

SEEKER AFTER TRUTH

*'Like attracts like'
Saying*

Attraction to Cults

One of the greatest difficulties for most spiritual aspirants is distinguishing between real and spurious spiritual teachers and teachings. According to the Sufi master Rumi: *'Counterfeit gold exists because there is such a thing as real gold.'* Almost by definition the seeker is unable to discriminate and evaluate the comparative worth of the various spiritual paths and teachers available in the world today. "What is rather remarkable is that a great many of these self-styled teachers are discernibly not teachers, if studied with the normal rational apparatus which is of some value even to seekers after truth."

Many seekers of higher knowledge and wisdom are attracted to religious and metaphysical teachings which in reality are deteriorated traditions lacking inner developmental value. These systems are stabilized on lower level social and psychological needs and only give lip service to real spiritual growth and understanding. The seeker must also learn to clearly distinguish the difference between outer form and appearance (sometimes called traditionalism) and the living reality of a legitimate, contemporary spiritual teaching suited to the times. "Traditionalism is doing something because others have done it, whether we understand it or not, whether it applies in a given culture, time-scale, etc., or not. It may simply be dogmatism."

Seekers who lack sincerity and insight are often drawn to cults and pseudo-teachers. The psychological condition of many people propels them to seek out cults rather than legitimate spiritual teachings, since the cults readily provide the social acceptance and stabilization which they often unconsciously crave. "People will tend to take from a teaching what they fancy they want. This is generally release from worry, decrease of perplexity, hero-worship, certitude, emotional indulgence and so forth."

It is also important to recognize that there is a crucial distinction between what people *want* and what they actually *need* for their spiritual development. For the two to coincide, there must be a certain degree of honesty, self-knowledge and insight. Cults, when attracting and recruiting followers, almost always ignore this important difference.

Most cults have defining characteristics which actually prevent learning and progress in the spiritual domain, and tend to "attract the unbalanced or unbalance those prone to such directions." The would-be student of higher knowledge must recognize that many 'spiritual' organizations are conscious or unconscious conditioning instruments. "It is as if a trap was laid for the ignoble element in you when a person, a book, a ceremony, a method appears directly or by recommendation, to have something which is applicable to all, or attracts you strongly though incorrectly."

Religious and spiritual teachings inevitably deteriorate over the course of time and to be effective must be revitalized through a process of supersession, from the original living source. The typical spiritual seeker is almost always unaware of this fact and tends to follow a teaching which may no longer be applicable to the contemporary time and current circumstances.

Searching for Emotional Stimulus and Excitement

In almost all aspects of life, including spiritual studies, people will seek things which attract them, rather than that which will suit them and aid their inner development. Some individuals are attracted to the sheer excitement, novelty or even unfamiliarity of a teaching. The term 'spiritual tourism' has been coined to describe the superficial search for entertainment, emotional stimulation and social satisfaction rather than real spirituality.

Systems of higher knowledge can be employed for purposes of either recreational amusement or genuine learning. In the 'enjoyment stage' of learning people are essentially entertaining themselves by consuming intellectual and emotional stimuli or engaging in lower-level amusements and satisfactions. The would-be student needs to distinguish between entertainment and real instruction. "The seeker may become a consumer of emotional stimuli, while concurrently imagining that one is experiencing deep spirituality."

The seeking of emotional experiences and alluring new ideas actually attenuates the process of learning in the spiritual sphere. Some seekers crave wonders and miracles and the acquisition of 'mystical' experiences. Fascination and interest in such things represents a form of emotional craving and sensationalism rather than the perception of spiritual truth.

One of the obstacles to higher human development is the desire for 'secrets' or 'mystery' on the part of the seeker. "People seeking knowledge often assume that there is some secret that can be confided to them, something that they can acquire, as one takes possession of a material object."

