

THE WAY TO THE DIVINE

Swami Yatiswarananda

**Sarada Sevika Mandali
Bangalore 1989**

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Our beloved Gurudev, Revered Swami Yatiswaranandaji had delivered a course of lectures in Germany to a small group of earnest spiritual seekers. The typescript of these talks had been prepared by the Swami and entrusted to Dr. Prabhu Shankara in 1964 with instructions to edit and publish the same in book form.

We are happy to present this book on the occasion of the 79th Birthday of the Revered Swamiji. The book gives practical instructions for a direct approach to the Ultimate Reality.

We take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Prabhu Shankara for editing, and also for giving us an opportunity to publish this book. We are grateful to Rev. Swami Achalanandaji for his invaluable guidance and help given to us in all possible ways. Our thanks are due to Prof. S.S. Raghavachar, Professor of Philosophy, University of Mysore for his scholarly preface. We are grateful to Dr. K.B. Ramakrishna Rao, Principal, JCBM College, Sringeri, for readily preparing the beautiful cover design. We are deeply indebted to M/S Mayura Printers and Publishers for printing the book so nicely and within a short period.

We hope and pray that this book will help the spiritual aspirants and guide them on 'The way to the Divine!'

Bangalore 15-1-68

B.C.Indira
Secretary

SECOND EDITION

We are particularly happy to bring out this second edition of the book during the centenary year of the Revered Swamiji. We are also happy to include in this edition a tribute paid to the Swamiji by Swami Sastrananda of Vivekananda Ashrama, Bangalore.

The book has been phototypeset afresh, and the opportunity so afforded has been availed of to eliminate a few typographical errors that had crept in, albeit inadvertently, in the first edition. Our thanks are due to Mr. N. Parthasarathy and Mr. Sreenivas Babu Koneru of Deepar International for getting the book typeset and printed so elegantly.

Bangalore March, 1989

Indira Krishna
President

A Note on Sri Sarada Sevika Mandali

Founded in the year 1953, the Birth Centenary year of Sri Sarada Devi, with just five girl students, the Mandali has grown considerably over the last twenty five years. Dedicated as it is to the cause and welfare of women and children, the Mandali now runs the following institutions:

1. *Sri Sarada Balika Mandali*—a cultural and recreational centre for girls
2. *Sri Sarada Kutir*—a cultural and residential home for working women
3. *Sri Sarada Mandali Rural Development Project*—to serve the cause and welfare of rural women
4. *Sri Sarada Sishu Kendra*—a cr?che for rural children
Smt Hemavati Kuvempu Library—to cater mainly to the needs of rural people.

It is extremely gratifying that the first phase of Sri Sarada Nilaya, a home for the members of Sri Sarada Sevika Mandali and aged women, is now complete.

The inauguration of this building during the Silver Jubilee year of the Sri Sarada Sevika Mandali, which coincides with the Birth Centenary year of Swami Yatiswarananda, founder of the Mandali, gives us great joy and immense satisfaction.

The Mandali has plans to start a High School for girls in the very near future. The building for housing the school is expected to be ready very soon. The school will be called 'Sri Sarada Higher Secondary School for Girls.'

Sri Sarada Sevika Mandali fondly hopes that it will continue to expand its activities to promote and serve the cause and welfare of women and children. Any suggestions to enable us to achieve our objective will be welcome. So also monetary contributions which will be accepted with thanks and gratitude, and duly acknowledged.

A Tribute to Swami Yatiswarananda

Referring to India as the 'Punya Bhumi' or the holy land, Swami Vivekananda declares that this is the land where humanity has attained its highest in its march towards 'Gentleness, Generosity, Purity, Calmness, and above all Introspection and Spirituality.'

