

RIGHT ATTITUDE AND ALIGNMENT

'How near the truth yet how far we seek.'
Hakuin

'The wise understand the ignorant, for they were themselves once ignorant. But the ignorant do not understand either themselves or the wise, never having been wise themselves.'
Sufi saying

Preparation and Aspiration

Successfully navigating the spiritual path, with all its challenges and perils, begins with positive intention and noble aspiration. Rumi: "The intention gives birth to the act." And, aspiration must be accompanied by capacity on the part of the seeker and guidance by a teacher in order for potentiality to become actualized as self-realization and enlightenment.

If the motive of the aspirant is an honest search for wisdom and truth then this provides the proper psychological attitude and foundation to begin the journey to self-realization. However, the decision to embark on inner transformation should not be taken lightly:

Think very seriously before you decide to work on yourself with the idea of changing yourself, that is, to work with the definite aim to become conscious and to develop the connection with higher centers. This work admits of no compromise and it requires a great amount of self-discipline and readiness to obey all rules and particularly direct instructions. Think very seriously: are you really ready and willing to obey, and do you fully understand the necessity for it? There is no going back. If you agree and then go back, you will lose everything that you have acquired up to that time, and you will lose more really, because all that you acquired will turn into something wrong in you. There is no remedy against this. (1)

The road to self-knowledge requires clarity, maturity of heart and mind and, above all, sincerity and earnestness. "Some people are more earnest and some are less. You may choose any way that suits you; your earnestness will determine the rate of progress. Compassion, for oneself and others, is the foundation of earnestness."

If you are truly earnest and honest, the attainment of reality will be yours. As a living being you are caught in an untenable and painful situation and you are seeking a way out. You are being offered several plans of your prison, none quite true. But they are all of some value, only if you are in dead earnest. It is the earnestness that liberates and not the theory.

Q: Theory may be misleading and earnestness -- blind.

A: Your sincerity will guide you. Devotion to the goal of freedom and perfection will make you abandon all theories and systems and live by wisdom, intelligence and active love. Theories may be good as starting points, but must be abandoned, the sooner – the better. Whatever name you give it: will, or steady purpose, or one-pointedness of the mind, you come back to earnestness, sincerity, honesty. When you are in dead earnest, you bend every incident, every second of your life to your purpose. You do not waste time and energy on other things. You are totally dedicated, call it will, or love, or plain honesty. We are complex beings, at war within and without. We contradict ourselves all the time, undoing today the work of yesterday. No wonder we are stuck. A little bit of integrity would make a lot of difference. (2)

An honest inquiry into the workings of our mind, emotions and perceptions, without preconceptions or judgments, is essential to gaining psychological insight and self-knowledge. "Maturity comes from inquiring, inquiring about your life, your motives, your surroundings, your relationships. Inquiring means questioning, seeing facts and questioning the facts, without forcing an answer, without forcing a solution, only taking note."

Q: You talked about ripeness. How can we ripen?

A: Ripening comes through inquiring, inquiring into your life, your feelings, your thinking, your relationships with your husband, with your children, and so on. Inquiring means that you are completely open. When you inquire, when you question, never force an answer, because the right attitude in asking a question is the answer. So when you inquire into your life the attitude must be: I am open to not-knowing, and from this opening to not-knowing comes the answer. The answer is on a completely different plane from the question.

Q: What is functional acceptance?

A: Functional acceptance is seeing facts. The moment you try to interpret them, justify or manipulate them, you are not really accepting them. When you see facts from your globality, there is welcoming without choice. When you look from the ego, there is psychological acceptance, which is not acceptance. In real acceptance there is no personal manipulation. (3)

The ability to learn begins with right attitude and right conduct. Higher knowledge and understanding has to be earned in accordance with one's capacity and inner worth. Certain practices, when followed in a specific order, help shape the student's inner development. In the Sufi dispensation this sequence of psychological exercises is known as *Sabr* (patience), *Taubat* (repentance) and *Khidmat* (service). Similar spiritual postures of ordered development are found in other traditions.

Appropriate action and conduct in the world does not automatically determine spiritual progress but it does enhance harmonization with higher levels of reality. "It is possible to achieve the alignment of thought and action which corresponds with the Ultimate Truth by the application in the right manner of order, discipline and service. The capacity for order, discipline and service is the basis for discharging the terms of the injunction: *Be in the world, but not of the world.*"

Among the Sufis, as among those of other paths, it has always been required that the intending participant practise certain requirements to fit him or her for higher learning. In modern societies, equivalent and often exactly similar prerequisites are found. Because so many familiar institutions with clearly laid out requirements already exist in contemporary cultures, it should be easier, not more difficult, for people to understand, given real desire, the requirements. These include: humility, dedication, abstinence, restraint, obedience. Unless you exercise these 'virtues,' you will get nowhere in banking, the army, medicine, politics, human service or anywhere else in many forms of mundane endeavour . . . It is no accident that Sufis find that they can connect most constructively with people who are well integrated into the world, as well as having higher aims, and that those who adopt a sensible attitude toward society and life as generally known can usually absorb Sufi teachings very well indeed. (4)

Positive qualities such as generosity, honesty, compassion and discipline will naturally emerge when lesser attributes and behaviours are clearly observed and modified. The Sufi master Ansari notes four "traps" that must be overcome in order for people to advance on the Path: "Ingratitude in good fortune, impatience in ill fortune, discontent with their lot, hesitation in serving their fellows."

The initial step in preparing the way for a more spiritually sensitive approach to life is to acknowledge the presence and impact of fixed, conditioned psychological and behavioural patterns. One of the biggest barriers to inner development, and one of the hardest to eradicate, is excessive self-absorption and feelings of self-importance. Another related disabling and distorting element in the learning process is greed. "Greed makes you believe things you would not normally believe. It makes you disbelieve things you should ordinarily believe. If you cannot overcome greed, exercise it only where you can see it working, do not bring it into the circle of the wise."