People who are seen to be strongly influenced by the idea of secrecy, and stimulated by it, thus automatically reveal themselves as curiosity-mongers. To clamour for 'secrets' or to do the equivalent (to want them unknowingly) is a characteristic of man, strongly marked in almost all undertakings and stages of maturity, by no means confined to esoteric areas. If you narrow your conception of secrecy to a crude definition of something which is being kept from you, for instance, you do no more than show that you are unlikely to be flexible and sensitive enough to understand the 'secret' aspects of refined and subtle things. Many 'secrets' are best kept by the denial of any secret, or by people appearing to be people of simplicity and ordinariness. (1)

Individuals who approach a spiritual teaching in a highly charged, emotional state are usually unable to benefit from such a contact. People tend to respond to things which have immediate appeal or which touch them emotionally, often disregarding more subtle impacts. "What a sorry state such people are in when some sort of dramatic event spells activity and significance, and where the absence of a crude stimulus spells discontent or means that 'nothing is happening'."

One of the chief barriers preventing would-be seekers from harmonizing with a legitimate source of spiritual teaching is the over-development and over-use of imagination. In the words of Rumi: *'Imagination blocks you like a bolt in a door. Burn that bar.'* People who claim that they have had 'indescribable' or 'rarefied' feelings and experiences are unlikely to profit from serious spiritual study:

The worst are those with vague, sporadic, incomplete connections with an 'invisible world.' In fact, such feelings are mere distortions or the stirring of a potentiality, which their own subjectivity endows with fantastic, distorted entities and meanings, and often attempts to systematize. And the worst of these seek similar equally distorted individuals or examples of literature, and 'prove' their experiences by reference to these. They suffer from concealed arrogance.
(2)

People who feel something strongly may be feeling it in an erroneous and unconstructive manner. Such individuals are in reality sensation-seekers who easily become indoctrinated, obsessive or 'true believers.' Individuals who are powerfully attracted to a teaching and who are single-minded in their pursuit of higher knowledge may actually harm their development due to wrong motivations and the operation of conditioning factors:

Inevitable pitfalls in human learning are two: 'conversion syndrome,' when people believe anything said by an individual or institution; and obsessional opposition, when they believe nothing. These are the two factors, though they may be combined in one person in varying proportions. The task of the real higher teaching is to contact people and inform them quite aside from the question of faith or unfaith. Both factors are aspects of brain-engineering, and have no place in real teaching. (3)

Following a spiritual teacher through curiosity or hero worship can lead to the 'cult of the personality' whereby the subjective impact of the person obscures the meaning and reality which the teacher truly represents. Students who are overly impressed by the personality of the teacher are poor candidates for the assimilation of higher knowledge until they learn to handle the impact and make use of it. And, those who respond to authority figures or only to the famous and respected are unable to make contact with, and learn from, many genuine wise people: "Spiritual teachers who lead ordinary lives, or who lack the trappings, are invisible to the greedy or anxious."

Western seekers who journey to the East in search of knowledge and wisdom are often unaware that they may be merely looking for sensation, mystery and emotional stimulation. "More people go to the East and find nothing than ever realize any heart's desire, because they do not know how to structure their enterprise." Seeking spiritual teachings in the East is based on a number of unexamined assumptions concerning the way such teachings are projected in the world:

The Western would-be disciple, having read various books, reasons fallaciously, somewhat in this manner: 'This teaching originates in the East. In the East there are people who know about it. Therefore I shall go to the East and find a master who will be able to teach me more about it.' This is fallacious because it would be true only if the Eastern mystical masters were so inefficient that, wanting to project their teachings in the West, they were incapable of setting up Western centers, especially adjusted to Western ways, for the establishment and progress of their work. All recognized Sufi masters in the East who were consulted by me are agreed that anyone who imagines that he must go to the East and find something in this manner is looking for romance and colour, mystery and so on – or else he is so primitive in his basic thinking that Sufism would be most unlikely to be able to help him in any case. (4)

Self-Deception and Preoccupation

One of the great dangers of a random undirected spiritual search is to focus energy and attention on the personal self, essentially a form of self-absorption and self-preoccupation. There is a saying: '*Vanity stands in the way of intelligence.*'

Self-indulgence is often confused with following a spiritual discipline, as when a person adopts a particular technique, such as self-observation, but uses it in a fragmentary, partial manner. What this approach does not credit is that if one is concentrating merely on oneself, it matters little whether one finds the self fascinating, disgusting, or even "objective." The point is that *all attention is directed at the self*, and nothing is left for a more comprehensive awareness. This kind of thinking stems from a simple confusion: self-indulgence is not mysticism. In any real attempt at conscious development, attention needs to be directed *away from the self*, from the psychotherapeutic "growth" or emotional levels, and away from piecemeal mystical techniques as well, in order that a person may encounter aspects of his surroundings *other* than the ordinary self. In an un-degenerated esoteric tradition, the ordinary self is not to be continuously massaged, pandered to, affirmed, or even "observed," but merely set aside as an unreliable judge of events outside its province. (5)