These qualities are not just legendary ideals, to be found only in the celebrated luminaries past or present. They are, in fact, the hallmark of any truly holy man, nay of any worthy human being. And one such person was Swami Yatiswarananda (1889-1966), who is even today remembered and honoured by many who knew him, and look back to their days of association with him with justifiable nostalgia. Those, who had the good fortune to be close to him in mind and spirit, would easily mark in him the aforesaid qualities, which, in turn, were bound to influence their own lives for the better, sooner or later.

He was indeed *gentle*, but without being soft, weak or ineffective; and he was in its true sense, a *gentleman*. *Generous* he certainly was, may be even to a fault, be it in extending material help or spiritual guidance and support to those who needed or sought them. An outstanding quality of his was a rare largeness of mind and heart, which one sadly misses in a world mostly filled with pettiness, pride and ill-will. His *purity* was something—both external and internal even more—which astonished sensitive observers. Ever *calm*, in spite of various adverse and obstructive factors in life, be they events or persons, he nonetheless led an intensely active life at whatever level there was a real need. *Introspection*—with its facets of inwardness, self-examination and love for meditation—revealed itself in his readiness to admit and amend mistakes, not blaming or finding fault in others, and a dignified and healthy reserve. His *spirituality* revealed itself patently in his life and actions, talks and writings, which constantly stressed the blessed presence of the Divine within and without, in oneself and in other fellow beings, resulting in an unflinching courtesy and concern for the welfare of others, a pure and pervasive love and readiness to serve unselfishly.

The spiritual in him also expressed itself as the quality of true freedom and independence, which made him rely on the Divine alone and motivated others also to do the same.

Speaking of holy people who serve as models for human conduct, the *Taittiriya Upanisad* uses the epithets, 'of impartial judgement, mature, independent, gentle and dedicated to higher values' (1-100); and Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Common men talk of religion in plenty but there is very little of it in their life. The wise and holy man, on the other hand, speaks little and his whole life is a living expression of religion in action.'

It would be quite proper to say that these descriptions fit in with Swami Yatiswarananda's life. It would also be only fair to record that his life was a significant contribution towards the promotion of Swami Vivekananda's cherished ideals, 'man-making and character-building', and 'awakening the potential divinity' in human beings.

A good and fruitful way in which we can honour the memory of this beloved and revered holy man—be it in his 'centenary' year or at any other time—would be for ourselves to imbibe the blessed qualities cited. Even better would be to become free and self-reliant spirits, dependent on the Divine alone. As an initiating 'guru' of the Ramakrishna Order, he has left a powerful message to us, particularly those who would consider themselves as his disciples or followers: 'A true teacher is a free soul, and would very much like to see that all his disciples stand on their own feet, realise their divine nature, and solve their individual problems, developing a cosmic outlook... He will rather have *one free soul* as his disciple than a multitude of them following him blindly.'

Let us sincerely and intensely strive to become such souls and thus pay a fitting homage to this *gentle, generous, and free* soul!

Swami Sastrananda

January 1989

PREFACE

Swami Yatiswarananda, one of the greatest members of the Ramakrishna Order in recent times, functioned as a source of inspiring benediction to spiritual aspirants for about fifty years. He worked both in Europe and America, and in several centres in India. By his writings, discourses and interviews he spread the universal message of Sri Ramakrishna and thus stimulated spiritual aspiration in many, guided the striving of many groping in the dark and confirmed and perfected the self-realization of many. His life radiated illumination and peace and fulfilled the blessings that Swami Brahmananda, his spiritual preceptor, showered on him, after marking him out as the chosen soldier of God. All those who had the privilege of knowing him personally, testify to his sweetness of manners, clarity of counsel and boundless gift of love.

