult to resist the delusion that they have attained Godhood. In his self-delusion the aspirant says "I am God", and believes himself to have arrived at the end of the spiritual Path. But he perceives his mistake as he advances to the sixth plane. The merging into the sixth plane is called *Fana-e-Mahabubi* or the annihilation of the self in the Beloved. Now the aspirant sees God directly and clearly as an ordinary person sees the different things of this world; and this perception and enjoyment of God suffers no break. Yet he does not become one with God.

The state of conscious Godhood

When the aspirant ascends to the seventh plane he experiences the last merging which is called *Fana-Fillah* or the final annihilation of the ego in God. Through this merging the aspirant loses his separate existence and becomes permanently united with God.

He is now one with God and experiences himself as none other than God himself. This seventh plane *Fana-Fillah* is the terminus of the spiritual Path, the goal of all search and endeavour. It is the *Sahaj Samadhi* or the *Nirvikalp Samadhi* characteristic of conscious Godhood. It is the real awakening. The aspirant has now reached the other shore of the vast ocean of imagination, and realizes that this last Truth is the only Truth and that all other stages on the Path are illusory. He has arrived at the destination.

THE DEEPER ASPECTS OF SADHANA

Sadhana does not consist of the application of rigid laws. In life there is no uniformity. Much more so in the spiritual realm is there diversity. The *Sadhana* for a particular aspirant has relation to his *sanskaras* and temperament, and may be peculiar to himself. However, since the goal is the same for all, the differences with regard to *Sadhana* are not of importance, and the deeper-aspects of *Sadhana* are the same for all.

Sadhana in the spiritual realm is essentially different from *Sadhana* in the material realm because the spiritual end is different from the material end. The end sought in the material realm belongs to time; in the spiritual realm the end transcends time. Therefore, in the material realm *Sadhana* is directed towards that which is yet to be; in the spiritual realm, *Sadhana* is directed, towards that which always has been, will ever be, and now IS.

The end in spiritual Sadhana

The spiritual goal of life is in life itself, not outside life. In the spiritual realm every part of *Sadhana* aims at the realization of the spiritual goal of godliness in all phases of life; therefore, the different aspects of spiritual *Sadhana* represent different degrees of approximation to the state of spiritual perfection. This relation between *Sadhana* and the end sought may be contrasted with the relation which obtains between them in the material realm. In the material realm the end falls outside the *Sadhana* through which it is secured; and there is a clear disparity between *Sadhana* and the end achieved through it. In the spiritual realm, however, the *Sadhana* and the end sought cannot be external to each other, and there is no disparity between them. This gives rise to the paradox that the practicing of a *Sadhana* amounts to participation in the goal.

Sadhana through Knowledge, Action and Love

In its deeper aspects, spiritual *Sadhana* consists in treading (i) the Path of Knowledge (*Dnyana Marga*), (ii) the Path of Action (*Karma Marga*) and (iii) the Path of Love or Devotion (*Bhakti Marga*). The *Sadhana* of knowledge finds its expression through (a) the exercise of detachment born of understanding, (b) the different forms of meditation and (c) the constant use of discrimination and intuition. Each of these modes through which spiritual knowledge is sought or expressed requires explanatory comments.

The individual soul is entangled in the world of forms and does not know itself as part of the being of God. This ignorance constitutes the bondage of the soul from which spiritual *Sadhana* aims at securing emancipation. Renunciation of the things of this world is therefore often counted among the *Sadhanas* that lead to liberation; but though such renunciation may have value, it is not necessary. What is needed is an internal renunciation of craving for the things of this world; it matters little whether the soul has or has not externally renounced the things of this world when it has internally disentangled itself from the illusory world of forms and prepared itself for the state of *Mukti*. Detachment is an important part of the *Sadhana* of Knowledge.

Meditation is another means through which spiritual knowledge is sought. Meditation has been explained in earlier chapters.

Knowledge

The *Sadhana* of Knowledge remains incomplete unless the aspirant exercises discrimination and unveils his highest intuitions. The realization of God comes to aspirants who use discrimination as well as intuition about values. Infinite knowledge is latent in everyone, but has to be unveiled. The way is to put into practice the spiritual wisdom one has. The teachings that have come to humanity through the Masters and the inborn sense for values that the aspirant has, shed sufficient light upon the next step to be taken. The difficult thing is to act upon the knowledge one has.

Action

If *Sadhana* of knowledge is to be fruitful, it must at each step be implemented by action. Everyday life has to be guided by

discrimination and inspired by intuition. *Karma Yoga* or the Path of Action consists in acting upon the intuitions of the heart without hesitation. In *Sadhana* what counts is practice, not theory. Practice based upon right knowledge is most fruitful, but even mistakes in practical action have valuable lessons to bring. Mere speculation, however, remains spiritually barren, even when flawless. Thus, a person who is not very learned but who sincerely takes the name of God and does his duties whole-heartedly may be much nearer to God than one who knows the metaphysics, but does not allow his knowledge to change his life. In the spiritual life, it is not necessary to have a complete map of the Path; on the contrary, insistence upon complete knowledge may hinder rather than help. The secrets of spiritual life are opened to those who venture, not to those who seek guarantees for every step.

Fulfilment of the *Sadhana* of *Karma Yoga* requires that action should spring from the perception of the Truth. Enlightened action does not bind because, not rooted in the ego, it is selfless. Selfishness represents ignorance, while selflessness is a reflection of the Truth, and the justification for the life of selfless service is to be found in the intrinsic worth of such life, not in the advantages it brings. The paradox of selfless action is that it brings to the aspirant much more than could come from mere selfishness. Selfishness leads to a narrow life, and confirms the false idea of a limited and separate existence; but selfless action contributes towards the dissipation of the illusion of separateness and proves to be the gateway to the unlimited life. What one has lost and what one desires to have may never come; but if one parts with anything in the spirit of an offering to God, it has already come back. Such is the *Sadhana* of *Karma Yoga*.

Love

Even more important than the *Sadhana* of Knowledge or Action is *Bhakti* or love. Love is its own reason for being. It is complete in itself. The greatest of saints have been content with their love for God, desiring no more. Love is not love if based upon any expectation. In the intensity of Divine Love, the lover becomes one with the Beloved. There is no *Sadhana* greater than love; there is no law higher than love; and there is no goal beyond love. God and love are identical, and one who has Divine Love has received God.

Love may be regarded as at once a part of *Sadhana* and a part of the goal; but the intrinsic worth of love is so obvious that it is often considered a mistake to look upon it as a *Sadhana* for some other thing. In no *Sadhana* is the merging into God so easy and complete as in love. When love is present, the path to the Truth is joyous. As a rule *Sadhana* involves effort, maybe even desperate effort, but, in love, all is spontaneous. Spontaneity belongs to spirituality. The highest state of consciousness, in which the mind is completely merged in the truth, is known as *Sahajawastha* or state of unlimited spontaneity, in which there is uninterrupted Self-knowledge. One of the paradoxes connected with spiritual *Sadhana* is that the effort of the aspirant is to arrive at a state of effortlessness.

The fructification of *Sadhana* involves the termination of the ego-life of the aspirant; but, at that moment, there is the realization that he has been the object of his search and endeavour, that all he has suffered and enjoyed, all risks and adventures, all sacrifices and strivings, were for self-knowledge, in which he loses his limited individuality to discover that he is one with God.

PERFECTION

Perfection should be considered under two aspects. There is spiritual perfection, which consists in the inner realization of a transcendent state of consciousness beyond duality, and perfection as expressed in the sphere of duality. All related existence which is a part of the manifold world of manifestation admits of degrees; and when we are concerned with perfection as seen in this manifested world, we find that like other things subject to duality, it also admits of degrees. Bad and good, weakness and strength, vice and virtue are the opposites in duality. But all these aspects are expressions of the one reality in different degrees.

Thus evil is good in its lowest degree; weakness is strength in its lowest degree and vice is virtue at its lowest level. Evil is the minimum of good, weakness the minimum of strength, and vice the minimum of virtue. All aspects of duality have a minimum and a maximum and all the other intervening degrees; and perfection is no exception. The whole range of humanity is included in the two extremes of perfection and imperfection; and both perfection and imperfection are essentially matters of comparison, contrast and relative existence. So perfection in the sphere of duality is relative perfection only.

Spiritual perfection distinguished from excellence

Perfection concerned with duality consists in the excellence of some attribute or capacity. And perfection in one respect does not necessarily include perfection in other respects. For example, a man who is perfect in science may not be perfect in singing, or a man who is perfect in singing may not be perfect in science. There is a sense in which excellence can be exhibited even in crimes. When a murder is committed in such a manner as not to leave a single clue, it is called a perfect crime. So even in crimes there is a

sort of perfection. But this type of perfection, which consists in the excellence of a quality or capacity, should be distinguished from spiritual perfection. The different types of excellence characteristic of duality are all within the scope of the intellect, for such excellence can be envisaged by the extension (in imagination) of something good found in the experience of everyday life. But the perfection that belongs to spiritually realized souls is not in the sphere of duality, and entirely beyond the scope of the intellect. When a person becomes spiritually perfect, he knows that nothing exists but God, and that what seems to exist in the sphere of duality and capable of being grasped by the intellect is illusion. For the spiritually perfect man to whom God is the only reality, science, art, music, weakness, strength, good and evil are nothing but dreams. His perfection consists in the knowledge of one existence.

All forms of excellence latent in spiritual perfection

When a spiritually perfect soul wants to use his knowledge and powers, it is always for the spiritual upliftment of other souls, His knowledge of others is not based upon what they say about themselves, for he knows directly their minds, and is not dependent upon the expression of their thoughts. For him words are unnecessary. If he wants to know something before it is manifested, he can do so, but only when it is necessary for spiritual reasons. In the same way, if he wants excellence in any other matter, he can have it without difficulty. All excellences are latent in spiritual perfection. Krishna was spiritually perfect. He was also perfect in everything. Possessed of perfection, it was not necessary for him to exhibit it. The spiritually perfect can exhibit supreme excellence in any mode of life which they may be required to adopt for the spiritual upliftment of others, but they do not attempt to show themselves to be perfect in that respect. Excellence is used by them only when there is a spiritual need for it, not merely to satisfy curiosity, and only with utter detachment. Just as a person who wears gloves may touch dirt without getting soiled, a spiritually perfect soul can be engaged in activity without being bound by it.

Perfection is all-sided

Perfection is the full development of all aspects of personality.

Perfection in one respect only is not perfection, only an incapacity to adjust oneself to the vicissitudes of life. A person who possesses it cannot maintain equilibrium of mind. If he is in an environment which gives scope for the faculty he has developed, he is happy, and enjoys a sense of harmony with the world, but in a hostile environment, in which his faculty does not fit, he has a sense of failure.