In far too many instances, individuals begin a spiritual quest by only thinking of themselves and ignoring the effect of such an enterprise on others. A balance must be achieved between desiring things for oneself and wanting others to benefit as well. Many would-be students are only concerned with their own development, which is essentially an expression of vanity and self-absorption. A saying by the Sufi Jami illustrates this problem: *'Seekers are plenty: but they are almost all seekers of personal advantage. I can find so very few Seekers after Truth.'*

Although many seekers appear sincere in their search for spiritual truth, in reality they are motivated by egoism and a desire for personal satisfaction. In many cases the pursuit of spiritual knowledge only serves to support vanity, pride and a sense of personal significance. "When someone's self-esteem is linked to their 'spiritual search,' they can achieve very little until they have seen that this is a wrong connection. They more often imagine that they are humble: but this humility is quite often easily exposed as an unwitting cloak for a sense of personal importance."

Seekers often have an inflated opinion about their own level of knowledge and degree of perceptiveness concerning spiritual matters. There is a tendency for learners to over-value their role, knowledge and potentiality: "Metaphysically minded people, and especially those who feel that they are comfortable in the domain of mysticism or 'inner perception,' have no greater start on the generality of humanity. Their subjectivity, especially where it is linked with a strong sense of personal uniqueness 'caught' from other people, can in fact be a serious disability."

It is important to understand one's personal motivation in searching for spiritual knowledge and to be able to recognize that previous approaches, expectations and thinking patterns are inadequate for the current task. It is only by observation and honest examination that the debilitating effects of vanity and self-absorption can be identified and overcome. Regarding self-deception: "The only corrective is to be prepared to face one's own self-deception, even if it has existed for thirty years under the name of 'interest in higher knowledge'."

One of the consequences of self-deception in the spiritual and metaphysical domain is that individuals may start to set up study groups, advise other people, or even try to teach others without the requisite spiritual understanding and maturity to do this effectively:

You may be full of goodwill, want to inform people about higher matters, know little but think that you can do little harm by giving talks, having meetings, and so on. But this activity is full of pitfalls, which are far more numerous and objectionable than the advantages. Wisdom does not come out of ignorance, and the matter does not even end there. Out of ignorance and self-deception may come a great deal of harm. The least that can happen is that imitation groups will proliferate, because there is nothing that can be done to prevent this. (6)

Social Integration and Psychological Therapy

Many seekers are really trying to find relief from social, psychological and other problems, not spiritual understanding and illumination. The desire for social activity and acceptance, personal prominence and recognition by others, is often mistaken for meaningful spiritual development: "They only want a social community, friendship, 'togetherness,' attention and the like. All these things are delightful: and all the more delightful when consciously indulged in, rather than found by means of deception. Deception in this case is pretending to oneself that one is studying when one is seeking stimuli." The confusion between social adjustment and spiritual development is widespread among people who approach higher esoteric teachings: "It is a central fact of the Teaching that the Teaching itself is lost when it becomes a mere means of helping social adjustment. This is doubly true where there are adequate methods and facilities for social adjustment available already in the wider community."

The primary motivation of many people who approach spiritual teachings is often psychotherapy and the reduction or resolution of personal problems. It is important to distinguish the difference between self-realization and therapy, while acknowledging that many people who style themselves as spiritual seekers actually *do* need psychological help and a reduction in tension and anxiety.

Perceptions of a higher order can be blocked from awareness by coarser ambitions and pre-occupations of a socio-psychological order. Necessary and essential needs such as social harmony, mental and emotional stabilization and a sense of belonging, must be met before any productive search for higher knowledge and wisdom even begins: "It is of great importance that people who feel that they want to align to something higher should first stabilize themselves in the social context, so that they will not unconsciously be seeking to transform something higher into something lower. Their social capacities, needs and integration have to be met first."