The main direction of the Swamiji's teaching was towards the initiating and fostering of the spiritual life, in all its inwardness of meditative devotion. This emphasis is amply borne out by his books published during his lifetime, *Divine Life*, *Universal Prayers* and *The Adventures in Religious Life*. The present work,¹ which he meant for publication, also falls into this category, perhaps, in a more pronounced way. It consists of the authentic records of his teachings mainly addressed to spiritual seekers of pre-war Germany where he was working during those difficult years. But their appeal is universal and timeless and they enter into the inner life of man, as it were, and lead him on from the first step to the last with intimate comprehension, compassion and sure guidance. The vast erudition and deep spirituality of the teacher are pressed into service in framing lines of guidance. These are no words of mere academic knowledge as they spring from the wisdom of the spirit and aim at transmitting divine life. The precious

1. Containing: 1) Class-notes published in "VEDANTA", the Quarterly the Swami published from Switzerland in 1937 and 1938 (units 1-6 and 8), and 2) extracts from his Wiesbaden (1933) "*Readings on the Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*", and other notes.

document under publication contains 15 units of writing, each of which is a fairly self-contained body of instructions. While the whole gamut of religious discipline is covered by the entire set, there is considerable repetition, bringing into relief the principles that the Swamiji valued most. The effect of reading the book is an imperceptible induction into the mood of meditation and prayer. We feel the atmosphere of intimate personal communion with the revered teacher hitching our wagon, as it were, to the star of the Supreme. The reader is at once awakened and moved. Some memorable utterances, in which the compilation abounds, may be fittingly cited as furnishing the right sort of introduction:

‘The Grace of Divine comes to a person in the form of self-effort.’

‘Only one who has passed through strenuous self-effort can give himself up and surrender himself wholly and unconditionally at the feet of the Divine.’

‘Hold the reins tight. All accidents in the path are due to carelessness.’

‘First of all, a void is to be created in the heart of every aspirant, and once this is done he can fill this void with the Divine.’

‘The concentrated mind, if it is not purified, becomes a veritable demon.’

‘It is essential for us to have a true conception of freedom. Do we want freedom for the senses or freedom from the senses?’

‘Manhood is worth the name in proportion it frees itself from the fetters and limitations of animal nature.’

‘Perfect sincerity, perfect purity and dedication, that is what is needed by all of you. Then, one day, some fine work will be done.’

Yes, indeed, it will be done. This will be our endeavour.

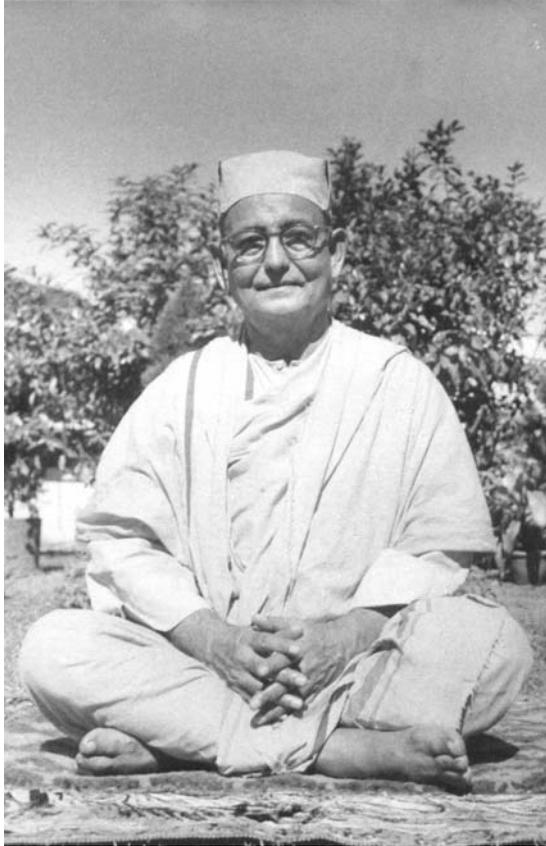
S S Raghavachar

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Swami Yatiswarananda
(16.1.1889–27.1.1966)

1. HOW TO BEGIN A SPIRITUAL LIFE?

Choose Wisely

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, *'We should not ask God for the things of the world. Suppose He grants them. The material things may bring trouble to us.'* When we approach this great Boon-Giver, we should never ask Him for worldly things connected with personal wishes and desires. We may approach the Lord just for saving our souls from getting drowned in the ocean of worldliness and infatuation for material things. Ordinarily if we feel unhappy, we would rather adjust ourselves to our unhappiness and cling to our desires and fancies than change our ways and come to Truth and Bliss. We are so body-bound that we stress physical enjoyment more than anything else and are not prepared to renounce it. Rather we go on clinging desperately to its different forms although we get nothing but kicks and blows again and again. Such is the tremendous power of Maya or ignorance.