Transcending the opposites

This means that perfection transcends the opposites by being above and beyond them. If you try to grasp the nature of perfection by means of a set standard (implying an opposite) you will fail to understand its significance. Thus, the perfect man is not bound by any rule. He is beyond good and bad; but his law for those who are good, gives good reward, and is equally good for those who are bad. Krishna proved to Arjuna that his apparently bringing about the physical and mental annihilation of Kauravas, who were vicious, was for their spiritual salvation. Perfection may manifest itself through killing or saving according to the spiritual demands of the situation. The heart of the Perfect One is at once as soft as fleece and as hard as steel. Perfection is not limited to any particular expression and does not exclude the possibility of finding expression through the opposite. It expresses itself through either opposite or through neither according to the situation. It is equal to all possible situations in life. It ensures adaptability without surrendering the standpoint of the Truth and secures an unshakable peace and sense of harmony by resolving conflicting situations.

Human activities are limited by the opposites, but it should not be imagined that perfection has no human element. Human beings are unhappy, they laugh to convince themselves and others otherwise, and the Perfect Man, who is eternally happy, is not without a sense of humour. Perfection does not consist in being inhuman but in being superhuman; it is the full development of that rationality which is implicit in humanity.

Perfection in man becoming God or God becoming man

Perfection does not belong to God as God, nor does it belong to man as man; we get perfection when man becomes God, or God

becomes man. The finite being who is conscious of the finite is short of perfection, but conscious of being one with the Infinite he is perfect. That happens when man gives up the illusion of being finite and attains Godhood by realizing his divinity. If by the Infinite we mean that which is opposed to the finite or that which is other than the finite, we misunderstand it. There is no such Infinite. The Infinite discovers its unlimited life in and through the finite without being limited. God's perfection is revealed when he manifests himself as man. The conscious descent of God into the limited form of man is known as *Avatar*; this is an example of perfection. Thus we have perfection when the finite transcends its limits and realizes its infinity, or when the Infinite becomes man; in both, the finite and the Infinite are not outside each other. When there is a conscious unity of the finite and the Infinite, there is perfection. Then we have the Infinite revealing itself through the finite without becoming limited, and we have the finite transcending its sense of limitation in the full revelation of the Infinite.

THE BEGINNING AND END OF CREATION

As long as the human mind does not directly experience the One Being, or Ultimate Reality, it is baffled in every attempt to understand the origin and purpose of creation. The past is shrouded in mystery, and the future is a sealed book. The human mind can make conjectures about the past and the future of the universe, because it is bound by the spell of *Maya*, but it can neither arrive at final knowledge on these points, nor can it remain content with ignorance about them. "Whence"? and "Whither"? are the everlasting questions that express the divine restlessness of the human mind.

The mind cannot reconcile itself with infinite regress in its search for the origin of the world, nor can it reconcile itself with endless change without a goal. Evolution is unintelligible if it has no initial cause, and is deprived of meaning if it has no end. The questions "Whence?" and "Whither?" presuppose the beginning and end of evolving creation. The beginning of evolution is the beginning of time, and the end of evolution is the end of time. Evolution has both beginning and end, because time has both beginning and end.

Between the beginning and the end of this changing world, there are many cycles, but in and through these cycles there is a continuity of cosmic evolution. The termination of the evolutionary process is called *Mahapralaya* or the final annihilation of the world, when the world becomes what it was in the beginning, namely nothing. The *Mahapralaya* of the world may be compared with the sleep of a man. Just as the varied world of experience completely disappears in the man who is in deep sleep, the entire objective cosmos which is the creation of *Maya* vanishes into nothingness at the time of *Mahapralaya*. It is as if the universe had never existed.

Even during the evolutionary period the universe is nothing

but imagination. There is only one indivisible Reality, without beginning or end. From the point of view of this timeless Reality the whole time-process is imaginary, and the billions of years that have passed and the billions of years that are to pass do not have the value of a second.

So the evolving universe cannot be said to be an outcome of this Ultimate Reality. If it were so, Ultimate Reality would be either a relative term or a composite being, which it is not. The Ultimate Reality is absolute.

Reality and Nothing

Yet the Ultimate Reality includes in itself all existence. It is everything, but has nothing as its shadow. The idea of all-inclusive existence implies that nothing, not even its shadow, is outside its being. When you analyze the idea of Being, you arrive at the idea of that which does not exist. This idea of non-existence, or Nothing, helps you to define clearly the notion of Being. The complementary aspect of Being is Non-Being or Nothing, but Nothing cannot be looked upon as having its own existence. It is nothing. Nor can it be a cause of anything.

How then does the manifold and evolving universe arise? It is through the mixing of the Ultimate Reality and Nothing. It springs out of Nothing when this Nothing is placed against the background of the Ultimate Reality. But this should not be taken to mean that the universe is partly the outcome of the Ultimate Reality, or that it has even an element of that Reality. It is an outcome of "Nothing" and is nothing. It only seems to be. And its apparent existence is due to the Ultimate Reality which is behind "Nothing". When "Nothing" is added to the idea of the Ultimate Reality, the result is the manifold and evolving universe. But the Ultimate Reality, infinite and absolute, does not thereby suffer modification. It is absolute and unaffected by addition or subtraction. The Ultimate Reality remains what it was, complete and absolute, unconcerned and unconnected with the panorama of creation. "Nothing" might be compared to the value of "zero" in mathematics. In itself it has no value; but when added to another number it gives rise to the many. In the same way the manifold and evolving universe springs out of "Nothing" when combined with the Ultimate Reality.

The imagined division between the self and its environment

The entire evolutionary process is within the domain of imagination. When in imagination the one ocean of Reality is disturbed, there arises the manifold world of separate centres of consciousness. Thus we have the division of life into the self and not-self or the "I" and its environment. And owing to the falseness and incompleteness of this self (which is only an imagined part of an indivisible totality), consciousness cannot remain content with identification with it. Thus consciousness is trapped in ceaseless restlessness forcing it to attempt identification with the not-self. That portion of the not-self or the environment with which consciousness succeeds in identifying itself gets affiliated to the self in the form of "mine"; and that portion of the not-self with which it does not succeed in identifying itself becomes the environment which creates a limit and opposition to the self.

Thus consciousness arrives not at the termination of its limiting duality but at its transformation. As long as consciousness is subject to the working of imagination, it cannot successfully put an end to this duality, and all the attempts which it makes for the assimilation of the not-self (or the environment) result merely in the replacement of the initial duality by other novel forms of the same duality. The acceptance and the rejection of certain portions of the environment respectively express themselves as "wanting" and "not-wanting", thus giving rise to the opposites of pleasure and pain, good and evil, etc. But neither acceptance nor rejection leads to freedom from duality, so that consciousness finds itself engaged in oscillation from one opposite to the other. The entire process of the evolution of the individual is characterized by this oscillation between the opposites.

Beyond the opposites

Like the shuttle of the weaver's loom, the human mind moves within two extremes, developing the warp and the woof of the cloth of experience. The development of the psychic life is best represented not as a straight line but as a zigzag course. The opposites of experience are like two banks of a river; were there to be no banks to a river, the water would disperse making it impossible for the river to reach its destination. In the same way the life-force would dissipate itself were it not for being confined

between the opposites. But these banks of the river of life are not two parallel lines, they are two converging lines, which meet at the point of liberation. The amount of oscillation becomes less and less as the individual approaches the goal, and subsides when he has done so. It is like the movement of a doll, which has its centre of gravity at the base, with the result that it has a tendency to become steady in a sitting posture, but if shaken it swings from side to side for some time, each movement covering a shorter span, so that in the end the doll becomes stationary. In cosmic evolution the subsiding of the alternation between the opposites means *Mahapralaya*, and in spiritual evolution of the individual, liberation.

Planes of consciousness

The step from duality to non-duality is not a matter of difference in degree. As the two are qualitatively different, the difference between them is infinite. The former is a not-God state and the latter the God state. This infinite difference constitutes the abyss between the sixth plane of consciousness and the seventh. The lower six planes of consciousness are separated from each other by a kind of a valley or distance. But though the difference between them is great, it is not infinite, because all are subject to the bi-polarity of limited experience, consisting in the alternation between the opposites. The difference between the first plane and the second, the second and the third, and up to the sixth plane, though great is not infinite. It follows that none of the six planes of duality can be said to be really nearer to the seventh plane than any others. The difference between any of the six planes and the seventh is infinite. The progress through the six planes is a progress in imagination. But the realization of the seventh plane is the cessation of imagination, and the awakening of the individual into Truth-consciousness.

The illusory progress through the six planes cannot, however, be avoided. Imagination has to be completely exhausted before the Truth can be realized. When a disciple has a Master, he has to cross all the six planes. The Master may take his disciple through the planes, either with open eyes or under a veil. If the disciple is taken under cover, not conscious of the planes he is crossing, the desires persist until the sixth plane; but if he is taken with open eyes, conscious of the planes, no desires are left after the

fifth plane. The Master often chooses to take his disciples under cover, for they are likely to be more actively useful for his work if taken blind-folded than if taken with open eyes.

The crossing of the planes is throughout characterized by the unwinding of *sanskaras*. This process of unwinding should be distinguished from spending. In the process of spending, the *sanskaras* become dynamic and release themselves in action or experience. This does not lead to emancipation from *sanskaras* as the never-ceasing fresh accumulation of *sanskaras* more than replaces the *sanskaras* that are spent, and the spending itself is responsible for further *sanskaras*. In the process of unwinding, the *sanskaras* get weakened and annihilated by the flame of the longing for the Infinite.

Longing for the Infinite may be the cause of much spiritual suffering. There is no comparison between the acuteness of ordinary suffering and the poignancy of the spiritual suffering which has to be gone through while crossing the planes. The former is the effect of *sanskaras* and the latter the effect of their unwinding. When physical suffering reaches its climax a person becomes unconscious and so gets relief, but there is no such automatic relief for spiritual suffering. The spiritual suffering, however, does not become intolerable, because there is intermingled with it the pleasure of consciousness.

The longing for the infinite gets acute until it arrives at its climax, and then begins to cool, but while cooling, unconsciousness does not give up the longing for the Infinite, it continues to realize the Infinite. This state of cooled longing is preliminary to the realization of the Infinite. Longing for the Infinite has been the instrument of annihilating all other desires and is itself ready to be quenched by the stillness of the Infinite.

The peace realization

Before the longing for the Infinite is fulfilled through the realization of the Infinite, consciousness has to pass from the sixth to the seventh plane. It has to pass from duality to non-duality. Instead of wandering in imagination, it arrives at the ending of imagination. The Master understands the Reality as One and "Nothing" as its shadow; for him time is swallowed up in eternity. As he has realized the timeless aspect of Reality, he is beyond time, and

holds within his being the beginning and end of time. He remains unmoved by the temporal processes of action and re-action. Ordinary man neither knows the beginning nor the end of creation, and is over-powered by the march of events, which seem beyond his control or comprehension. They loom large because of lack of perspective, he being caught up in time. He looks upon everything in the terms of possible fulfilment or non-fulfilment of his *sanskaras*, and is profoundly disturbed by the happenings of this world. The objective universe appears to him as an unwelcome limitation which has to be overcome or tolerated.