It is incumbent on the seeker that their personal and psychological needs be adequately satisfied before embarking on a spiritual quest. The primary aim of an authentic spiritual teaching is self-realization and not merely the removal of psychological problems, although the latter may occur as a secondary by-product of the teaching: "This is not to state that personal problems should just 'go away,' be ignored, or that they should not be met and answered. They should be, but *before* one's involvement in higher studies begins, else this study will become an extension of the person's difficulty, and may be captured by it."

You must follow your personality interests somewhere else. In an advanced society there are more institutions catering to such outlets than anyone could possibly need. Make sure that your professional, commercial, social, psychological and family needs are fulfilled in the society to which you belong. The rest of you is the part which can be communicated with by means of the specialized techniques available to those who have a comprehensive and legitimate traditional teaching: and who have the means of safeguarding it. This is what

you have to study first of all . . . There is no harm at all in a social ingredient in a human relationship: far from it. But when this gets out of balance, and a human contact becomes an excuse for a social contact, you are not going to learn, no matter what materials you are working with. (7)

Impatience and the Desire for 'Progress'

Impatience, anxiety and a sense of urgency actually prevent progress and development in the realm of spirituality. These factors cause would-be students to overlook many essential qualities of a learning situation. In fact, learning requires attention to factors other than "how long things will take?" or "when will I become enlightened?"

Many students of higher knowledge are their own worst enemies because they are too anxious to see immediate results and obvious signs of change. "Impatience prevents learning. At its worst, it causes a preoccupation with the thought, 'Why am I not making any progress?,' which effectively blocks that progress."

People are often impatient to learn quickly and expect esoteric knowledge to be handed to them without any suitable preparation on their part. The desire for 'instant illumination' and the attraction to short-cuts or crash programs of study are traps which many seekers find themselves in. Teachings which are slower-paced or based on 'drop-by-drop' activity are perceived as unrewarding or uninteresting. Remember the adage: '*Do not try to run before you can walk.*'

Impatience is often based upon unexamined assumptions, through selective reading and study, about how the learning process should proceed. "Anxiety and impatience are similar to feelings experienced in any situation where people have themselves made random assumptions about how much time they need to do something; or how little time they may have left in which to achieve something."

When people are in a hurry to learn and progress they fail to properly absorb and digest spiritual teachings and procedures. This is rooted in impatience and selfishness. "When people try to 'steal' something, to use it too soon, it is because they have a tendency to want to do so before they have taken it in. This means that they do not in fact have what they think they have, because their desire for acquisition and transmission are stronger than their desire to learn."

The desire of would-be students to progress on their own terms along the path of spiritual development is rooted in disguised greed and lack of humility. "Their demand should be 'Give me what I need, what will profit me, will profit others, and will profit something higher.' That is a manifestation of humility, when rightly conceived."

The desire for obvious, tangible signs of progress along the spiritual journey is pervasive among seekers of all types. "There are many people who are excessively interested in whether they are 'progressing' or 'improving' in any endeavour. All people are not the same, and what is opportunity at one occasion for one person may not be for another."

Many students of higher studies lament that 'nothing is happening' and are incapable of perceiving subtle impacts and developments in their spiritual life, looking instead for obvious indications of change or quantifiable signs of progress:

Q: Why does a [spiritual] group go on, sometimes for years, reading books, meeting and apparently not getting anything done, without any measurement of its progress, and without a sense of how things are going?

A: The main characteristic displayed by the questioner is that of a person who wants something ('progress' or a sense of how things are going) without carrying on an active observation and digesting of experience happening in and to the group. In traditional terminology familiar to people of all cultures (used in this instance not as a reproach but as a technique) we have here too much greed ahead of capacity, too much dissatisfaction due to greed and false premises, too much laziness which gives rise to a person being a potential victim of an exploiter who might appear and promise automatic progress without effort or right alignment. (8)

The complexity of genuine spiritual systems precludes the easy answers and rapid progress prized by so many seekers of higher knowledge. "The overall picture, understood at a certain stage, enables one to perceive what place each experience takes in the process, but it is not easy to describe in advance." In authentic spiritual traditions the student's progress and development occurs in measured stages, each step preparing for the next. "The fact that one may be learning bit by bit, storing up little pieces of information and experience which are, almost insensibly, to come together at some later date, does not recommend itself to people who may be offered elsewhere something which, it is claimed, will give them instant insights."