The Great Father or the Great Mother is witnessing the children at play. It is only when a child gets disgusted with its toys and childish occupations that the Lord really comes to it and draws it away from the play-land of illusion. Children play with sweets, with dolls, with toy-soldiers, with toy-houses, with toy-cars, and nothing can be done by the Lord until they get tired of these and turn from them in utter disgust. God takes it as great fun. And then, one day, the child has become a little grown-up and cries, 'What have I done with my life?' and the Lord says, 'Yes, what have you done, my child? Who asked you to do it? Who asked you to go on playing indefinitely in such a foolish way? Who asked you to get hurt and get entangled in your toys? Who? Who did it all?' And then very often it is already too late and the child sits in the ruins of its shattered life and wails.

We all have an opportunity to follow saner and better ways, but we cling to our particular toys and do not let go our hold. So we have to suffer, and shall have to suffer until we learn the great lesson life teaches us again and again, in innumerable ways, and come to act wisely. Just as most people try to achieve their

worldly ambitions and ideals, we should strive for spiritual life and illumination, but this most people won't do. And it depends solely on our own choice whether we take up the worldly life or the spiritual life, whether we lead a life of slavery and fear or that of freedom and fearlessness.

We must strive to achieve something that is higher, that is not subject to change and decay. But we very often choose the path of Avidya (ignorance) wilfully and deliberately, because we cling to our phantoms of physical and emotional enjoyment which, after all, we shall have to give up sooner or later. We all, one day, must let go the hold, and if we do not do this of our own free will, the toy will be torn away from us, and this will mean great sorrow, and in many cases a broken heart. For most people, this is the only way in which they can be made to learn their lessons, but it is very painful and usually takes many lives. We should try to live a spiritual life, knowingly, consciously, deliberately, in a spirit of dedication and singleness of purpose. This will of ours may be directed towards the higher channels of life or towards the lower ones, just as we please.

We are just like cows tied to a post with a very long rope. The cows could graze and have a certain amount of freedom in their movements but the silly animals just turn round and round the post till the whole rope has coiled round them and makes it impossible for them even to reach the grass at their feet. God allows a very long rope to man, but only in rare cases does man make proper use of the rope. Mostly he entangles himself hopelessly in it till he can scarcely move one way or the other. That is not God's fault though. Learn to take the whole responsibility always on your own shoulders. It is a great mistake to hold God responsible for all that happens to you. You forget everything else for a moment's pleasure and do not care to listen to what God has been telling man through the ages.

Says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita:²

"The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings. Take refuge in Him with all thy heart, by His grace shall thou attain su-

2. *Bhagavad-Gita*, 18.61, 62, 63.

preme peace and the eternal abode. Thus has wisdom more profound than all profundities been declared to thee by Me. Reflecting over it fully, act as thou likest."

Use and Misuse of Will-Power

Spiritual life, if it means sublimation and purification of our feelings, means at the same time developing our will-power and forcing the mind to take to the higher path. This must be wholly directed towards the higher life. We find in the world tremendous will-power and concentration but both are given a wrong direction and thus lead man into deeper and deeper darkness and ignorance. If all the will-power you find in the world were directed along the right channels, this world of ours would immediately become a heaven.