The essence of the Sufi operation's success is to give, rather than to want to get, to serve, rather than to be served. Although almost all cultures pay lip-service to this as an ideal, the failure really to operate it means that the mental, the psychological, posture which unlocks the greater capacity of the consciousness is not achieved where this element is lacking, and so people do not learn. You can't cheat in this game. It is often considered a paradox, especially by people who want to get something and to rationalize their greed as, at least, laudable ambition, that when the ambition is suspended anything can be gained. The easiest way of deal-

ing with this is to affirm, with relative truth, that since people customarily want too much, the non-ambitious posture is a corrective, which enables them to be just ambitious enough and not too greedy; focusing their mind to operate correctly in this respect. Sufi mentors are only too well aware of the underlying greed and how and why it must be assuaged. (5)

One of the most common expressions of greed is impatience to progress quickly on the path to self-realization. Many seekers attempt to start far beyond their actual state of raw, undeveloped potentiality and feel that they are entitled to advanced studies without first completing the preparatory stages.

Self-deception and imagination present further obstacles to the actualization and refinement of our spiritual nature: "Perceptions of another kind of being, when not accompanied by correct preparation, can be more harmful than a lifetime without any such perception. This is because unprepared people misinterpret their experiences and cash in on them at a low level. An example is when people imagine that some true but minor 'sign' gives them an importance or a divine contact or character. Such people are already almost lost, even if their repute rises to the heavens." Authentic schools of inner development are pragmatic and based on realistic possibilities, not fantasy and imagination:

We are not dealing in promises and imagination; we are operating an enterprise. Although it is not romantic to talk in this way, (and most people demand as their 'price' for giving attention, some degree of romanticism and imagination) we are interested in the results, and let other people be interested in fantasies. There are plenty of people who are emotionally-minded. We must be serious. And we must also remember that many people are, effectively, asleep, dreaming romantic dreams. These people will always oppose this approach, dislike it, as they always have, and we *are* spoiling their amusement: or interrupting their dream. They will not, however, realise that this is their condition, and they will therefore oppose these ideas, as always, on other grounds. This helps the cause of sleep, and therefore it is important for us to remain calm, and to recognize the disease. When a person has a disease, you do not attack him, but neither do you worry about all that he is saying. (6)

In order to learn and develop the student must turn away from maladaptive behaviour patterns and live more in harmony with spiritual values and sensitivities. One of the ways to do this is through the practice of selfless service without expectation of gain or reward. A strong moral compass also supports real inner growth, but it must be based on conscious choice rather than mechanical performance of moral injunctions. Gurdjieff: "People are very fond of talking about morality. But morality is merely self-suggestion. *What is necessary is conscience. We do not teach morality. We teach how to find conscience.*"

In most religious and spiritual traditions ethical behaviour is seen as the foundation and support of all further methods and practices, and a precondition to self-realization. The effort

to observe precepts and moral codes also develops self-discipline and self-control and changes the way we relate to the world: "One's life situation is the consequence of one's own actions, arising from our thoughts, speech and emotions, whether we are aware of the meaning of good and bad or not. These actions echo within us and influence our personality. When our fundamental attitudes change, our circumstances likewise change."

The Buddha's precepts provide excellent guidelines: (1) not to kill but to cherish all life; (2) not to take what is not given but to respect the things of others; (3) not to engage in improper sexuality but to practice purity of mind and self-restraint; (4) not to lie but to speak the truth; (5) not to cause others to use liquors or drugs that confuse the mind, nor to do so oneself, but to keep the mind clear; (6) not to speak of the shortcomings of others but to be understanding and sympathetic; (7) not to praise oneself and condemn others but to overcome one's own shortcomings; (8) not to withhold spiritual or material aid but to give it freely where needed; (9) not to become angry but to exercise control. (7)

Effort and Discipline

In everyday life a certain amount of discipline is required, as a means to an end, to accomplish a goal, pass an exam or learn a skill. The discipline can be imposed externally or emerge from within as self-discipline. In a similar fashion, in order to progress on the spiritual journey, discipline must be exercised at certain stages of the path. Idries Shah: "Good discipline is a part of study, and exists for carrying out study: because it is the undisciplined, not the disciplined, who over-studies, and who amasses information which he cannot really digest in all its levels. Discipline also enables a person to focus on and off study, and to refrain from it when it is not indicated for the improvement of his higher states."

In the Tradition a person is required to follow the discipline of the Tradition, and by doing so, disciplining themselves and obeying the order of the teacher of the time. The whole concept of this discipline is a self-imposed one. After all, people come into the Tradition freely, stay in freely, and they can leave if they so wish. But while they are in, they obey the instructions or discipline and impose a discipline upon themselves . . . If a person is mentally and physically prepared to discipline themselves, then they can judge to what degree they can assimilate and use this discipline in a correct way. (8)

At a certain point, however, discipline must be transmuted into conscious attention and discernment without any sense of effort or compulsion. Jean Klein speaks to this point: "Even in the course of the technique known as 'letting-go,' a faint shadow of discipline is implied, for letting go of an object implies a certain discipline. Only an effortless and choiceless reaction is the hallmark of liberation."

Q: Would you please say something about discipline?

A: A disciplined mind is never a free mind and can never act spontaneously. A disciplined mind looks for results or for a profit. Do not confuse what we call "attention" with "discipline." Attention is open, it is not directed, it is multidimensional. It is not the discipline of "being attentive to" something as is so often proposed. You do not need discipline when you really love something. But you may need a certain rhythm. In the year we have the four seasons which appear according to a rhythm. All your cells, all the composition of your body, ask for rhythm. So discover the rhythm. (9)

Some teachings place great emphasis on the need for an inner struggle between two forces: an active, developmental impulse and a passive resisting power that does not want to change. This great metaphysical struggle is sometimes allegorized as the 'Dark Night of the Soul' in which the seeker confronts the "demons" which prevent real spiritual growth. It is the crucible of fire or struggle which burns away the lower self so that our true nature can shine. "The passage is strewn with thistles and brambles, and the climb is slippery in the extreme. It is no pastime but the most serious task in life; no idlers will ever dare attempt it. It is indeed a moral anvil on which your character is hammered and hammered. To the question, 'What is Zen?' a master gave this answer: 'Boiling oil over a blazing fire.' This scorching experience we have to go through with before Zen smiles on us and says, 'Here is your home'." Gurdjieff described this process in striking terms:

Fusion, inner unity, is obtained by means of 'friction,' by the struggle between 'yes' and 'no' in man. If a man lives without inner struggle, if everything happens in him without opposition, if he goes wherever he is drawn or wherever the wind blows, he will remain such as he is. But if a struggle begins in him, and particularly if there is a definite line in this struggle, then, gradually, permanent traits begin to form themselves, he begins to 'crystallize.' But crystallization is possible on a right foundation and it is possible on a wrong foundation. 'Friction,' the struggle between 'yes' and 'no,' can easily take place on a wrong foundation. For instance, a fanatical belief in some or other idea, or the 'fear of sin,' can evoke a terribly intense struggle between 'yes' and 'no,' and a man may crystallize on these foundations. But this would be a wrong, incomplete crystallization. Such a man will not possess the possibility of further development. In order to make further development possible he must be melted down again, and this can be accomplished only through terrible suffering. (10)

When viewed from a higher, more panoramic perspective the difficulties and challenges of life are seen as 'gifts' which act as 'polishing stones' to refine the human essence:

In a sense, our path is no path. The object is not to get somewhere. There is no great mystery, really; what we need to do is straightforward. I don't mean that it is easy; the "path" of practice is not a smooth road. It is littered with sharp

rocks that can make us stumble or that can cut right through our shoes. Life itself is hazardous . . . The path of life seems to be mostly difficulties, things that give trouble. Yet the longer we practice, the more we begin to understand that those sharp rocks on the road are in fact like precious jewels; they help us to prepare the proper conditions for our lives. The rocks are different for each person. The sharp rock might be working with a nasty person or living with somebody who is hard to get along with. The sharp rocks might be your children, your parents, anyone. Not feeling well could be your sharp rock. Losing your job could be it, or getting a new job and worrying about it. There are sharp rocks everywhere. What changes from years of practice is coming to know something you didn't know before: that there are no sharp rocks – the road is covered with diamonds. (11)

The pursuit of self-knowledge demands a certain intensity of effort, steady determination and persistence to overcome obstacles. In the words of Ramana Maharshi: “No one succeeds without effort. Self-realization is not one's birthright. The successful few owe their success to their perseverance.” In esoteric schools the greater the effort made on the part of the student, the greater the subsequent demands required by the teacher:

Every effort a man makes increases the demands made upon him. So long as a man has not made any serious efforts the demands made upon him are very small, but his efforts immediately increase the demands made upon him. And the greater the efforts that are made, the greater the new demands. At this stage people very often make a mistake that is constantly made. They think that the efforts they have previously made, their former merits, so to speak, give them some kind of rights or advantages, *diminish* the demands to be made upon them, and constitute as it were an excuse . . . Nothing that a man did yesterday excuses him today. Quite the reverse, if a man did nothing yesterday, no demands are made upon him today; if he did anything yesterday, it means that he must do more today. This certainly does not mean that it is better to do nothing. Whoever does nothing receives nothing. (12)

Gurdjieff coined the term “super-effort” to describe efforts on the part of the student that go far beyond what is normally required. “Vast efforts, tremendous labors, are needed to come into possession of the wings on which it is possible to rise. The way is hard, the ascent becomes increasingly steeper as it goes on, but one's strength also increases. A man becomes tempered and with each ascending step his view grows wider.” Gurdjieff provided an arresting example to illustrate this exceptional effort:

It means an effort beyond the effort that is necessary to achieve a given purpose. Imagine that I have been walking all day and am very tired. The weather is bad, it is raining and cold. In the evening I arrive home. I have walked, perhaps, twenty-five miles. In the house there is supper; it is warm and pleasant. But, instead of sitting down to supper, I go out into the rain again and decide to walk another two miles along the road and then return home. This would be a super-effort. While

I was going home it was simply an effort and this does not count. I was on my way home, the cold, hunger, the rain – all this made me walk. In the other case I walk because I myself decide to do so. This kind of super-effort becomes still more difficult when I do not decide upon it myself but obey a teacher who at an unexpected moment requires from me to make fresh efforts when I have decided that efforts for the day are over. (13)

The energy and effort expended in one's spiritual search can also be carried over and applied to everyday life:

A jewel of great price is never a giveaway. We must earn it, with steady, unrelenting practice. We must earn it in each moment, not just in the "spiritual side" of our life. How we keep our obligations to others, how we serve others, whether we make the effort of attention that is called for each moment of our life – all of this is paying the price for the jewel. I'm talking about earning the integrity and wholeness of our lives by every act we do, every word we say. From the ordinary point of view, the price we must pay is enormous – though seen clearly, it is no price at all, but a privilege. As our practice grows we comprehend this privilege more and more. (14)

Effort by itself is a form of raw energy. When dedicated to laudable goals it is a positive force, but when misdirected it can be counterproductive and even an agent of destruction. Too much effort, or effort applied at the wrong time, can actually delay spiritual development. The wife of the Indian saint Ramakrishna admonished his disciples for their excessive zeal, comparing them to mangoes on a tree which are picked before they are ripe: "Why hurry? Wait until you are fully ripe, mellow and sweet." Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj recommended a balance between effort and non-effort: "When effort is needed, effort will appear. When effortlessness becomes essential, it will assert itself. You need not push life about. Just flow with it and give yourself completely to the task of the present moment."

Striving for goals, achievement and end-gaining can ensnare the aspirant in the anticipation of future rewards while disregarding the reality of *now*. "There is nothing to attain, nothing to find. When you make the slightest effort you go away from the purity of the timeless reality."

Any form of exercise is bound to a goal, to a result. But this is an obstacle when there is no goal to be reached since what you are looking for is here now and has always been. When the mind is free from all desire to become, it is at peace and attention spontaneously shifts from the object to the ultimate "subject," a foretaste of your real Self. Be vigilant, clear-sighted, aware of your constant desire to be this or that and don't make any effort . . . In this letting go of all trying, time no longer exists, there is no more expectation. In the absence of name and form what room is there for fear and insecurity? When there is no projection there is the forefeeling of wholeness. (15)

Effort implies tension and striving as the seeker looks for a result, an accomplishment. It hides our natural state of pure seeing and being: "Just be aware that you *don't* see. Become more aware that you constantly react. Seeing requires no effort because your nature is seeing, is being stillness. The moment you're not looking for a result, not looking to criticize, to evaluate or conclude, just looking, then you can perceive this reacting and you're no longer an accomplice to it."

Q: If we want to learn the piano, we need to practice a lot before it becomes effortless. If effort applies to limited objects, why shouldn't it also apply to infinity?