Providing a framework for spiritual development actually works against the attainment of the goal since the attitude of the aspirant is changed by the provision of time-bound information. A Sufi teaching story illustrates through analogy the importance of 'right time, place and people' in the pursuit of higher knowledge:

People often imagine that if they do not get what they have wanted exactly when they want it, they have wasted their time, or that someone else is to blame. They may think, too, that they are to blame when it is all a matter of the right time, right place, right people. You can keep this in your mind by an analogy, which is not supposed to be regarded as a sacred recital, but is scripted to show you the relative positions of timing and also of how people leave out of calculations things which alter circumstances. This is the story:

A Wager

A man once bought a parrot. When he got it home, he told it: "I am going to teach you to talk." "Don't bother," answered the bird, "I can talk already!" He was so amazed that he took it to a teahouse. "Look, I've got a fantastic talking parrot here!" But the parrot wouldn't talk, even though the man kept insisting that it could. People bet him ten to one that it could not, and he lost the bet. Nothing could induce it to speak.

On the way home, followed by the jeers of his friends, the man cuffed the parrot, and said; "You fool – look at the amount of money you lost me!"

"It is you who are the fool," said the parrot. "Take me back to that teahouse tomorrow and you'll get a hundred to one and win!"

'Time, place and people,' of course, is the message. Keeping this principle in mind helps to make it operative. This in turn alerts one to the 'occasions' when progress in higher awareness can really be made. (9)

Mixing Spiritual Traditions

Many spiritual seekers invent their own path by borrowing and combining methods, ideas and techniques from a whole range of inner teachings. The assumption that this can yield real developmental results is rarely questioned and flies in the face of both common sense and the experiences of everyday life: "Both oil and water are liquids, yet they don't mix."

One occasionally meets people who have sort of nailed and cobbled together a philosophy for themselves out of various bits and pieces. You will then find they are perhaps reciting a Buddhist mantra, reading to Sufi music, dressed in a garment belonging to some other philosophy, and following a diet based on something else again. Not to put too fine a point on it, one cannot take significant techniques or aspects of one philosophical teaching and try and match it with another, and heaven prevent one from taking a philosophical teaching, which may be the Tradition – it may be Buddhism, Taoism, or a number of other philosophical systems – to which they add some sort of spooky thing like stars, the Tarot, omens, or various different superstitions. This leads to complete confusion. (10)

The impossibility of effectively mixing different formulations for spiritual development is equivalent to combining different recipes when cooking a dish – the result is a mishmash which could even be harmful. "At almost any stage, people try to mix the ideas and activities of various teachings, according to what appears to suit them. The consequence is never effective. You may produce something attractive by this method, but never anything that works."

When people collect all kinds of esoteric, religious, metaphysical or philosophical fragments from a variety of sources, and try to link or amalgamate them, they do the reverse of what any lucid teaching system stipulates for effective learning and progress to occur: "It requires the student to follow a series of carefully selected and graded steps, without incorporating imagination, assumptions, materials from elsewhere, or concepts originating from other times, places and people."

There are numerous drawbacks to combining various spiritual teachings according to personal whims and proclivities. Real, effective 'higher nutrition' requires a certain quantity, quality and time-frame for the learning process to crystallize. This process is defeated by mixing various metaphysical teachings:

Whether in the West or in the East, there is a temptation among certain people to amalgamate or agglomerate ideas and practices drawn from various teachings. This type of activity is not necessarily unreasonable, and in certain contexts or circumstances it is useful, laudable, rewarding and even indicated. However, when you get a coming-together of factors which seem to be similar and you then try and put them together in a haphazard fashion; even with a good and reasonable intention, this very often leads to considerable confusion . . . This is what is called the 'supermarket mentality' in which you are shopping around. It's no laughing matter, because say you do an exercise in the context of the Tradition and you use a Zen technique, breathing position or movement. Even if the two are not mutually exclusive, they will still produce a certain degree of confusion because although they may both be of a positive nature, they do not apply in the same way. A Zen position requires a Zen intention and a Zen form of breathing. You cannot take one thing and put it together with something else. (11)