We must set the spiritual goal very, very clearly before ourselves. If we are able to rouse tremendous enthusiasm in ourselves for the goal to be attained, then only shall we have the necessary energy to strive for it and do our utmost. In the world of the spirit you very often find people with a chaotic brain. They do not care to follow any definite system and like to drift on the boundless sea of their emotions and impulses. So they attain practically nothing, or achieve just as little as the out-and-out worldly-minded people. No person with a muddled brain can have any success in the world, and much less so in the spiritual world. Settle once for all as to what you really want. Very often we want to attain peace, but follow a path that can only end in restlessness and trouble.

The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You

God alone is the repository of all peace and blessedness. We should try to look within and find Him seated within our own hearts. This body of ours is the living temple of God. This is a conception we find stressed again and again in all the Scriptures. The best temples of the Divine are the greatest prophets and seers. That is why they exert the greatest influence. Those who have realized the Truth in their own souls can alone teach others the way to realization. The Lord is always at the back of our minds, at the back of our whole personality, and only if we can pray with a fervent heart, will the prayer be heard, and

otherwise not. We should never think in terms of happiness while praying. Happiness by itself is no real index for spiritual life, no proof whatever of spiritual progress or realization.

The lover, when dreaming of his beloved, imagines things that have no reality. The mad man, too imagines things that do not exist at all. All hallucinations are to be avoided in spiritual life. We must try to get a glimpse of the Truth by following a systematic course of spiritual practice. If such a glimpse comes unawares, and if we are not properly prepared for it through long and regular training, the reaction may be tremendous, and may even unsettle us for life. We must first learn how to become fit for such glimpses so that we can then make them our own for good. Spiritual evolution at first brings great pain to the aspirant, not happiness. In the intermediate stage his life becomes very difficult. Then he has no longer any real interest in what he has in the world and cannot yet obtain self-realization. It is still beyond his reach. It is just like hanging in mid-air without being able to go either up or down.

Very often when we get a thing we find that we never really wanted it. We may have been seeking it, but when we get it we may actually find that the desire has vanished, and some other desire has taken its place. Many people mistake the true nature of their yearnings and give them worldly direction, whereas in reality no human yearning can ever find satisfaction in anything that is not permanent and unchanging, however much people may try to deceive themselves on this point. The old void haunts them again and again and mostly in a more terrible and relentless form than before. People seek happiness outside, in attributes, in forms, in the phenomenon, whereas it lies in themselves from all time and for all time and can never be lost. Whatever can be lost, can never bring true happiness to us. We commit the mistake of looking at a certain span of time instead of looking at the whole. Temporary happiness there is, no doubt, in worldly things and worldly relations, in human love and human affections, but temporary happiness can never mean real happiness, rather it is the opposite of it. Let us have the desire to know our nature, to know our true Self. In Self-realization alone there lies real blessedness.

The test of Truth is this: whereas in the case of worldly things and worldly relations you can never get any ultimate satisfaction, in the case of spirituality and spiritual life you can get that perfect satisfaction which is not dependent upon anything external. So the great sage Narada says, '*Realization of That is attaining to One's heart's desire. And only thus does one become immortal. Thus only does one become full of bliss*'.³

What is Our Reality?

It is often very difficult to have a yearning heart in the beginning and the reason is that God does not seem a reality to us. With most of us, this body is our soul, and it is for the enjoyment of this body on the material plane, it need not necessarily be a very gross form of enjoyment, that we are most anxious. Religion to most of us is something highly amateurish, a kind of fashion, just like so many fashions. But if some day through our spiritual striving God comes to be a reality, we feel that our whole being responds to that reality and longs for it alone. If the world is real to us, it absorbs our entire attention. If something else is real, that, too, does the same. That which we take to be real for the time being affects us, stirs up our feelings, draws out our will; it occupies our whole intellect. In fact, our whole being responds to this reality. If we carefully study our own lives and those of the saints we find a great difference. It is the 'reality' that affects the minds of both, but the reality is something different to the saint from what it is to us ordinary people. To us this world is real; to them the spiritual world alone is real. Their whole life is busy with this one idea, how to realize the Divine, how to make Him a reality instead of an intellectual and rather vague concept. If we are able to appreciate what the saints call reality we can also appreciate why they are ever ready to lay down their lives for the sake of Self-Realization.