The Master is free from duality and the *sanskaras* characteristic of duality, and is, thus, free from all limitation. The stresses of the universe do not affect his being. All the movement of the world with its constructive and destructive processes have for him no importance, for he has entered into the sanctuary of Truth, which is the abode of that eternal significance which is only partially and faintly reflected in the values of the phantasmagoria of creation. He comprehends within his being all existence, and looks upon the entire play of manifestation as a game.

XXIV

SELFISHNESS

Selfishness comes into existence because of the human desire to find fulfilment in action and experience. It is born of ignorance about one's own nature, and because human consciousness is clouded by the accumulation of impressions deposited in the long course of the evolution of consciousness. These impressions, or *sanskaras*, express themselves as desires, and the range of consciousness is limited by them, for they form an enclosure around the field of consciousness. Within the circle of *sanskaras* is the area within which the individual consciousness is focused. Some desires are latent, but others translate themselves into action. The capacity of a desire to find expression in conduct depends upon the intensity and amount of the *sanskaras*. To use a geometrical metaphor, when a desire passes into action it traverses a distance that is equal to the radius of a circle describing the boundary of the *sanskaras* connected with it.

The range of selfishness is equal to the range of desires. Owing to the hindrance of innumerable desires it becomes impossible for the soul to find free and full expression of its true being, and life becomes self-centred and narrow. The entire life of the personal ego is continually in the grip of wanting, i.e., it attempts to seek fulfilment of desires through things that change. But there can be no fulfilment through transient things. The satisfaction derived from the fleeting things of life is fleeting, and the wants of man remain unfulfilled. There is thus a general sense of dissatisfaction accompanied by every kind of worry.

The chief forms in which the frustrated ego finds expression are lust, greed and anger. Lust is like greed in many respects, but differs in the manner of its fulfilment, which is directly related to the physical sphere. Lust finds its expression through the physical body and is concerned with the flesh. It is a form of entanglement with the physical sphere. Greed is the restlessness of the heart, and

consists mainly of craving for power and possessions sought for the fulfilment of desires. Man is only partially satisfied in the attempt to fulfill his desires, and this partial satisfaction increases the flame of craving instead of extinguishing it, so greed always finds an endless field of conquest, and leaves man endlessly dissatisfied. The chief expressions of greed are related to the emotions. They are a form of entanglement with the subtle or psychic sphere. Anger is the fume of an irritated mind, caused by the thwarting of desires. It feeds the limited ego in its aim for domination and aggression. It aims at removing the obstacles to the fulfilment of desires. The frenzy of anger nourishes egoism, and is the greatest benefactor of the limited ego. Mind is the seat of anger, and its expressions are mostly through the activities of the mind. Anger is a form of mental entanglement. Lust, greed and anger respectively have body, heart and mind as their vehicles of expression.

Man experiences disappointment through lust, greed and anger; and the frustrated ego seeks further gratification through them. Consciousness is thus caught up in a circle of endless disappointment, which comes into existence when either lust, greed or anger are thwarted in their expression. It is a general reaction of the gross, subtle and mental entanglements, a depression caused by the non-fulfilment of lust, greed and anger, which together are co-extensive with selfishness. Selfishness, which is the common basis of these three vices, is thus the ultimate cause of disappointment and worries. It defeats itself. It seeks fulfilment through desires, but succeeds only in increasing unsatisfied desires.

The road to happiness

Selfishness inevitably leads to dissatisfaction and disappointment, because desires are endless. The problem of happiness is, therefore, the problem of surrendering desires. Desires, however, cannot be overcome by repressing them. They can be annihilated only through knowledge. If you enter deeply into the realm of thought and think seriously for a few minutes, you will realize the emptiness of desires. Think of what you have enjoyed for many years and what you have suffered. Does it not all amount to nothing? Are not all your sufferings throughout life also nothing? All was illusion. It is your right to be happy, yet you created your own unhappiness by wanting things. Wanting is the source of

perpetual restlessness. If you did not get the thing you wanted, you were disappointed. And if you did get it you wanted more and more of it and remained unhappy. Say, "I do not want anything", and be happy. The continuous realization of the futility of wants will eventually lead you to knowledge, which will give you freedom from wants and lead you towards abiding happiness.

Renunciation of wants

Wants should be distinguished from needs. Pride and anger, greed and lust are different from need. You may think, "I need all that I want." But this is a mistake. If you are thirsty in a desert, what you need is water. As long as man has a body, there will be needs, and it is necessary to meet them. But wants are a product of imagination. They must be scrupulously killed, if there is to be happiness. But as the very being of selfishness consists of desires, renunciation of wants becomes a process of death. Dying in the ordinary sense means parting with the physical body; but dying in the spiritual sense means renunciation of sense-desires. The priests prepare men for false death by pictures of hell and heaven; but death is an illusion, since life is an unbroken continuity. The true death consists of the cessation of desires and comes by gradual stages.

The dawn of love facilitates the death of selfishness. Being is dying by loving. If you cannot love one another, how can you love those who torture you? The limits of selfishness are created by ignorance. When a man realizes that he can have a more glorious satisfaction by widening the sphere of his interests and activities he is heading towards the life of service. At this stage he entertains many good desires. He wants to make others happy by relieving distress and helping them. And though even in good desires there is often an indirect and latent reference to the self, selfishness has no grip over good deeds. Even good desires may be said to be a form of enlightened and extended selfishness, for, like bad desires, they too move within the domain of duality; but in entertaining good desires selfishness eventually brings about its own extinction. Instead of trying to be luminous, arrestive and possessive, man learns to be useful to others.

The desires that enter into the constitution of the personal ego are either good or bad. Bad desires are ordinarily referred to as

forms of selfishness, and good desires as forms of selflessness. But no hard and fast line divides selfishness from selflessness. Both are in the sphere of duality, and from the point of view that transcends the opposites of good and bad, selfishness and selflessness are two phases of the life of the personal ego, and the two phases are continuous. Selfishness arises when desires are centred upon the individuality; selflessness arises when this crude organization of desires suffers disintegration, and there is a general dispersing of desires. Selfishness is the narrowing down of interests to a limited field, selflessness the extension of interests over a wide field. To put it paradoxically, selfishness is a restricted form of selflessness; and selflessness is the drawing out of selfishness into a wide sphere of activity.

Transformation of selfishness

Selfishness has to be transmuted into selflessness before the sphere of duality is transcended. Persistent and continuous performance of good deeds wears out selfishness. Selfishness extended and expressed in the form of good deeds becomes the instrument of its own destruction. The good is the link between selfishness thriving and dying. Selfishness, which in the beginning is the father of evil tendencies, becomes, through good deeds, the cause of its own, defeat. And when evil tendencies are replaced by good tendencies, selfishness is transformed into selflessness, i.e., individual selfishness loses itself in universal interest. And though this selfless and good life is also bound by the opposites, goodness is a necessary step towards freedom from the opposites. Goodness is the means of the soul to annihilate its own ignorance.

From the good the soul passes to God. The selfless is merged into the Universal Self, beyond good and bad, virtue and vice, and all other dual aspects of *Maya*. The height of selflessness is the beginning of the feeling of oneness with all. In the state of liberation there is neither selfishness nor selflessness, for both are merged in selflessness for all. Realization of the unity of life is accompanied by peace and unfathomable bliss. It does not lead either to spiritual stagnation or to the obliteration of relative values. Selflessness for all brings about undisturbed harmony without loss of discrimination, and peace without indifference to surroundings. And this selflessness for all is not an outcome of mere

subjective synthesis. It is a result of an attainment of union with the Ultimate Reality, which includes all.

Open your heart by weeding out desires and by harbouring only one longing—the longing for union with the Ultimate Reality. That Ultimate Reality is not to be sought in the changing external environment, but in one's own being. Every time your soul intends to enter your human heart, it finds the doors locked with the heart full of desires. Do not keep the doors of your heart closed. Everywhere there is present the source of abiding bliss, yet all are miserable because of desires born of ignorance. The goal of happiness is reached only when the limited ego with its desires finds its extinction.

Spirituality a positive attitude to life

Renunciation of desires does not mean asceticism or a negative attitude to life. Negation of life would make man inhuman. Divinity is not devoid of humanity. Spirituality makes man more human. It is a positive release of the good, noble and beautiful in man, and to what is gracious and lovely in the environment. It does not require renunciation of worldly activities or the avoiding of duties and responsibilities. It requires only that while engaging in worldly activities or discharging the responsibilities arising from the place and position of the individual, the inner spirit should be free from the burden of desires. Perfection consists in remaining free from the entanglements of duality. Such freedom is the essential requirement of unhindered creativity; but this freedom cannot be attained by running away from life for fear of entanglement with it. This would mean denial of life. Perfection does not consist in shrinking from the dual expressions of nature. To attempt to escape from entanglement implies fear of life, but spirituality consists in meeting life without being overpowered by the opposites. The free spirit asserts its dominion over all illusion, however attractive or powerful. Without avoiding contact with the different aspects of life, a perfect man functions with complete detachment in the midst of intense activity.

VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE

Non-violence means love infinite. It is the goal of life. When pure and infinite love is reached the aspirant is at one with God. To reach this goal there must be intense longing and the aspirant who has this longing has to begin by practicing the "non-violence of the brave". This applies to those who, though not at one with all through realization, consider none to be their enemy and try to win over even the aggressor through love; they give up their lives through love not through fear.

"Non-violence of the brave" is practicable for those who have the intense longing to attain the supreme state. This longing is not to be found in the majority. If, therefore, it is intended to lead the majority to "non-violence", it is necessary first to prepare them for the "non-violence of the brave". To achieve this in a practical way it is necessary to make them follow, in the beginning, the principle of "non-violent violence", that is, violence done solely for defending the weak without any selfish motive. In times of war, when the masses are in the mood to listen to advice about having intense longing to attain the supreme goal of life, the only practical way to lead them towards the goal is to begin by inculcating in them the principle of "non-violent violence" and then gradually introducing the "non-violence of the brave". Otherwise nonviolence would not only fail but there would be serious danger of the fatal "non-violence of the coward", i.e., non-resistance to aggression because of fear.

The masses may also be led to the "non-violence of the brave" by following the principles of "selfless violence" instead of those of "non-violent violence". This selfless violence is violence done in self-defense when attacked treacherously. No other motive should be allowed to justify the violence. Thus, for example, were a woman threatened with violation and one defends her by resorting to violence, he is said to have followed the principles of "selfless

violence". Similarly when the motherland is being attacked by enemies, the nation's effort in defending the motherland is "selfless violence". An element of

selfishness being there, the love expressed is limited human love.