A: The word "effort" implies intention, the will to achieve some end. But this end is a projection from the past, from memory, and so we miss being present to the moment at hand. It may be accurate to speak of "right attention" in the sense of unconditioned listening, but this attention is diametrically opposed to effort in that it is entirely free from direction, motivation and projection. In right attention our listening is unconditioned; there is no image of a person to impede global hearing. It is not limited to the ear; the whole body hears. It's entirely outside the subject-object relationship. (16)

Inner and Outer Support

Certain 'psychological postures' and behavioural changes, when properly carried out under the guidance of a teacher, prepare the ground for real learning and progress on the spiritual path. These postures include obedience, respect, trust, faith, sacrifice and voluntary suffering.

Spiritual progress requires both obedience and gratitude on the part of the student. "If you cannot be obedient to your teacher, you cannot effectively learn anything. Obedience is part of attention."

Q: Why should a spiritual master be treated with respect?

A: Not for him, but for ourselves. It is the posture of mind which accompanies the feeling of respect which attunes us to the reality and banishes self-satisfaction. Just as when people mourn the dead they are doing so because of themselves – the dead are unaffected by it – so, too, when people are too self-centered they cannot learn. They have to think of others as more important than themselves. However, a balanced attitude is necessary. People sometimes become too worshipping and think too much of their spiritual teacher. (17)

Unless the student trusts the teacher no real learning is possible. "The human being, whether he realises it or not, is trusting someone or something every moment of the day.

He trusts the floorboards not to collapse, the train not to crash, the surgeon not to kill him, and so on.”

Sufis, traditionally, dwell among those whom they teach, living good lives as people of probity, acting according to their words, fulfilling undertakings: until they have earned a sufficient degree of trust from those who come in contact with them. According to the nature of the individuals among whom their lot is cast, this time put in by the Sufis will vary. None of them complains if it is measured in decades – though the would-be learners may complain. The latter may lack patience when only this will overcome their suspiciousness. If the teacher does not dismiss them, they effectively dismiss themselves. One cannot learn from someone whom one distrusts. Yet plenty of people, again perhaps because of self-flattery, ‘follow’ those whom they do not entirely trust. To the Sufi, such people may be followers: they cannot, in that condition, be pupils. (18)

The apparent duality and dynamic tension between faith and doubt provides the energy to lead the seeker to the final goal of spiritual enlightenment:

Faith is needed because the experience of Zen is inconceivable to the ordinary mind and cannot even be imagined until it happens. Therefore faith in the natural possibility of enlightenment is necessary in order to take practical steps toward the unknown. Doubt is unavoidable because the inconceivable nature of Zen enlightenment necessarily keeps the seeker in a state of suspense, which is of indefinite duration and intensity. Without the first element of faith, this suspense is humanly unendurable; combined with faith, it enables the individual to question objectively the circumscribed habits of feeling and thought to which he or she tends to return again and again. According to Zen teaching, the inclination to become engrossed in subjective habits of thought and feeling is precisely what inhibits the human mind from realization of enlightenment. (19)

Trust and faith in the words of the teacher provide the foundation and support for spiritual development and realization of our true nature:

To begin with, trust me, trust the Teacher. It enables you to make the first step – and then your trust is justified by your own experience. In every walk of life initial trust is essential; without it little can be done. Every undertaking is an act of faith. Even your daily bread you eat on trust! By remembering what I told you you will achieve everything. I am telling you again. You are the all-pervading, all transcending reality. Behave accordingly: think, feel and act in harmony with the whole and the actual experience of what I say will dawn upon you in no time. No effort is needed. Have faith and act on it. Please see that I want nothing from you. It is in your own interest that I speak, because above all you love yourself, you want yourself secure and happy. Don't be ashamed of it, don't deny it. It is natural and good

to love oneself. Only you should know what exactly do you love. It is not the body that you love, it is Life – perceiving, feeling, thinking, doing, loving, striving, creating. It is that Life you love, and which is you, which is all. Realize it in its totality, beyond all divisions and limitations, and all your desires will emerge in it, for the greater contains the smaller. Therefore find yourself, for in finding that you find all. (20)

At certain critical points in the spiritual journey privations and sacrifices may be necessary for a period of time. Gurdjieff: "Sacrifice is necessary. If nothing is sacrificed nothing is gained. And it is necessary to sacrifice something precious at the moment, to sacrifice for a long time and to sacrifice a great deal. *But still, not forever.* Sacrifice is necessary only while the process of crystallization is going on." The attitude that accompanies sacrifice and renunciation is crucial and determines the success of the efforts:

When a man comes to the conclusion that he cannot, and does not desire, to live any longer in the way he has lived till then; when he really sees everything that his life is made up of and decides to work, he must be truthful with himself in order not to fall into a still worse position. Because there is nothing worse than to begin work on oneself and then leave it and find oneself between two stools; it is much better not to begin. And in order to not begin in vain or risk being deceived on one's own account a man should test his decision many times. And principally he must know how far he is willing to go, what he is willing to sacrifice. There is nothing more easy to say than *everything*. A man can never sacrifice everything and this can never be required of him. But he must define exactly what he is willing to sacrifice and not bargain about it afterwards. (21)

Deliberate, voluntary suffering is based on conscious choice and requires a certain psychological attitude to be effective. "What is important is your attitude towards it. It becomes deliberate if you don't rebel against it, if you don't try to avoid it, if you don't accuse anybody, if you accept it as a necessary part of your work at the moment and as a means for attaining your aim." Gurdjieff employed a memorable analogy to compare conscious and unconscious suffering:

Q: What is the role of suffering in self-development?

A: There are two kinds of suffering – conscious and unconscious. Only a fool suffers unconsciously. In life there are two rivers, two directions. In the first, the law is for the river itself, not for the drops of water. We are drops. At one moment a drop is at the surface, at another moment at the bottom. Suffering depends on its position. In the first river, suffering is completely useless because it is accidental and unconscious. Parallel with this river is another river. In this other river there is a different kind of suffering. The drop in the first river has the possibility of passing into the second. Today the drop suffers because yesterday it did not suffer enough. Here the law of retribution operates. The drop can also suffer in advance. Sooner or later everything is paid for. For the Cosmos there is no time. Suffering

can be voluntary and only voluntary suffering has value. One may suffer simply because one feels unhappy. Or one may suffer for yesterday and to prepare for tomorrow. I repeat, only voluntary suffering has value. (22)

Advaita Vedanta teacher Jean Klein describes how suffering played an important role in his own spiritual journey:

Q: Did suffering play any part in propelling you into the path?