Imposing Conditions of Study

The assumptions, expectations and preconceptions that the seeker brings when encountering a spiritual teaching often leads to a desire to retain choice and control over what he or she does or believes. The presence of existing beliefs and the psychological commitment to them can actually disturb the learning process and block the entry of real knowledge into the seeker's mind:

Lucky is the seeker who can see through the dearth of false systems, bogus gurus, hucksters, and deceptive practices. But once one comes upon a legitimate teaching system, one's motives and approaches must be in correct alignment. Besides insincerity, the most common mistake is for novices to insist the conditions of study be on their terms. They may come into a study system with all sorts of preconceptions and expectations -- a hidden agenda or mental model as to what they believe should be happening and what they should be

doing in order to fulfil their goal. Novices *want* exercises when what they really need is information. They may wish to dance and sing when all they first need to do is read. Neophytes may want their teacher to give them more attention when they really need less. They may want study materials to be presented to them in a timely and orderly A-to-Z fashion whereas a non-sequential approach may be best. They might think that they should be fasting, meditating, breathing a certain way; they may insist on celibacy, vegetarianism or certain attire. (12)

The would-be student of spirituality who has been conditioned by previous modes of learning usually demands to be taught in his or her own way, effectively preventing wider forms of understanding. "Students are not able to suggest a study or organizational programme when they are there to learn." Factors such as selective reading, following only the things which one decides are interesting or important, studying and doing only what is perceived as appealing produce no real results in the field of spirituality.

By attempting to prescribe the nature, conditions and timing of their own spiritual studies, students are placing their subjective viewpoint above the requirements of the teaching itself. By imposing conditions gained from speculation, imagination, emotion, and so on, they effectively block higher learning. Seekers frequently demand that ideas and teachings be simplified or packaged in ways which are more acceptable to them. Primitive thinking about the learning process leads people to believe that they must be taught at the same time, in the same surroundings and in the same manner. They fail to realize an essential fact: "The Path has its own requirements, and the things which people want to do are likely to be those which will only help them to continue in the way they are already set, rather than in a direction which will break through their subjective limitations."

The requirements of any authentic spiritual teaching are similar to those that hold in almost any learning situation and cannot be effectively questioned or modified in any real sense. In order to learn, students must respect and follow the established patterns and methods of study in any field of accomplishment. "Learning is the reverse of choosing your own time, place and manner of instruction – and your own vacations."

The test for those who are really interested to learn from a [spiritual teaching] is exactly the same as the test which common sense applies to the learning of anything. Does the would-be learner want to learn what there is to be learnt, in the manner, in the company, and with the materials, timing and methods, which are necessary to the time, place, situation of the pupil and the learning? Or does the learner want to proceed in ways which he or she feels are the right ones? (13)

In any real learning situation, regardless of the field of study, there is little or no progress if people select only portions of the study material or try to study them in the order and manner which they themselves choose. It is essential that the student not attempt to impose his or her own conditions of study or criteria of progress. "Failure to observe simple rules of learning

make it almost impossible to learn anything. Those who find this hard to follow need only imagine trying to learn mathematics, say, according to their own rules or curriculum; or trying to learn the alphabet only through working with the letters whose shape pleases them."

Aspirants who approach a spiritual teaching may unconsciously attempt to manipulate the teaching process: "Spiritual activity is not a matter of someone winning and someone losing, or of easy gains without effort." Many seekers approach a spiritual teaching with a 'commercial' or 'supply-and-demand' attitude. They view the transmission of higher knowledge almost as a business transaction. One form of this approach has been called 'bargaining.' They need to heed the following injunction: "As with more material gifts, they cannot stipulate the nature, extent and timing of their bestowal. One cannot bargain with someone who has gifts to offer."

Mistrusting the Teacher and Teachings

A characteristic posture of would-be students is to attempt to assess and measure the reliability and worth of a teacher before placing themselves in the mentor's hands. Many people, especially from the West, are not prepared to place their confidence, without concrete evidence, in those who are supposed to be able to guide their spiritual development. Yet: "When you go to a tailor to have a suit made, you use intelligence and logic to get you to the tailor's door. After you have chosen the cloth and given your order, you abandon all to the tailor."