"Non-violence of the coward" is fatal; so also is "selfish violence", i.e., violence for selfish motives by individuals or a nation to gain power or for other selfish ends.

It will therefore be seen that while non-violence is the goal of life, this goal is to be attained by individual seekers of God by following "non-violence of the brave". The majority who have not the intense longing for being one with God have to be led towards this goal on the principles of "non-violent violence" or those of "selfless violence" according to the circumstances. It must be very clearly understood that "non-violent violence" and "selfless violence" are merely the means of attaining the goal of life, namely the pure and simple "Non-Violence" or the "Love Infinite". These means must not be confused with the goal itself.

The motive and the result are determined by the acceptance of their being good or bad; for example, "non-violence of the brave" and "non-violence of the coward" are both non-violence, but, from the viewpoint of the motive force behind it, "non-violence of the brave" is born of love and "non-violence of the coward" is born of fear, which is opposite to love. Although as "non-violence" they are not opposites, their motives are opposed. The motive behind "non-violence of the brave" is losing one's life to gain infinite love, and the motive behind "non-violence of the coward" is to save one's own life. So "non-violence (of the coward)" we describe as "non-love", as we describe "non-violence (of the brave)" as love.

"Non-violent violence" is justified not as love, but as duty—duty done selflessly for others according to *Karma Yoga*, which is linked with unlimited love—but human love.

The difference between these two opposite forces cannot be obliterated; but the transformation of one force to another can happen when expressed through the right channels. Food given wrongly becomes poison but poison given in small quantities as a tonic may become food for the nerves. Indeed, all food is poison; it is only in the power of transformation that it becomes converted into good.

We must live for God and die for God

War is a necessary evil; it is in God's plan to awaken humanity to higher values. If humanity fails to profit by the lessons of war, it suffers in vain. War teaches that even the man in the street can rise to the greatest heights of sacrifice for the sake of a selfless cause; it also teaches that wealth, possessions, power, fame, family and even life on earth—are devoid of lasting value. The incidents of war can, through the lessons they bring, win man for God, and initiate him into a new life inspired by lasting values.

In war, people make unlimited sacrifices and endure untold sufferings for the sake of their country or in the interests of political aims; they are capable of the same sacrifices and endurance for God. All religions have unequivocally claimed man for life in the Truth; and it is sheer folly to fight in the name of any religion. It is time for a fresh vision of the Truth that all life is one, that only God is real, and that God is all that matters. God is worth dying for. He is also worth living for. All else is vain and empty, the pursuit of illusory values.

XXVI

GOD AND THE INDIVIDUAL

There is one being, the Universal Being. The existence of the finite is apparent or imaginary. You are infinite. You are everywhere. But you think you are the body, and consider yourself limited. If you think you are the body, you do not know your true nature. If you would look within and experience your own self in its true nature, you would realize that you were infinite and beyond all creation. But you identify yourself with the body, due to ignorance made effective through the medium of the mind. Man thinks himself to be the physical body; when spiritually advanced he thinks himself to be the psychic body; the saint thinks he is the mind; but in these thoughts man does not experience self-knowledge. As spirit, man is infinite, but under the sway of the mind he becomes a "thinker", or a "saint", sometimes identifying himself with the body, sometimes with the mind. From the point of view of one who has not gone beyond *Maya*, it seems that there are as many individuals as there are minds and bodies. In Truth there is one Universal Being behind the minds of seemingly different individuals, who through them has the experiences of duality.

The cause of false thinking

Thinking becomes false owing to the interference of the *sanskaras* accumulated during the process of the evolution of consciousness, which manifest themselves as desires. Through many lives consciousness is burdened by the after-effects of experience, and the perception of the soul is limited. The soul cannot break through the hedge created by *sanskaras*, and consciousness becomes a helpless captive of illusions projected by its own false thinking. And this falsification of thought is present not only where consciousness is partly developed, but also in men who consider themselves to be fully developed.

The progressive evolution of consciousness beginning with the stone culminates in man. The history of evolution is the history of a gradual development of consciousness, and the fruit of evolution is full consciousness, which is the particular characteristic of man. But even full consciousness is like a mirror covered by dust, for owing to the operation of *sanskaras* it does not yield clear and true knowledge of the nature of the self. Though fully developed it yields not truth but an imaginary picture because its functioning is hindered by the weight of the *sanskaras*. Moreover it cannot extend beyond its desires, and therefore is limited in its scope.

The individuation of consciousness

The boundaries of consciousness are prescribed by the *sanskaras* and its functioning determined by the desires; as desires aim at self-satisfaction, consciousness is self-centred. The individuation of consciousness may be said to be the effect of the vortex of desires. The soul gets enmeshed in desires, and cannot rise out of the individuality constituted by them. It imagines barriers and becomes self-hypnotized. It looks upon itself as separate from other individuals. It gets entangled in individual existence, and a world of separateness, with many individuals and their minds and bodies.

Separateness exists in imagination

When the rays of the sun pass through a prism, they are dispersed and separate through refraction. If each ray had consciousness, it would consider itself to be separate from the other rays, forgetting the other side of the prism. In the same way the One Being descends in the domain of *Maya* and assumes multiplicity. The separateness of individuals exists only in imagination. The One Being imagines separateness, and out of this division there rises "I" and "mine" opposed to "you" and "yours". Although the self is an undivided unity, it appears to be divided owing to the working of imagination. Imagination is anything but the truth. The experience that the soul gathers in terms of the individualized ego is all imagination, *Maya* or ignorance.

The objective universe

With the birth of the separate and limited individuality there comes into existence the objective universe. As the limited individuality has separate existence only in imagination, the objective universe also has no separate reality. It is the One Being appearing in the second role of manifestation through the attributes. When the One Being descends in the domain of *Maya*, it takes upon itself the limitations of manifold existence. This self-limitation of the One Being might be looked upon as its self-sacrifice on the altar of consciousness. Although it eternally remains the One Being it suffers timeless contraction through its descent into the world of time and evolution. What, however, evolves is not the One Being, only the consciousness, which, because of its limitations, gives rise to the limited individuality.

The triple entanglement

The history of the limited individuality is a history of the development of the triple entanglement with mind, energy and matter. Duality prevails in these domains, and the individual gets entangled in this duality, although the self is beyond duality. Duality implies the existence of opposites, limiting and balancing each other through mutual tension. Good and evil, virtue and vice are examples of such opposites. The ignorant soul enmeshed in duality is in the clutches of both good and evil. During the evolution of the triple entanglement with matter, energy and mind, the ignorant soul is under the influence of wanting; it wants the good and evil of the physical world; the good and evil of the subtle world; the good and evil of the mental world; and owing to the distinction of good and evil, wanting itself becomes good and evil. Wanting is to be limited by the tension of the opposites. This tension causes oscillation from one state to another, without arriving at the unlimited state. The Infinite is to be sought for beyond the domain of duality, which is reached only when consciousness rises out of the limited individuality by breaking through the barriers of *sanskaras*.

The chasm between consciousness and unconsciousness

We have said that the field of consciousness is limited by the

sanskaras. This limitation creates a division of the human psyche into two parts, one within the range of consciousness, the other beyond it. The unconscious part in its full extent is identical with the power that is also behind matter. This is referred to as God in orthodox religions. The One Being, which is symbolically represented through such concepts, can be known only by bringing the unconscious into consciousness. An extension of consciousness consists in being conscious of that which was formerly unconscious. The progressive conquest of the unconscious by the conscious culminates in consummate consciousness, which is unlimited. Between this highest state of consciousness and the limited consciousness of average humanity there are forty-nine degrees of the illumined consciousness. They mark the important stages of illumination.

Spiritual advancement

The gulf between the clouded consciousness of average humanity and the fully illumined consciousness of a Master is created by *sanskaras*. These can be removed through perfect character, devotion and selfless service, and through the help of a Master. Spiritual advancement consists not so much in the further development of consciousness (for it is already developed in man), as in the emancipation of consciousness from the bondage of the *sanskaras*. Although in essence consciousness is the same in all the different states of existence, it can never be consummate until it reflects the knowledge of Infinity without the shadow of ignorance, and covers the whole extent of the universe illumining the different spheres of existence.

Deep sleep

Every time you sleep you are unconsciously united with the One Being. This unification thus bridges over the chasm between the unconscious and the conscious, but being unconscious of this union, you do not consciously derive benefit from it. This is the reason why when you wake from deep sleep you become aware of the individual you suppose yourself to be, and begin to act and experience exactly as you acted and experienced before going to sleep. If your union with the One Being had been a conscious union, you would have awakened into a new life.

Conscious union with reality

A Master is consciously united with the One Being. In him the chasm between consciousness and unconsciousness is bridged, not by the extension of the unconscious over the conscious as in the man who enjoys deep sleep, but by the extension of consciousness over unconsciousness. The waxing and waning of consciousness exists in the limited individual, but in the Master the conquest of the unconscious by the conscious is final and permanent, his state of self-knowledge is continuous and unbroken, and remains the same at all times without diminution. From this you can see that the Master never sleeps in the ordinary sense of the word. When he rests his body he experiences no gap in consciousness.

In the state of perfection full consciousness becomes consummate by the disappearance of obstacles to illumination. The conquest of the unconscious by the conscious is complete, dwelling in the full blaze of illumination. This alone is illumination. As long as a person remains under the sway of duality and looks upon the manifoldness of experience as true, he has not passed through the domain of ignorance. In the state of final understanding there is realization that the Infinite is the only reality, pervading and including all existence. A person who has such realization has attained the highest state of consciousness, in which the fruit of evolution is retained, but the limitations of *sanskaras* are transcended. The limited individuality, the creation of ignorance, is transformed into the Divine individuality, which is understanding. The illimitable consciousness of the Universal Being becomes individualized in this focus without illusion. One thus becomes the medium of the spontaneous flow of the supreme and universal Will, unimpaired by the separateness of *Maya*, the state of liberation, in which there is objectless awareness, pure being and unclouded joy. Such a one has no longer the illusions that perplex and bewilder man. In one sense he is dead. The personal ego which is the source of the sense of separateness has been for ever annihilated. But in another sense he is alive for-ever-more in love and eternal bliss. He has infinite power and wisdom, and the creation is a field for the work of perfecting mankind.

XXVII

THE ELEMENT OF SEX

Sex as one of the most important elements in the life of man is within the sphere of duality. As with everything in human life it exists in the opposites, which are the creations of the mind. As with the alternatives of joy or pain, good or bad, solitude or company, attraction or repulsion, so indulgence and repression are the alternatives in sex from which there is thought to be no escape. Life sways between the alternatives, and he who adopts repression is dissatisfied and thinks of indulgence, while he who indulges longs for the freedom of repression. Thus arises one of the most vital and complicated problems of life.