A: It depends how you understand suffering. Suffering as an idea, a concept, can never bring you to the knowing of yourself. But the direct perception of suffering is, like all objects, a pointer to your Self. What was important for me were those moments when I faced myself and found a lack of fulfillment; this produced the dynamism to explore more deeply. In a certain way when you really feel this lack without conceptualizing it, it is great suffering – but it is not the kind of suffering caused by a robbery, losing a job, a broken marriage, death, and so on. Of course these difficulties lift you out of a kind of complacency, a habitual way of living. They wake you up to interrogate, to inquire, to explore, to question suffering itself. Real surrender is letting go of all ideas and allowing the perception, in this case suffering, to come to you in your openness. You will see that it does not “go away,” as is the case with psychological acceptance – where the energy fixed on suffering is merely shifted to another area – but it comes to blossom within your full attention. You will feel it as a free energy, energy that was previously crystallized. (23)

Renunciation and Transformation

One of the dangers in traversing the spiritual path is when the student develops in an unbalanced, lopsided way and is unable to integrate experiences of a higher order into their normal personality. One example is the state of ecstasy or rapture where a person feels at one with creation or the Creator. “What is considered by the individual to be a blessing is in fact a flooding-out of potentiality. When experienced by those who have not carried out their development in a balanced way it may give rise to a conviction that it is a true mystical state, especially when it is found that supranormal faculties seem to be activated in that condition.”

In fact, ecstatic experiences are only a stage in spiritual development. The seeker, lost in awe and wonderment, is halted at this point and prevented from going forward to the realization that lies beyond. The seeking of such experiences is considered a ‘veil’ preventing further growth and development:

The disciple does not yet see the mine within the mountain. He may experience what he thinks are spiritual states, ‘illumination,’ all kinds of thoughts, feelings, experiences. These, however, are illusory. What is happening is the ‘wearing out’

of the spurious imagination. The spiritual cannot act effectively on the non-spiritual. As Saadi puts it, "If dust ascends to the skies, it is not made more precious." Such states often occur in people who, lacking proper guidance, believe that they are having spiritual experiences. These illusions can happen even to people who are not in discipleship, and they account for many of the reports of supposedly 'higher' experiences from those who have no specialised knowledge of these matters, and who are still 'raw.' (24)

A similar situation can arise when aspirants attempt to activate certain interior 'centers' or 'organs' of perception through experimental methods or out-of-sequence spiritual exercises. In some traditions such as Hinduism these 'points of concentration' are called *chakras* while in Sufism they are referred to as the *latifa*:

The illumination or activation of one or more of the centers may take place partially or accidentally. When this happens, the individual may gain for a time a deepening in intuitive knowledge corresponding with the *latifa* involved. But if this is not a part of comprehensive development, the mind will try, vainly, to equilibrate itself around this hypertrophy, an impossible task. The consequences can be very dangerous, and include, like all one-sided mental phenomena, exaggerated ideas of self-importance, the surfacing of undesirable qualities, or a deterioration of consciousness following an access of ability. The same is true of breathing exercises or dance movements carried out of correct succession. The nonbalanced development produces people who may have the illusion that they are seers or sages. Due to the inherent power of the *latifa*, such an individual may appear to the world at large to be worthy of following. In Sufi diagnosis, this type of personality accounts for a great number of false metaphysical teachers. They may, of course, themselves be convinced that they are genuine. This is because the habit of self-deception or of deceiving others has not been transmuted. Rather it has been supported and magnified by the awakening but still undirected new organ, the *latifa*. (25)

Real spiritual growth is only possible for a seeker when certain undesirable characteristics are abandoned and other qualities of a more developmental nature are nurtured. "Detach yourself from all that makes your mind restless. Renounce all that disturbs its peace. Emotional reactions born of ignorance or inadvertence are never justified. Seek a clear mind and a clear heart. All you need is to keep quietly alert, enquiring into the real nature of yourself."

Many spiritual traditions assert that the path to transcendental realization is one of negation and emptying – a vanishing of the ego rather than a pursuit of affirmation and attainment. "The finite is the price of the infinite, as death is the price of immortality. Spiritual maturity lies in the readiness to let go of everything. The giving up is the first step. But the real giving up is in realizing that there is nothing to give up, for nothing is your own."

Identification with our body, mind and emotions binds us and creates a state of dependency on the external impacts of life. There can be no true freedom until we recognize the illusory

world which we have created and in which we live. "The understanding that the ego has no reality in itself springs directly from our true being. It does not result from any effort but is spontaneous, neither discursive nor mental. It brings about total presence, wholeness, where fear has no place."

We live in fear of suffering. This suffering must first be fully felt and it can only be felt when it is accepted; accepted as a fact, objectively not fatalistically. This scientific acceptance can only take place when there is no psychological relationship with the fear, when it is seen from the impersonal standpoint. When we don't conceptualize fear it leaves us, for we no longer nourish it. It is condemned to die when seen in clear-sighted presence. (26)

When we become aware of the workings of the ego through intelligent observation it imperceptibly withers away. Spiritual transformation is a shift away from our self-protective view of life to a new way of being in the world – open, non-attached and fearless. "This means being as aware as we can in every moment, so that our 'personality' begins to break down and we can respond more and more simply to the moment."

In traditional teachings repentance involves confronting one's own shortcomings and psychological blocks, including fixation upon oneself. There can be a danger, however, when the ego hijacks the process, subtly reinforcing its own existence:

Repentance means turning back or giving up completely something that was of powerful attraction. Pleasure gained through repentance is in most cases as bad as the original offence, and no permanent improvement can be expected by those who pride themselves in reformation. The repentance of the ignorant is when people feel strong reactions to giving something up, or seeking forgiveness from something. There is a higher form, the repentance of the Wise, which leads to greater knowledge and love. (27)

Renunciation of the false is the door to liberation and self-realization. Ramana Maharshi: "All that is needed is to lose the ego and realize that which is always eternally present. Even now you are That. You are not apart from it. *Be yourself* and nothing more."

Q: Is renunciation necessary for Self-realization?