The Western cultural milieu encourages an attitude of mind that has been labelled by some as 'non-rational concern.' This entails the belief that any student-teacher relationship will be based on a pattern of domination and submission. It is characterized by "the fear of being controlled by others, with the consequent loss of autonomy that is believed to be fundamental to the conception of the self."

There is a widespread belief in both the East and the West that the role of a student in a spiritual school automatically entails a loss of their freedom, independence and individuality: "It is not uncommon for people to say that they feel that discipleship in a mystical school will deprive them of their autonomy, or otherwise rob them of something. They have not yet reached the stage where they realize that they are already prisoners of a far worse tyranny (that of the 'Old Villain' or personal, subjective ego) than anything which could be devised for them in a mystical school." Sometimes aphorisms are utilized in spiritual teachings and schools to stress the importance of reliance and trust in the journey to self-realization: '*A poor man fears no thief.*'

The attempt by students to analyze their teacher basically displays the assumptions, pre-conceptions and subjective thinking processes of the student. "If the desire to test the teacher or oppose the teaching is too strongly marked, there is little prospect of the learning process taking place at all."

There is always the question of the learner himself endlessly questioning (through a misapplication of the principle of judgement) the meaning and motives of authentic mystical systems. Saadi in his *Bostan* has a telling tale, well worth keeping in mind. It enables one to register that a person's ability to judge situations, if he is not thoroughly competent in the field in question, may seriously malfunction:

Faridun, the Persian King of about 700 B.C., had a minister who was reported to have lent out gold and silver. He had also stipulated, Faridun learned, that the loans were to be repaid on the death of the king. The king was infuriated and charged the man with plotting against him. The minister answered: "I wanted all the people to wish you long life. By imposing the condition, I ensured that they would pray for your extended health." (14)

Importance of Information and Preparation

Most people who are interested in spiritual teachings are deficient in terms of their background of information about these teachings. Specialized knowledge and techniques, as well as the proper approach, are required to properly access advanced esoteric knowledge. Western cultures, in particular, are full of confusion, imagination and misinformation concerning the activities of genuine schools of inner development. In order to gain higher knowledge, the seeker may first have to learn other things which act as preparation for further understanding:

When given materials or ideas to study, you have to give all of them equal attention. Realize that you have in the past been consuming selectively, i.e. welcoming what you think you want and ignoring what you think you do not need. Such a procedure, in any form of learning, can lead to nothing . . . The result is that a person tends to learn only what he has been trained (by himself or others) to learn. This leaves gaps when he is faced by deep knowledge. Unimportant in ordinary matters, these gaps are pitfalls in a more advanced stage. (15)

Many seekers possess only scraps of undigested information and experience related to the spiritual path, while believing that they have already attained higher knowledge and wisdom. "There is a widespread lack of real higher experience, as distinct from imagined experience. There is a serious lack of suitable information about areas of higher study which are not generally known nor reproduced in books." Basic information about spiritual teachings can remove many of the misconceptions and misunderstandings held by seekers of higher knowledge.

One of the consequences of insufficient information and lack of preparation is an inability to evaluate whether a spiritual teaching is authentic and comprehensive or not. "Is the lack of recognition of gold due to the incapacity or negligence of the assessor or to the nature of the

metal itself." In order to benefit from a spiritual teaching the student must be properly fitted for the task so as to ask the right questions and profit from the answers.

Without proper preparation students are prone to confusion and misunderstanding when embarking on a search for higher knowledge. "Real study centers of higher knowledge really are institutes of higher studies, which up to a point, have to lay the foundation of their studies as they go along. The habit of questioning the curriculum, however indicative of an enquiring mind, may often be very much out of control."

It is in order to carry out this educational project that real teaching institutions first of all have to broaden the basis of the student's attitudes to higher knowledge. There is an analogy here with the ordinary educational systems. In the latter, specialization and higher studies often have to be preceded by general studies which form the basis for the future studies. Many an undergraduate has wondered why he has to study botany or bacteriology before he can learn how to heal people as a physician. He is in fact receiving factual information, learning a skill and also exercising his brain in a manner which will enable him to cope with more complex things. (16)

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