To solve the problem the mind must understand that the alternatives are equally the creation of imagination under the influence of craving. Craving is present in the repression of sex as well as in its gratification, both presuppose the vitiation of consciousness by the operation of lust or the desire for sensations. Since it does not go beyond these opposites, the movement is always from one opposite to the other and consequently from one disappointment to another. There is diminution of being and lack of happiness whether the craving is gratified or not. The restless mind finds illusory happiness in the gratification of desire, and realizing the illusion seeks freedom through repression.

The false promises of the opposites

In spite of alternate and repeated disappointments the mind does not renounce the cause of unhappiness, which is the craving itself. Thus it moves as within a cage. The gateway to the spiritual path of internal renunciation of craving remains closed, for internal renunciation of craving is as different from mechanical repression as it is from indulgence.

The need for indulgence or repression arises when the nature

of the craving is not understood. When a man becomes awake to the inevitable bondage entailed by craving, he begins to disburden his mind of craving through understanding.

It should, however, be borne in mind that the life of freedom is nearer to restraint than to indulgence, though essentially different from both. Hence the life of celibacy is preferable to married life, if restraint comes easily without an undue sense of self-repression. But such restraint is difficult and sometimes impossible, so that married life is usually more helpful than a life of celibacy.

Celibacy and marriage

Just as the life of celibacy calls for the development of many virtues, the married life nourishes the growth of spiritual qualities of the utmost importance. The value of celibacy lies in restraint and the sense of detachment that it gives, but so long as the mind is not free from craving there is no freedom. In the same way, the value of marriage lies in mutual adjustment and the sense of unity. But true union or the dissolution of duality is possible only through Divine Love which can never be felt so long as there is a shadow of craving. Only by treading the path of inner renunciation of craving is it possible to attain freedom and unity.

For the celibate as for the married the path of inner life is the same. When the aspirant is drawn by the Truth he longs for nothing else; and as the Truth increasingly comes within his understanding, he disburdens himself of craving. Whether in celibacy or in marriage he is no longer swayed by deceptive promises, and practices internal renunciation of craving until freed from the deceptive opposites. The path is open to all whether in celibacy or in marriage, and whether a man begins from celibacy or from marriage depends upon his *sanskaras* and *Karmic* ties. He accepts the conditions that his past life has determined for him and utilizes them towards spiritual advancement in the light of the ideal he has come to perceive.

A choice has to be made between celibacy or married life, and there must be no attempt at compromise. Sex-gratification apart from marriage lands both men and women into spiritual chaos. It veils the higher values, perpetuates entanglements and creates insuperable difficulties in the spiritual path of internal renunciation of craving. Sex in marriage is entirely different from sex

outside marriage. In marriage, the *sanskaras* are much lighter and capable of removal more easily. When sex-companionship is accompanied by a sense of personal responsibility, love, and spiritual aspiration, the conditions exist for the sublimation of sex.

The temptation to explore the possibilities of sex contact is formidable, and only by the maximum restriction of the activity of mere sex can a man or woman arrive at understanding of the higher values attainable through the transformation of sex into love. But, if the mind endeavours to understand sex otherwise, there is no end to the delusions to which it must be prey, because there is no end to enlarging their scope.

Infinity attainable through marriage

Truth cannot be understood by multiplying superficial contacts; it requires full preparedness to free the mind, and to enable discrimination to be made between the higher and the lower and the transcendence of the lower in favour of the higher. Wholehearted concentration and interest is necessarily excluded when the mind becomes a slave to sensations. In married life there are opportunities to recognize and annul the limiting factors in experience. By the gradual elimination of desire and the progression through a series of increasingly richer experiences of love and sacrifice, married people may arrive at infinity.

The sanctification of married life

Most persons enter into married life as a matter of course; but immense spiritual possibilities are accessible through it, which depend upon the right attitude at the start. From the spiritual point of view, married life will be a success only if it is entered upon as a spiritual enterprise intended to discover what life can be at its best. When the two partners together launch upon the spiritual adventure of exploring the higher possibilities of the spirit, they must at the outset surrender all calculations concerning the nature and amount of individual gain.

Married life makes upon both the partners demands of mutual adjustment and understanding and creates many problems beyond their expectation. This is true of life in general but

particularly true of married life. In married life two souls linked with each other are called upon to tackle the whole complex problem of personality together. This is exactly where married life is different from all other forms of sex association.

The values of the various sides of the limited personality can best be appreciated in the varied settings and perspectives of married life. There is scope for a great variety of experiences, and the adoption of a definite scheme of thought and behaviour.

The spiritual value of married life is directly related to the nature of the factors that determine daily experience. If based upon shallow considerations, it can deteriorate into a partnership in selfishness against the rest of the world; but inspired by lofty idealism it can be raised to a fellowship which not only calls forth increasingly greater sacrifices from each other but becomes a medium through which two souls can offer their united love and service to the whole family of humanity. When married life is thus brought into conformity with the divine plan for the evolution of the individual, it becomes a pure blessing to the children that are the fruit of that marriage, for they get the advantage of a spiritual atmosphere from the beginning of their earthly career.

Children and birth control

Though children are thus the benefactors from married life, the parents have their own lives enriched, for children give to the parents an opportunity for spontaneous love in which sacrifice becomes a delight, and the part played by children in the life of parents is of tremendous importance.

In view of the claims that children have on married life the present birth control movement deserves attention and critical examination. The question must not be considered from the point of view of any limited interest but from that of the ultimate well-being of the individual and society. The right opinion has to be based upon spiritual considerations. The attitude of most persons towards birth control is confused because it is an admixture of good and bad elements. While birth control is right in its aim of securing the regulation of population, it is wrong in the choice of means. There can be no doubt that the regulation of the number of children is often desirable for personal and social reasons. Socially, uncontrolled breeding intensifies the struggle for

existence and brings about ruthless competition between people. It puts upon parents a responsibility they may not be able to discharge, and may become a contributory cause of crime, war and poverty. But though humane and rational considerations demand and justify serious attempts to regulate the birth of children, the use of physical means for securing this purpose is fundamentally indefensible.

Although the physical means of birth control are advocated on humanitarian grounds, it is almost always with selfish ends and for avoiding the responsibility of bearing and bringing up children. And since the physical consequences of yielding to desire can successfully be avoided through the use of these means, those who have not begun to be awake to higher values may thus become victims to indulgence and bring about their own physical, moral and spiritual ruin by neglecting mental control. The use of physical means obscures the spiritual aspect of the problem, and is far from contributing to the awakening of man to his dignity and freedom as a spiritual being. For spiritual aspirants in particular and indeed for all human beings (because all are potentially spiritual aspirants), it is inadvisable to employ physical means for the regulation of children. They must rely upon mental control, for mental control secures the humanitarian aims, and is indispensable for restoring man to his divine dignity and spiritual well-being. Only through the exercise of mental control is it possible for man to rise from passion to peace, from bondage to freedom, and from animality to spirituality. In the minds of thoughtful persons the spiritual side of this question must assume the importance it deserves.

Joint responsibility of parenthood

Since woman has to undertake the task and the responsibility of bearing and rearing children she may seem to be affected by any possible failure in mental control more seriously than man; but in fact it does not mean unfairness to woman. It is true that woman has this trouble and responsibility, but she has also the compensating joy of motherhood which is beyond measure greater than the joy of fatherhood. Further the man also has to face economic and educational responsibilities towards the children. In a properly adjusted marriage there is no injustice in

the distribution of the parental responsibility shared by man and woman. When the father as well as the mother is truly conscious of responsibility, inconsiderateness gives place to active and cooperative endeavour to attain full mental control; and should there be any failure in mental control they both cheerfully and willingly discharge the joint responsibility of parenthood.

If a person is not prepared to undertake the responsibility of children, there is only one course open to him. He must remain celibate and practice strict mental control; for, though mental control is extremely difficult to attain, it is not impossible.

From the spiritual point of view, therefore, birth control must be effected through mental control not otherwise; physical means are not advisable even when persons seek to use them merely as a provisional and secondary aid without intending to ignore the ideal of developing mental control. While using the physical means they can never arrive at mental control, though they may want it in earnest; on the contrary they become addicted to the use of physical means and even begin to justify them. To explain still more clearly what happens in the use of physical means: while they think that they are using them merely as a preliminary step before mental control is fully developed, they actually get addicted to their use. And though they may for some time remain under the delusion that they are trying to develop mental control, they are losing it. In short, mental power is undermined by reliance on the physical means. Thus the use of physical means is detrimental to the development of self-control and disastrous for spiritual advancement; it is therefore not advisable even for the best of motives.

At the beginning of married life the partners are drawn to each other by lust as well as love. But they can with conscious and deliberate co-operation lessen the element of lust and increase the element of love. Through this process of sublimation lust gives place to love. By sharing the joys and sorrows the partners move from one spiritual triumph to another, from deep love to ever deeper love, till the possessive and jealous love of the initial period is replaced by self-giving and expansive love. So that through the intelligent experience of marriage a person may traverse so much of the spiritual Path that it needs only a touch by the Master to raise him into the sanctuary of eternal life.

XXVIII

LOVE

Life and love are inseparable. Where there is life, there is love. Even the most rudimentary consciousness is ever trying to burst its limitations and to experience unity with others. Though each form of consciousness is distinct, all are forms of the same life; and the latent sense of inner reality indirectly makes itself felt even in the world of illusion through the attraction which one form has for another.

Love in nature

The law of gravitation, to which all planets and stars are subject, is a reflection of the love that pervades the universe. Even the forces of repulsion are expressions of love, since things are repelled from each other because they are more powerfully attracted elsewhere. Repulsion is the negative of attraction. The forces of cohesion and affinity, which prevail in the very constitution of matter, are positive expressions of love. An example of love at this level is in the attraction that the magnet exercises over iron.

In the animal world love becomes explicit in the form of conscious impulses directed towards different objects in the surroundings. This love is instinctive and takes the form of gratifying desires through the appropriation of suitable objects. When the tiger devours the deer, he is in a real sense in love with the deer. Sex-attraction is another form of love at this level. All such expressions of love have one thing in common, viz., they seek to satisfy some bodily impulse or desire.

Human love

Human love, much higher than these forms of love, because human beings have a more developed form of consciousness, is, however, continuous with the lower forms of love, but different

from them, because it exists with a new factor which is reason. Sometimes human love manifests itself as divorced from reason, sometimes it comes into conflict with it, or it may express itself in the harmonized whole where love and reason are balanced.