A: Renunciation and realization are the same. They are different aspects of the same state. Giving up the non-self is renunciation. Inhering in the Self is *jnana* or Self-realization. One is the negative and the other the positive aspect of the same single truth . . . Our real nature is timeless, effortless and ever present. There is no realization to be achieved. The real is ever as it is. What we have done is, we have identified with the unreal. We have to give up that. That is all that is wanted. (28)

Turning away from the false, from desires and fears, releases an energy that purifies and ennobles the essential being. “Merely giving up a thing to secure a better one is not true relinquishment. Give it up because you see its valuelessness. As you keep on giving up, you will find that you grow spontaneously in intelligence and power and inexhaustible love and joy.”

The purpose of inner purification is to unite the human essence with its source – the reality of timeless Being or Self. “When the psyche is raw, undeveloped, quite primitive, it is subject to gross illusions. As it grows in breadth and sensitivity, it becomes a perfect link between pure matter and pure spirit and gives meaning to matter and expression to spirit.”

Q: If it is the inner that is ultimately responsible for one’s spiritual development, why is the outer so much emphasized?

A: The outer can help by being restrained and free from desire and fear. You would have noticed that all advice to the outer is in the form of negations: don’t, stop, refrain, forego, give up, sacrifice, surrender, see the false as false. Even the little description of reality that is given is through denials – ‘not this, not this,’ (*neti, neti*). All positives belong to the inner self, as all absolutes – to Reality.

Q: How are we to distinguish the inner from the outer in actual experience?

A: The inner is the source of inspiration, the outer is moved by memory. The source is untraceable, while all memory begins somewhere. Thus the outer is always determined, while the inner cannot be held in words. The mistake of students consists in their imagining the inner to be something to get hold of, and forgetting that all perceivables are transient and, therefore, unreal. Only that which makes perception possible, call it life or Spirit, or what you like, is real. (29)

Certain psychological attitudes and behaviours, such as honesty and humility, are conducive to spiritual growth. Real honesty is a manifestation of an inner maturity rather than an externally induced compulsion. “The really sincere act is the one which is known by no recording angel, by no demon to afflict it, nor by the self to become prideful of it.” Humility is one of the keys to spiritual understanding and awakening. “Humility is the acceptance of the truth about the truth, from the truth.”

Q: Would you talk more about humility in human relations?

A: Humility is not something you wear like a garment. It has nothing to do with bowed heads and averted eyes! It comes from the re-absorption of individuality in being, in stillness. In attention, alertness, there is humility. It is receptivity, openness, to all that life brings. Where there is no psychological memory, no accumulation of knowledge, there is innocence. Innocence is humility . . . Humility arises when there is no reference to an ‘I.’ This emptiness is the healing factor in

any situation. Heidegger says, 'Be open to the openness.' In this openness the situation offers its own solution, and in openness we receive it. (30)

Humility is not so much a virtue as a necessity or 'technical requirement' for spiritual growth. True humility is concerned with the quest for Absolute Truth. "One of the real reasons for the attempted inculcation of a really 'humble' attitude towards life and learning in traditional teaching techniques is to try to enable people to adopt a point of view which will allow them to approach things as they are and not as they are imagined." The distortion of humility is false self-abasement. On the other side of the coin, people who take pride in their humility are hypocrites. Pride destroys all possibility of spiritual awakening.

Humility is a "cloak" which protects one from the subjective judgments and superficial assessments of others:

Like Zen, Taoism lays particular emphasis on not being glad when praised or upset when reviled. In both teachings, ultimate truth is not a question of human feelings, and the seeker of ultimate truth therefore cannot afford to have attention diverted by emotional assessments from another realm of concern. It is related that once when Jesus prayed for people who had reviled him, someone asked him why he had returned kindness for cruelty. Jesus replied, "I could only spend of what I had in my pocket." Similarly, it is said that when the prophet Mohammed was victimized by aggressors, and someone asked him why he did not curse his oppressors, he replied that it was not his mission to curse. (31)

Recognition of the spiritual laws governing earthly existence leads to a panoramic awareness which encompasses past, present and future:

Gurdjieff often spoke about the need to repair the past – not to dwell on it and indulge in useless self-reproach, but to feel remorse of conscience . . . He said to a pupil: 'Past joys are useless to a man in the present; they are as last year's snows, which leave no trace by which they can be remembered. Only the imprints of conscious labour and voluntary suffering are real, and can be used in the future for obtaining good,' On another occasion he said: 'What a man sows, he reaps. The future is determined by the actions of the present. The present, be it good or bad, is the result of the past. It is the duty of man to prepare for the future at every moment of the present, and to right what has been done wrong. This is the law of destiny. (32)

In order to energize the work of transforming our lower conditioned self and realizing our higher spiritual nature, Gurdjieff admonished his pupils to always remember their own mortality and the inevitability of the death of all living beings:

You should try to realize your own significance and the significance of those around you. You are mortal, and some day will die. He on whom your attention rests is

your neighbour; he will also die . . . If you acquire data always to realize the inevitability of their death and your own death, you will have a feeling of pity for others, and be just towards them, since their manifestations which displease you are only because you or someone has stepped on their corns, or because your own corns are sensitive. At present you cannot see this. Try to put yourself in the position of others – they have the same significance as you; they suffer as you do, and, like you, they will die. Only if you always try to sense this significance until it becomes a habit whenever your attention rests on anyone, only then will you have a real “I.” Every man has wants and desires which are dear to him, and which he will lose at death. From realizing the significance of your neighbour when your attention rests on him, that he will die, pity for him and compassion towards him will arise in you, and finally you will love him; also, by doing this constantly, real faith, conscious faith, will arise in some part of you and spread to other parts, and you will have the possibility of knowing real happiness, because from this faith objective hope will arise – hope as a basis for continuation. (33)

Acceptance and Surrender

Buddhist teachings stress the impermanent and transitory nature of all phenomena. Non-acceptance of this fact leads to suffering: we want life to be other than what it is. Open acceptance of life as it unfolds is diametrically opposed to our normal desire to control and shape events and situations. “Stay without ambition, without the least desire, exposed, vulnerable, unprotected, uncertain and alone, completely open to and welcoming life as it happens, without the selfish conviction that all must yield you pleasure or profit, either material or so-called spiritual.”

Without accepting the fact that everything changes, we cannot find perfect composure. But unfortunately, although it is true, it is difficult for us to accept it. Because we cannot accept the truth of transiency, we suffer. So the cause of suffering is our own non-acceptance of this truth. We should find perfect existence through imperfect existence. We should find perfection in imperfection. For us, complete perfection is not different from imperfection. The eternal exists because of non-eternal existence . . . We should find the truth in this world, through our difficulties, through our suffering. This is the basic teaching of Buddhism. Pleasure is not different from difficulty. Good is not different from bad. Bad is good; good is bad. They are two sides of one coin. (34)

Suffering and unhappiness arise when we oppose life in a futile effort to protect ourselves and maintain the illusion of a separate self or “I.” In reality, complete openness and vulnerability to life is the only truly satisfactory way of living. “Whatever natural experiences you encounter, just accept them as they come. Just *be* with them. Don’t try to alter anything.”

With an attitude of acceptance desires and fears come and go, and when they are allowed to naturally pass away they cease to have a grip on the mind. "Dispassion, detachment, freedom from desire and fear, from all self-concern, mere awareness – free from memory and expectation – this is the state of mind to which discovery can happen. After all, liberation is but the freedom to discover."

Genuine acceptance is free from any psychological need, preference or judgement. In the words of Jean Klein: "Seeing all the facts calls for acceptance. When there is no longer any psychological involvement there are no opposing factors and therefore no choices of some facts, some elements over others. Acceptance does not come from the body-mind, it comes from our wholeness. Once all the elements of the situation are welcomed in our acceptance free from qualifying, the situation itself calls for action, but we do not go to it already armed."

Q: In acceptance is there any notion of good or bad?

A: Good or bad are projections from pre-conceived ideas, from memory. Stop projecting your desires and fears onto the seen. Take things as they are. You must accept something in order to really know it. In accepting, the accent is not on what you accept but on the accepting position itself. You will come to find you are one with accepting. The acceptor is not an object. It is an inner reality. Acceptance gives freedom to whatever is accepted. What you accept really becomes alive and has its own story to tell you.

Q: But in life it's necessary to make decisions. How can we do this if we don't discriminate?

A: You can really only make decisions when you accept the situation. In acceptance the situation belongs to your wholeness, your completeness, and the decision comes out of this global perspective. There's nothing passive about this accepting. It is ultimate alertness. And the decision that results is an action, not a reaction. The moment you live in openness and let every situation come to you, you flow with the real current of life. (35)

An attitude of welcoming and accepting enables the false limited sense of who we are – body, mind, feelings and sensations – to drop away, revealing our true timeless nature:

Leave the body and mind free to be what they are and you will no longer be their slave. They are only fragments of the whole which you are. Simply take note of your imperfections and this awareness will take care of them. Once you understand that you are not the body and the mind, you can then accept whatever happens. Understanding your fundamental autonomy brings you to an attitude of total acceptance. Every single thing is seen in the light of this welcoming, appears and disappears within it. As a result, things attain their full significance and harmony re-establishes itself. This welcoming is an alert awareness, uninhabited by

the past. It allows whatever presents itself to unfold in and point to the welcoming, without being limited by the ego or deformed by memory. In this Oneness we discover our nature: ultimate joy and perfection. (36)

Accepting life unconditionally is pragmatic and functional. True acceptance is free from volition and the interference of the ego or "me," allowing one to be completely alert, aware and clear to face the situation or circumstance. "Accepting is a state of openness. Be completely open to whatever happens to you. That is non-volitional living. There is a very deep wisdom in not grasping, not asking, only waiting."

By relaxing and letting go, we create an open, welcoming space which is perfectly adequate to meeting whatever comes into our lives. Lao Tzu describes this state of being as "to do nothing, yet to leave nothing undone." In accepting and welcoming there is no arguing with reality, with *what is*.

With the dawn of spiritual understanding we flow with the energy and mystery of life, warmly embracing the present moment with all its glory and infinite possibilities. In this state of unconditional acceptance, past and future no longer exist and we are completely present to the reality of *now*. Zen master Shunryu Suzuki: "Our 'original mind' includes everything within itself. It is always rich and sufficient within itself. Our self-sufficient state of mind is an empty mind and a ready mind. If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's there are few."

Spiritual realization gives a completely new perspective on the workings of reality and produces a shift in our attitude to the events of everyday life: In the words of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: "You need not be anxious: 'What next?' There is always the next. Life does not begin nor end. Light cannot be exhausted even if innumerable pictures are projected by it. So does life fill every shape to the brim and return to its source, when the shape breaks down."

Things just happen; the roll of destiny unfolds itself and actualizes the inevitable. You cannot change the course of events, but you can change your attitude and what really matters is the attitude and not the bare event. The world is the abode of desires and fears. You cannot find peace in it. For peace you must go beyond the world. We seek pleasure and avoid pain. Replace self-love by love of the Self and the picture changes. *Brahma* the Creator is the sum total of all desires. The world is the instrument for their fulfilment. Souls take whatever pleasures they desire and pay for them in tears. Time squares all accounts. The law of balance reigns supreme. (37)

In many traditional spiritual teachings the word "surrender" is synonymous with acceptance. Ramana Maharshi described surrender as giving oneself up to the original source of one's being which lies within oneself rather than outside. He also characterized surrender as submission to a Higher Power: "By whatever path you go, you will have to lose yourself in the One. Surrender

is complete only when you reach the stage 'Thou art all' and 'Thy will be done'. With complete surrender you have no desire of your own. God's desire alone is your desire."

If you surrender yourself to the Higher Power all is well. That Power sees your affairs through. Only so long as you think that you are the worker you are obliged to reap the fruits of your actions. If on the other hand, you surrender yourself and recognize your individual self as only a tool of the Higher Power, that Power will take over your affairs along with the fruits of actions. You are no longer affected by them and the work goes on unhampered. Whether you recognize the Power or not the scheme of things does not alter. Only there is a change of outlook. Why should you bear your load on the head when you are travelling in a train? It carries you and your load whether the load is on your head or on the floor of the train. You are not lessening the burden of the train by keeping it on your head but only straining yourself unnecessarily. Similar is the sense of doership in the world by the individuals. (38)

When we surrender and open to the immediate experience of life as it actually is, we taste real freedom and sense the perfume of our real nature. "Surrender is not a passive state. It is both passive and active, passive in the sense of letting go as with Meister Eckhart's 'Poor Man,' and active in that it is a constant alertness."