Thus human love may have three forms. In the first, the spheres of thought and love are separate, i.e., the sphere of love is practically inaccessible to the operation of reason, and love is allowed little or no access to the objects of thought. Complete separation between these two aspects is never possible, but when there is an oscillating functioning of love and reason there is love unilluminated by reason or reason unenlivened by love. In the second, love and reason are simultaneous but not in harmony with each other. This conflict is a necessary phase in the evolution towards the synthesis of love and reason. In the third, the synthesis between love and reason is accomplished with the result that both love and reason are transformed and a new level of consciousness emerges, which is best described as super-consciousness.

Human love makes its appearance in the matrix of ego-consciousness which has countless desires. Love is coloured by these factors in many ways. Just as we get a kaleidoscope by the combinations of simple elements, there is a limitless qualitative variety in the range of love caused by combinations of psychic factors. And as there are infinite shades in the colours of flowers, so there are differences in human love.

The lower forms of love

Human love is encircled by obstructive factors such as infatuation, lust, greed, anger and jealousy, which are either forms of lower love or the inevitable results of lower forms of love. Infatuation, lust and greed are to be looked upon as perverted forms of love. In infatuation a person gets enamoured, in lust he develops a craving for sensations, and in greed he desires to possess. Of these three forms of love, greed tends to extend itself from the original object to the means of obtaining it. Thus, persons become greedy for money or power or fame as instruments for the possession of the objects craved after. Anger and jealousy come into existence when these forms of love are thwarted or threatened.

The lower the enemy of the higher

These forms of love are obstructive to pure love, and the stream of love can never become clear until freed from them. If consciousness gets caught in the rhythm of the lower it cannot emancipate itself from its self-created processes and finds it difficult to advance. Thus the lower form of love has to be given up to allow for the appearance of the higher.

The emergence of higher love from the shell of lower love is helped by the constant exercise of discrimination. Therefore, love has to be distinguished from the obstructive factors of infatuation, lust, greed and anger. In infatuation, the person is a passive victim of attraction, but in love there is an active appreciation of the intrinsic worth of the object.

Love and lust

Love differs from lust because in lust there is reliance upon the object of sense and spiritual subordination of the soul in relation to it, but love puts the soul into direct and co-ordinate relation with the Reality, which is behind the form. Therefore, lust is heavy, while love is light. In lust, there is narrowing of life, while in love there is expansion in being. To have loved one soul is to add its life to your own; your life is, as it were, multiplied and you virtually live in two centres. If you love the whole world, you vicariously live in the whole world. But in lust there is an ebbing of life and a sense of dependence upon the form regarded as another. Thus, in lust there is accentuation of separateness and suffering; but in love there is unity and joy. Lust is dissipation; love is re-creation. Lust is the craving of the senses; love is the expression of the spirit. Lust seeks fulfilment but love experiences fulfilment. In lust, there is excitement; in love there is tranquillity.

Love is equally different from greed, which is possessiveness in gross and subtle forms. It seeks to appropriate things and persons, as well as such abstract and intangible things as fame and power. In love, the annexation of the other person to one's individual life is not desired, and there is free and creative outpouring that replenishes the psychic being of the beloved independently of any expectations for the self. There is the paradox that greed which seeks for the self the appropriation of another object leads to the spiritual incorporation of the beloved in the being of the lover.

In greed the self aims to possess the object, but is itself spiritually possessed by the object; in love the self offers itself to the beloved, but in that act finds the beloved included in its own being.

Love awakened through grace

Infatuation, lust and greed constitute spiritual maladies often rendered more virulent by anger and jealousy; but pure love, in sharp distinction from them, is the bloom of spiritual perfection. Human love is so tethered by limiting conditions that the spontaneous appearance of pure love from within becomes impossible. So, when such pure love exists it is always a gift arising in the heart in response to the descent of grace from the Master. When pure love is first received as a gift of the Master, it is lodged in the consciousness of the aspirant as the seed in a favourable soil, and in the course of time the seed develops into a plant, then into the full-grown tree.

The grace of the Master is however subject to preliminary spiritual preparation. This preparation is not completed until the aspirant has built into his psychic being some divine attributes. When a person avoids back-biting and thinks more of the good points in others than of their defects, and when he practices tolerance and desires the good of others even at cost to himself, the aspirant is ready to receive the grace of the Master. One of the greatest obstacles to this spiritual preparation of the aspirant is worry; and when with effort this obstacle is overcome, a way exists for the cultivation of the divine attributes which constitute the spiritual preparation of the disciple. As soon as the disciple is ready, the grace of the Master descends; for the Master who is the ocean of Divine Love is always on the look out for the soul in whom his grace will fructify.

The kind of love awakened by the grace of the Master is a rare privilege. The mother willing to sacrifice all for her child and the martyr prepared to give up his very life for his country are indeed supremely noble; but they may not have tasted of the pure love which comes through the grace of the Master. Even the great *yogis*, who, sitting in caves and mountains, are completely absorbed in deep *samadhi*, do not necessarily have this precious love.

Love as discipline

Pure love awakened through the grace of the Master is more valuable than any other method adopted by the aspirant, for it combines the merits of all the disciplines but excels them in its efficacy to lead the aspirant to his goal. When this love is born the aspirant has only one desire, to be united with the Divine Beloved. Withdrawal of consciousness from all other desires leads to infinite purity; therefore nothing purifies the aspirant more completely than this love. The aspirant is willing to offer everything for the Divine Beloved; and no sacrifice is too difficult. All his thoughts are turned away from the limiting self and are centred on the Divine Beloved. And through the intensity of this ever growing love he eventually breaks through the limitations of the self and becomes united with the Beloved. This is the consummation of love. When love has thus found its fruition it has become Divine.

Human love is for the many in the One. Divine Love is for the One in the many. Human love leads to complications and tangles; Divine Love leads to integration and freedom. In Divine Love, the personal and impersonal aspects are equally balanced; but in human love the two aspects alternate, the personal note leads to blindness to the intrinsic worth of other forms, so that, as in the sense of duty when love is predominantly impersonal, it often makes a man cold, rigid and mechanical. The sense of duty is experienced as external constraint of behaviour; but in Divine Love there is freedom and spontaneity. Human love in its personal and impersonal aspects is limited; but Divine Love with its fusion of the personal and the impersonal is infinite.

Even the highest type of human love is subject to the limitations of the individual nature, which persists till the seventh plane; but Divine Love arises after the disappearance of the individual mind and is free from the trammels of individual nature. In human love, the duality of the lover and the Beloved persists; but in Divine Love the lover and the Beloved are one. At this stage, the aspirant has stepped out of the domain of duality and become one with God; for Divine Love is God. When the lover and the Beloved are one, that is the end and the beginning.

The universe exists for the sake of Love

It is for the sake of Love that the universe sprang into existence and for the sake of Love it is kept going. God descends into the realm of illusion because the apparent duality of the Beloved and the Lover is contributory to his conscious enjoyment of his own divinity. The development of love is conditioned and sustained by the tension of duality. God suffers the apparent differentiation into the multiplicity of souls for the sake of the game of Love. They are his own forms and in relation to them he assumes the role of the Divine Lover and the Divine Beloved. As the Beloved, he is the real and ultimate object of appreciation and as the Divine Lover, he is their Saviour drawing them back to himself. Though the entire world of duality is but an illusion, it has come into being for a significant purpose.

Love is the reflection of God's unity in the world of duality. It is the significance of creation. If love were excluded from life all souls in the world would assume externality to each other, and their only possible relations and contacts would be superficial and mechanical. It is because of love that the contacts and relations between individual souls become significant; and it is love which gives meaning to every happening in the world of duality. But the love that gives meaning to the world of duality is a standing challenge to it. As love gathers strength, it generates creative restlessness and becomes the spiritual dynamic which ultimately succeeds in restoring to consciousness the original unity of being.

GOD AS INFINITE LOVE

GOD is not understood until he is understood as Infinite Love. In the Beyond State, from which the entire universe springs and into which it merges, God is eternally Infinite Love; it is only when God's Love is in the limited context of forms (which arise in the interim period of the appearance of the illusory universe of duality) that its infinity seems to have been impaired.

Three stages of the Lover

Even in the lowest life of the physical sphere, God is experiencing himself as a Lover, but as a Lover who is ignorant of the true nature of himself or the Beloved, the state of a Lover who is separated from the Beloved by the curtain of duality. It is nevertheless the beginning of a long process by which the Lover breaks the enveloping curtain of ignorance and comes into his own Truth as Unbounded and Unhampered Love. But to be initiated into Infinite Love, the Lover has to pass through two other stages characteristic of the subtle and mental spheres.

Lover of the subtle sphere

The Lover in the subtle sphere is not free from lust; but its intensity is half that in the physical sphere, and there is no gross expression of it. The Lover in the physical sphere is entangled with physical objects, and his lust finds physical expression; but in the subtle sphere it is loosened from attachment to physical objects; hence, it remains unexpressed in physical form. He experiences Love as a longing for being united with the Beloved. Thus in the subtle sphere, Love is expressed as Longing. Lust, as a craving for sensations, is disregarding of the well-being of the Beloved. But in longing, though it continues to be possessive, the Beloved is

recognized. Longing is a less limited form of Love than lust, and the curtain of duality becomes transparent, for the duality between the Lover and the Beloved is consciously sought to be overcome.

Lover of the mental sphere

The Lover in the mental sphere has an even freer expression of Love. In him, though lust has not fully disappeared, it is sublimated, so that only about one-fourth of the original lust of the physical sphere remains in latent form without expression. In the mental sphere, lust does not have subtle expression. The lover is detached from subtle objects, and is free from possessive longing for the Beloved.

In the mental sphere, Love expresses itself as complete resignation to the will of the Beloved. All selfish desire including longing for the presence of the Beloved has disappeared. The emphasis is on the worth and will of the Beloved, and there is abundant release of Love in its pure form. However, even in the mental sphere, Love is not infinite, since there is still present the curtain of duality that separates the Lover from the Beloved. Love, no longer under the influence of selfishness, is still experienced through the medium of the finite mind, just as in the lower spheres, it is experienced through the medium of the lower bodies.

Divine Love

Love becomes consciously infinite when the individual mind is transcended. Such Love is rightly called Divine, because it is characteristic of the God-state in which duality is overcome. Divine Love is unlimited in essence and expression because it is experienced by the soul through the self itself. In the physical, subtle and mental spheres, the Lover is conscious of separation from the Beloved; but when these spheres are transcended, the Lover is conscious of unity with the Beloved. Divine Love is entirely free from the thralldom of desires and the limiting self. The Lover has no being apart from the Beloved; he is the Beloved.

God as Infinite Love, first delimits himself in the forms of creation, and recovers his infinity through the different stages of creation. All the stages of God's experience as a Lover culminate in his experiencing himself as the sole Beloved. The sojourn of the

self is a divine romance, in which the Lover, who in the beginning is conscious of emptiness, frustration, superficiality and the chains of bondage, attains an increasingly fuller expression of Love and finally merges into the unity of the Lover and the Beloved in the supreme and eternal truth of God as Infinite Love.