Surrender calls for a true recognition of the facts, facing them squarely. You must accept and welcome them in a scientific way without reaction and judgement. Acceptance is not a sacrifice nor a process of will. In the openness that is inherent in our nature there is no one who accepts. Acceptance or surrender is thus passive in its absence of a director, and active in that one remains supremely awake and alert, ready for what presents itself. This silence is simply waiting without the anxiety of waiting and in this openness the highest intelligence operates. (39)

Liberation and Awakening

In the awakened state we live in harmony with the rhythm and pulse of life, able to respond skilfully and effectively to any situation or circumstance. "Perfection means not perfect action in a perfect world, but appropriate action in an imperfect one."

Our true nature is pure, clear, and free. All kinds of things come up in our lives – hardships, pain, illness – but if we know our true nature, if we experience the bottom of our being, the ultimate ground of our being, none of these things can knock us over. Of course we die, but there is a certainty in the midst of birth and death that we are living in the Great Time of eternity. There is no end to this. No matter that this body falls off, passes away; the joyful essence of life goes on. (40)

With the dawn of enlightenment, fear and anxiety are replaced by serenity and inner joy. We realize that we are whole and complete just as we are: "You are generally not conscious of the fact that you are immensely rich. The inner self is filled with everything you need; there is nothing else to seek."

Charity, kindness and sympathy emanate from the heart of a realized being. In the words of Saadi: "The Path is none other than service of the people." Compassionate human actions bear fruit only when performed selflessly; there should be no sense of "I am the doer," "I am helping others."

Real service is sensitive to the needs of the people involved, the situation and circumstance, and the larger context of humanity's spiritual evolution. It is the natural reflection of the awakened state: "The solemn truth is that you can't begin to help anybody until you yourself have become whole through the experience of Self-realization. When you have seen into the nature of your True-self and the universe, your words will carry conviction and people will listen to you."

Wisdom and compassion develop and express themselves simultaneously. The fully mature spiritual life is characterized by a warm, open heart and a flexible, adaptive mind. Zen teacher Maurine Stuart: "Become the noble soul, and live in this awakened way, not imitating anyone. Whatever the circumstances of your life asks of you, respond to them in your own individual Zen-inspired way. Don't cling to yesterday, to what happened, to what didn't happen. And do not judge today by yesterday. Let us just live today to the fullest!"

Self-realization also unlocks the vast storehouse of creativity that lies dormant in every human being. "In this openness you find yourself adequate to every situation. There is no choice in this position, and you can understand *what is* spontaneously. The solution comes to you like an intuition, an apperception. When you are open, free from the past, creativity comes to you. It takes time to realize it in time and space, but the insight of this creativity is constantly present as a background."

Following Self-realization there is a return to the world of everyday life to help others on the road to enlightenment:

As Buddhists, we have two directions toward which we are reaching: one is the attainment of enlightenment, the other is to render service to others. Attainment of enlightenment is the attainment of wisdom, *prajna*; to render service to others is to complete our love, *karuna*. Wisdom and love together is our aim. But wisdom is the Buddhist's faith, the foundation, and love is our aim. We educate ourselves to attain enlightenment; only then can we bring happiness to the world, to our home, and to ourselves. There can be no peace in the world, no happiness in the family, no quietude in one's self if one fails to attain one's own enlightenment . . . Buddhism teaches us to realize both these aims. Enlightenment and rendering service to others is a twofold teaching. (41)

Self-realization is the direct experience of our true nature of stillness, peace and pure awareness. It is ever-present and always available. The only barrier is our false identification of the Self with the not-Self – body, mind, feelings and sensations. When the not-Self disappears, the Self alone remains. Ramana Maharshi: “Realization is ever present, here and now. The Self is always as it is. There is no such thing as attaining it. Realization is permanent and is here and now.”

Q: How shall I reach the Self?

A: There is no reaching the Self. If the Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not here and now but has yet to be obtained. What is got afresh will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say the Self is not reached. You are the Self; you are already That. Therefore Realization is for everyone. Realization makes no difference between aspirants. This very doubt whether you can realize and the notion “I have not realized” are themselves the obstacles. Be free from these obstacles also. (42)

Liberation from the ego-centered self is a movement away from the known to the unknown. When the mind is purified of its past conditioning it naturally reflects its true nature of pure awareness and being. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: “You are universal. You need not and cannot become what you are already. Only cease imagining yourself to be the particular. What comes and goes has no being. It owes its very appearance to reality. Realize that you are the eternal source and accept all as your own. Such acceptance is true love.”

Q: The experience of reality, when it comes, does it last?

A: All experience is necessarily transient. But the ground of all experience is immovable. Nothing that may be called an event will last. But some events purify the mind and some stain it. Moments of deep insight and all-embracing love purify the mind, while desires and fears, envies and anger, blind beliefs and intellectual arrogance pollute and dull the psyche.

Q: Is self-realization so important?

A: Without it you will be consumed by desires and fears, repeating themselves meaninglessly in endless suffering. Most people do not know that there can be an end to pain. But once they have heard the good news, obviously going beyond all strife and struggle is the most urgent task that can be. You know that you can be free and now it is up to you. Either you remain forever hungry and thirsty, longing, searching, grabbing, holding, forever losing and sorrowing, or you go out wholeheartedly in search of the state of timeless perfection to which nothing can be added, from which nothing – taken away. In it all desires and fears are absent, not because they were given up, but because they have lost their meaning . . . There is nothing to do. Just *be*. Do nothing. *Be*. (43)

Our very nature is peace and happiness. "Whenever love and kindness are in your heart, you will have the intelligence to know what to do and when and how to act. When the mind sees its limitations, a humility and innocence arise which are not a matter of cultivation, accumulation or learning, but the result of instantaneous understanding. It is this reality that transforms your mind, and not effort or decision."

What you fundamentally are is always here, always complete. It needs no purification. It never changes. For the Self there is no darkness. You cannot discover or become truth for you are it. There is nothing to do to bring it closer, nothing to be learned. See only that you are constantly trying to go away from what you are. Stop wasting time and energy in projecting. Live this stopping, not lazily and passively, but live in the alertness that that is found in the stopping of expectation and anticipation. There is no room for improvement in reality. It is perfection itself. How could you possibly get nearer to it? (44)

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