XXX

THE CONDITIONS OF HAPPINESS

Every creature seeks happiness. All that man desires or undertakes is for the sake of happiness; power because he expects happiness from its use; money because he thinks it will secure for him the conditions of his happiness; knowledge, health, beauty, science, art, literature, because he feels that the pursuit of happiness is dependent upon them; worldly success and fame because he hopes for happiness in their attainment.

Everyone seeks to be happy; yet most people are in some kind of suffering; the installments of happiness they get in their lives are neither unadulterated nor abiding. Man's life moves between the opposites of pain and pleasure. If moments of pleasure leave a trace, it is of a memory that augments the pain of having lost them.

Man does not seek suffering; it comes to him as an outcome of his search for happiness. Happiness is sought through the fulfilment of desires, but in the pursuit of desires he is preparing for suffering from their nonfulfilment. The tree of desire has two kinds of fruit, one sweet, the other bitter. The tree cannot be made to yield only one kind of fruit, so that he who would gather pleasure must be prepared for pain.

Goaded by desires, man seeks the pleasures of the world with hope; but the zest does not remain constant, because even while reaching out for the cup, he has to drink large measures of sufferings. Enthusiasm for pleasure gets abated by the experience of suffering. His moods subject him to ups and downs and to constant change.

Fulfilment of desires does not lead to their termination; they get submerged for a while only to reappear with intensity. When one is hungry he eats, but is soon hungry again. If one eats too much he experiences pain and discomfort. It is the same with every desire of the world.

If a person experiences the suffering that waits upon desires, his desires get mitigated. Sometimes intense suffering may detach him from worldly life; but this detachment is often set aside by fresh desires. Many persons temporarily lose their interest in worldly objects, owing to the impact of acute suffering, but to pave the way for freedom from desires the detachment must be lasting. There are varying degrees of detachment; not all are lasting.

Temporary detachment

The temporary mood of detachment is known as *Smashan Vairagya*, because it is usually in the burial ground that such thoughts arise, and they stay in the mind only as long as the person is in the presence of death. Such moods of detachment seem strong while they last; but when the experience is forgotten, the mood vanishes.

Intense detachment

Sometimes, the mood of detachment is more lasting, and not only endures for a considerable time, but modifies the general attitude to life. This is called *Tivra Vairagya* or intense dispassion. It usually arises owing to some misfortune, and under its influence, the person renounces worldly things. *Tivra Vairagya* has its own spiritual value; but it is also likely to disappear, or to be upset by desires, and does not endure, because it is not born of understanding. It is but a reaction to life.

Complete detachment

The kind of detachment that lasts comes from the understanding of suffering and its cause; it is based upon the knowledge that the things of this world are passing and that to cling to them is bound to be a source of pain. Man seeks pleasure and tries to avoid pain, but as long as there is attachment to worldly objects, he must invite the suffering of not possessing them. Lasting detachments with freedom from desires and attachments is called *Purna Vairagya* or complete dispassion. It is one of the essential conditions of true happiness; for he who has complete detachment no longer creates for himself the suffering that comes from desires.

Desirelessness causes a man to be unmoved by pleasure and

sorrow; he is not upset by opposites. The same is true of praise and blame. The only way of not being distressed by blame is to be detached from praise also. The equanimity that remains unaffected by opposites is possible only through complete detachment. This is an essential condition of happiness. He who has complete detachment is no longer at the mercy of the opposites of experience, he is free from the thralldom of desires, and ceases to create his own suffering.

Of all sufferings, mental suffering is most acute. Even *yogis* who can endure great physical suffering find it difficult to keep free from mental suffering rooted in the frustration of desires. Yet the state of complete desirelessness is latent in everyone, and when through complete detachment one reaches the state of wanting nothing, the unfailing inner source of happiness is reached.

Contentment

Most human suffering created by desires is unnecessary because desires are not necessary. Desirelessness means freedom from self-inflicted suffering, when imagination does not reach out towards things that do not matter. This is to be established in peace. When man is contented, he does not require solutions to problems, because the problems have disappeared.

When it is understood that desires are the bondage of the spirit and the decision is made to give them up it is found to be a painful process, because the decision is contrary to the ego-mind. Because renunciation of desires is the curtailment of the life of the ego-mind, it is accompanied by acute suffering. Such suffering is wholesome, because it liberates the soul from bondage.

The life of freedom and happiness is difficult to achieve, for man has complicated his life by the growth of desires; and to go back to simplicity amounts to the renunciation of what seems to have become a part of the self. When a man through great suffering understands the true nature of desires, he realizes that suffering is to be welcomed. Suffering may come to eliminate further suffering.

Man is not content to create suffering only for himself, but creates it for his fellow-men. Thus arise wars in which there is disregard for the well-being of others. In the pursuit of happiness to the exclusion of the happiness of others, the false self becomes

accentuated and burdensome. When man is selfish in the pursuit of happiness his callousness and cruelty to others recoil upon himself.

When a man is desireless, he not only eliminates the suffering he causes to others, but much of his own suffering. But mere desirelessness does not yield positive happiness, though it protects from self-created suffering and goes a long way towards making happiness possible. True happiness begins when a man learns the art of right adjustment to other persons; and right adjustment involves self-forgetfulness and love.

Love is adulterated with selfish motives introduced into consciousness by the operation of accumulated *sanskaras*. It is extremely difficult to purge consciousness of deep-rooted ignorance expressing itself through the idea of "I" and "Mine". The feeling of "I" and "Mine" may be present even in the expression of love.

Pure love cannot be forced neither can it be taken away by force. It manifests itself from within with spontaneity. What can be achieved through decision is the removal of the factors that prevent manifestation.

Love awakened by the Master

It is when the aspirant has developed an intense longing for pure love, that he prepares for the intervention of the Master, who through direction brings him into the state of Divine Love. Only a Master can awaken love through the Divine Love which he imparts. Divine Love cannot be awakened except by contact with the Incarnation of Love. Merely to long for love may result in a theory about love with the heart remaining empty.

When true love is awakened, it is the realization of God. The happiness obtained through realizing God is worth all the physical and mental suffering in the universe.

Even those who are not God-realized can through *Yoga* control their minds to the extent that nothing makes them feel pain and suffering, they remain untouched by suffering, however great. But though advanced *yogis* can annul suffering they do not experience the happiness of realizing God. God-realization is self-sustained, eternally fresh, unfading, boundless and indescribable happiness; and for this happiness the world has sprung into existence.

XXXI

WORK FOR THE SPIRITUAL FREEDOM OF HUMANITY

All over the world, the spirit of man is crying for freedom. Love for freedom and search for freedom are characteristic of our time, but in all races and under all climes, in all countries and at all times, the watch-word for groping and struggling humanity has been freedom. Yet there are few who understand the implications of freedom; and there are many who in their partial understanding of it strive only for the attainment of relative freedom. Thus, different persons long for different kinds of freedom according to the different things they have come to value.

Freedom of life usually expresses itself by demanding the external conditions of the existence people wish to lead. Thus, those who identify their being with their country seek national or political freedom, those who are animated by economic purposes seek economic freedom, those who are inspired by religious aspirations seek freedom of religion, and those who are enthusiastic about sociological or cultural causes seek freedom of movement and freedom of expression in respect of the ideals they cherish and wish to propagate. There are few who realize that the basic freedom, which gives true value to different kinds of relative freedom is spiritual freedom. Even when all the external conditions of a free life are fulfilled and guaranteed, the soul of man remains in bondage if it has failed to realize spiritual freedom.

All the different freedoms that are associated with external conditions exist only within certain limits; for the freedom that an individual or community or state seeks must be consistent with similar freedoms for other individuals, communities or states. National, economic, religious or cultural freedom expresses itself in and by means of the duality of existence; it lives on duality and is sustained by duality; therefore, it has necessarily to be relative and limited; it cannot be infinite. It exists only in varying degrees,

and even when won through persistent effort it cannot be a permanent attainment, since the external conditions that have been secured are not permanent but deteriorate in the course of time

Spiritual freedom

Only spiritual freedom is unlimited; won through persistent effort, it is secured for ever. Though spiritual freedom expresses itself in and through the duality of existence, it is grounded in the realization of the unity of all life, and is sustained by it. One important condition of spiritual freedom is freedom from wanting. It is want that fetters life through attachment to the conditions that fulfil that want; if there is no want, there is no dependence. The soul is enslaved through wanting. When the soul breaks the shackles of wanting, it emancipates itself from the bondage to the bodies, to the mind and to the ego. This is spiritual freedom, which brings the final realization of the unity of all life and puts an end to doubts and worries.

Only in spiritual freedom can one have abiding happiness and unimpaired self-knowledge; only in spiritual freedom can there arise the supreme certainty of Truth-realization; only in spiritual freedom can there be the ending of sorrow and limitation; and only in spiritual freedom can one live for all, and yet be detached amidst activities. Any other freedom is comparable to a house that is built on the sand, and any other attainment is fraught with the fear of decay. Therefore, there is no gift greater than the gift of spiritual freedom, and there is no task more important than the task of helping others to it. Those who understand the supreme importance of spiritual freedom have not only to strive for it for themselves, but also to share the God-given duty of helping others to win it.

Those who are inspired by the spirit of selfless service are quick to render humanity all possible help through the provision of the necessities of life such as clothes and shelter, food and medicine, education and the other achievements of civilization; and in the path of duty they are not only prepared to fight for the weak against aggression and oppression, but also to lay down their lives for the sake of others. All these forms of service are good; but from the ultimate point of view, the help which secures spiritual freedom for humanity surpasseth them all.

The way to help others to spiritual freedom

The way to help others to attain spiritual freedom is far different from the ways of rendering other kinds of help. To the hungry food is provided, and they have only to eat it. To the naked clothes are provided, and they have only to wear them; and to the homeless houses are provided and they have but to dwell in them. But to those who are in the agonies of spiritual bondage there is no ready-made means that can give them relief. Spiritual freedom has to be won by oneself for oneself through watchful and unflinching war against the false self. Those who would be soldiers in the cause of truth have to help others not only in launching upon the thrilling enterprise of attaining victory over oneself, but also in every step they take towards that attainment; there is no other way of sharing their burden.

XXXII

THE TASK FOR SPIRITUAL WORKERS

Addressed to disciples at large

I am very happy that, in response to my call, you have gathered to receive my message. In the Path, the most important condition of discipleship is readiness to work for the spiritual cause of bringing humanity to the realization of God. I am glad that through faith and love for me, you have whole-heartedly offered yourselves for sharing my work of spiritualizing the world; and I have full confidence that you will not only inherit for yourselves the Truth which I bring, but also that you will become enthusiastic torch-bearers for humanity enveloped in deep ignorance.

Because of its supreme importance for the true and final well-being of humanity, spiritual work has an imperative claim on all who love humanity; it is, therefore, very necessary to be quite clear about its nature. The whole world is firmly established in the false idea of separateness; and being caught in the illusion of duality it is subject to all its confusions. Spiritual workers have to redeem the world from the throes of imagined duality by bringing home to people the Truth of the unity of all life.

The root-cause of the illusion of manyness is that the soul in its ignorance identifies itself with its bodies or the ego-mind. The physical and subtle bodies as well as the ego-minds of the mental bodies are all mediums for experiencing the different states of the world of duality; but they are not the medium for knowing the true nature of the self, which is above them all. By being identified with the bodies or the ego-mind the self gets caught up in the ignorance of manyness. The self in the bodies and ego-mind is really one undivided existence, but as it gets confused with these bodies and the ego-mind, which are its vehicles, it considers itself to be limited, and looks upon itself as

being only one among many instead of looking upon itself as the one reality.

The true self of everyone is eternally one with the one undivided and indivisible Universal Self, which is the one reality; yet false identification with the bodies or the ego-mind creates the illusion of manyness within the whole in which there is no room for any separateness or duality. Bodies and the ego-mind are only the vehicles of consciousness; and as the self experiences the different planes of the world through its different mediums or vehicles, it goes through different states of consciousness.

Most persons are unconscious of their true nature as God. God-realization is only latently present in them. But those who have cast off the veil of duality experience the self through itself, independently of any vehicles; and in this experience, the self consciously knows itself as identical with God who is the unity and reality of all Being. Life in the truth of the unity of all brings with it freedom from limitations and sufferings; it is the self-affirmation of the infinite as infinite. In this state of spiritual freedom and perfection, ego-life is finally surrendered to experience the Divine Life in the Truth; and God is known and affirmed as the one reality.

To realize God is to dwell in eternity; it is a timeless experience. But spiritual work exists in relation to the souls caught up in the mazes of the multiplicity of the creation which is bound by time. Spiritual workers cannot afford to ignore the element of time in creation, for that would be to ignore the spiritual work itself. It is imperatively necessary to be aware of the flow of time in creation, and particularly necessary to appreciate fully the supreme importance of the moment in the near future in which will be witnessed the dispensation of the Truth of spiritual wisdom.

Warning to spiritual workers

The task for spiritual workers to help me in this dispensation of the Truth to suffering humanity means that you have not only to prepare others to receive this truth but to get established in it yourselves. You can help others to gain spiritual freedom and to come out of the illusion of duality only if you yourself do not lose this idea of unity while working for others. This is not easy, for others are inclined to create divisions where they do not exist and to allow no respite to spiritual workers.

The mind has to be purged of all forms of selfishness to inherit Life in Eternity, which I bring; it is by no means an easy task to persuade people to give up their selfishness. It is not by accident that people are divided into the rich and the poor, the pampered and the neglected, the rulers and the ruled, the leaders and the masses, the oppressors and the oppressed, the high and the low, the winners of laurels and the recipients of ignominy. These differences have been created and are sustained by those who through spiritual ignorance are attached to them, and who are so confirmed in perverse thinking and feeling that they are not conscious of their perversity. They are accustomed to looking upon life as divided into compartments, and are unwilling to give up their separative attitude. When you launch upon your spiritual work, you will encounter divisions that people desperately seek to maintain, which they accentuate and fortify, and strive to perpetuate consciously or unconsciously.

Mere condemnation of these divisions will not enable them to be destroyed. They are maintained by separative thinking and feeling; and separative thinking and feeling yield only to the touch of love and understanding. You have to win people to the life of truth, they cannot be coerced into spirituality. It is not enough that you should have friendliness and good will in your hearts; to succeed in your work, you have to bring home to others the conviction that you are helping them to redeem themselves from bondage and suffering and to realize the highest to which they are heirs. There is no other way to help them to spiritual freedom and enlightenment.

For rendering spiritual help, you should have clear understanding of the following four points:

(i) *Apparent descent into the lower level*

It may often be necessary for you apparently to descend to the lower level of those you are trying to help. Though your purpose is to raise people to the higher level of consciousness, they may fail to profit by what you say unless you talk in terms they understand. What you convey to them through thought-feeling should not go over their heads; they are bound to miss it unless you adapt it to their capacity and experience. However, it is important to remember that while doing this you should not lose your own

level of understanding. You will change your technique as they arrive at deeper understanding, and your apparent descent into the lower level will be only temporary.

(ii) Spiritual understanding ensures all-sided progress

You must not divide life into departments and then attempt to deal with each department separately. Departmental thinking is an obstacle to integral vision. Thus, if you divide life into politics, education, morality, material advancement, science, art, religion, mysticism and culture, and think only of one of these aspects, solutions to the problems of life cannot be found. But if you succeed in awakening spiritual inspiration and understanding they will be active in all aspects of life. As spiritual workers you have to aim at an inclusive and creative attitude to the individual and social problems of life.

(iii) Spiritual progress consists in the spontaneous growth of understanding from within

As spiritual workers you have also to remember that the spiritual wisdom that you desire to convey to others is latently present in them, and that you have only to be instrumental in awakening it. Spiritual progress is not accumulating from without but un-foldment from within. The Master is necessary for anyone to arrive at self-knowledge; but the significance of the help given by the Master consists in the fact that he enables others to come into possession of their own possibilities.

(iv) Some questions are more important than answers

You as spiritual workers must not lose sight of the real work which the Masters desire to get done through you. When it is understood that spiritual wisdom is latent in all, you will no longer be anxious to provide ready-made answers and solutions to problems. You will be content to set up a new problem to clarify the nature of the problem with which people are faced. You may have done your duty if you ask them a question, which they would not themselves have asked when placed in some practical situation; at other times you will have done your duty if you succeed in

putting them in a searching and questioning attitude, so that they begin to tackle their own problems. To give them a deeper point of view, or suggest to them a fruitful line of thought and action, may mean more than thrusting upon them your own answers. But the questions which you may help them to formulate for themselves should neither be theoretical nor unnecessarily complicated. If they are simple, straightforward and fundamental, the questions will answer themselves, and people will find their own solutions. But you will have rendered indispensable and valuable service to them, because, without your intervention, they would not have arrived at the solution of their problems from the spiritual point of view.

Spiritual workers must necessarily be confronted with many obstacles; but obstacles are meant to be overcome. Even if some of them seem to be insuperable, you have to do your best irrespective of results or consequences. Obstacles and their overcoming, success and failure, are illusions within the domain of Unity; and your task is already done when performed wholeheartedly. Steadfast and one-pointed in your desire to help my cause of awakening humanity to the sole reality and to the deep happiness of God and God alone, you will get many opportunities for spiritual work. I am fully confident that you will lend yourself ungrudgingly to this work. You will do so if you unreservedly follow the spiritual instructions which will be given to you separately.

XXXIII

STATES OF GOD

God in the beyond, beyond state is absolutely independent of the world, is the source of all Power, Knowledge, Bliss, Beauty and Wisdom, but is neither conscious of these, nor of himself.

God in the beyond state—Allah, Paramatman, is independent of the world and is conscious of His Power, Beauty, Eternity; but He does not (in that state) express all these. He is eternal in the sense that he ever was, is and will be.

We imagine he was; before that he was, and still before that he was. One that has no beginning and no end. Imagination cannot grasp and cannot reach him. We logically conclude that this state is beyond imagination and understanding. You cannot understand God. Whatever is said about God in volumes of Puran scriptures and the *Gita* is all mere talk.

It is incorrect to say God is one—the idea of oneness limits him; he is infinite. To speak of him correctly is to say God "is". We can say this of him only in his beyond state where there is no beginning, for there is no end and nothing exists but God. "Nothing" exists also. Let us see how this "nothing" represents the whole universe.

"Nothing" exists in God latently. If only God is, God is everything; and in this infinite everything, "nothing" is latent, but is.

The First imagination which Vedanta calls *lahar* and Sufism calls *guman* is the First urge in the beginningless eternity to know Itself. As soon as this urge appeared a beginning began—not of God but of the urge that produced "nothing" which was latent in God. What was the urge? It was "Who am I?" Nothing was produced as long as the urge was there. God, instead of knowing himself, began to know "nothing". This process may be likened to a man tickled out of his sleep into a gradual opening of his eyes—a progressively full awakening. When he awoke, he saw

the object—his own shadow—and not himself. Passing gradually through seven stages of the rise of consciousness, he attained to a full opening of the eyes and consciousness of a fully manifested shadow.

Shadow was latent in God. He saw, not himself as such, but himself in the shadow. Impressions gathered in transitions of the shadows through alternations of pain and pleasure, beauty and ugliness, births and deaths piled up in profusion, germs of imagination and illusion. To know himself as he really is, full open-eyed consciousness should remain in human form, and the seven inward stages of the descending journey traversed by piercing within.

Before knowing himself, creation of forms and experiences was necessary. Some suffer, some are happy. You don't remember having gone through all the dual states of experience—of being a woman, a leper and so forth. It was a bad dream. It will be so till you become free.

When the "urge" for knowing himself came, a beginning was made. It should have an end. Beginning and end and all the paraphernalia of things and becomings that go along with them are what constitute opposites to God.

God's beyond state is formless; so "nothing" must have form, and is latent in "everything"—God. God has no end. Nothing has an end. God is not limited; nothing is limited. Nothing constitutes three states—mental, subtle and gross. When "nothing" manifests, binding (in Law) manifests. Law is established on all the three domains. Law is there, but it is of "nothing". "Nothing" is nothing. Raise up your hand. The light falling upon it is, as it were, the "urge", and the shadow you see of the hand is latent in light. Shadow is nothing. Still it *is*. Law binds equally all, except those who become free. One principal binding appears in varied aspects—like the uniformity of two hands, one head and two eyes running through the differences of human features and figures.

According to Law, the number of lives and deaths, with the measure of suffering and happiness, is fixed. Until the total number of incarnations are gone through and the amount of experience is earned and lost, no freedom can be attained. But all experience is in "nothing". There is no suffering. When I say this, you grouse. Since you do not know the law of nothingness, you think there is nothing like justice.

When one escapes "law", and merges in God who is beyond law, he becomes God. There is no binding; he is *Majzub*.

If he comes down, he brings God on earth; but "law" exists on earth. He brings law-exceeded God down to a law-abiding God.

God in the beyond is conscious of his infinite power. Law cannot touch him, because law-exceeded God is infinite, mighty and powerful. He is *Jivanmukta*. His state is unique. He does everything, and does nothing. He is *Majzub* in normal consciousness.

The *Avatar* is law-exceeded God. He is all powerful. He comes down from the beyond state to normal consciousness. Law cannot touch him, but he touches law, grasps law, acts like an ordinary human being and uses power to make others free from law.

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