When we study the life of a Christ, a Sri Chaitanya, a Rama-krishna, we find that to all of them God is the highest reality. The Divine is the central object of their lives, and every thing else is subordinate to it.

3. *Narada Bhakti Sutras* 1.4.

You may take up any aspect of God that appeals to you most such as mother, father, child, friend, comrade, play-fellow or lover. Only make Him somehow your nearest and dearest. There is a prayer that says, *'Thou art our Mother, Thou art our Father, Thou art our Friend, Thou art our Comrade, Thou art our Knowledge, Thou art our Wealth, Thou art our All-in-All.'*⁴

The ideal is to establish a close relationship with the Divine. And we should clearly note that this God is not merely personal but impersonal, too.

As already explained, whatever we take to be real, whatever we call real, draws our whole being, absorbs our whole mind, attracts our whole feeling. And according to Vedanta nothing is ultimately real which does not remain unchanged under all circumstances. Real is that alone which was in the past, is in the present and will be in the future without ever undergoing any change. Everything that changes or decays, undergoes evolution or involution, belongs to the category of the unreal.

Sri Ramakrishna has said, *'When the mind becomes pure and is freed from worldly attachments and longings, one comes to have true yearning for the Divine, and then alone will one's prayers reach Him.'* *'No message can be sent if the telegraph-wire be broken or if there be any other interruption.'* With a yearning heart he used to cry to the Lord in solitude. He used to become unconscious of the world and lose himself in God. How to have connection with the Divine? Is it possible to get it if there be a break in the wire of the mind? The mind must be completely free from all worldly attachments, so that Divine communion may become an accomplished fact.

*'One comes to have the vision of God when there is this three-fold attraction: the love that a chaste wife has for her husband, the love that a mother bears for her child, the love that a rich man has for his riches.'*⁵

It is enough if one has sincere and single-hearted yearning, if one has true love for the Divine. He is the indwelling spirit. He

4. *Prapanna Gita*, 28.

5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (1957) P. 7.

looks to the yearning of the heart.

Until the mind is perfectly pure we cannot know Him. It is only when we conquer lust, anger and greed that the Lord's mercy falls upon us, and then comes the vision.

Begin as Beginners!

Many people want to begin their spiritual life from the top-most rung of the ladder, but that cannot be done. There are no short cuts to spiritual realization; neither can anything be achieved without first finding out where one really stands. High philosophical flights and wonderful metaphysical dreams, however useful and necessary they may be, do not mean actual experience. By themselves they do not lead to realization, but only to abstract and superfine speculations that have no connection at all with spiritual life. We should know where we stand and then proceed from there. We must begin as beginners and go on step by step. As an ideal, monism or rather non-dualism may be all right for us, but when we come to the practical aspects, we find that we are dualists and may have to remain so for a long time to come. It is amusing to hear people talking in high-sounding terms about the Absolute, the Principle etc., because in most cases all these are nothing but empty speculations and frothy words and do not even mean that particular person is fit for the monistic path. Nobody who stands in dualism, in whatever way it may be, is a monist, whether monism appeals to him or not.

Very often the mind of the modern man revolts at the idea of any particular discipline. It says, 'Why should we busy ourselves with that? Haven't we got enough drudgery in the world? We want the Absolute, so what is the use of Japa, repetition of the Divine name, meditation on Divine attributes and forms? Let us reach the Absolute. Let us worship the Divine 'in spirit and in Truth.' All this, no doubt, sounds very grand and highly spiritual, but as soon as we come down to the realities of life, we find it does not mean anything at all. Mostly such people are convinced dualists as far as their own actions in daily life go. To worship God, 'in spirit and in truth' is all right, but where is the beginner who can do this? This is the point. For most people it means just vagueness, hazy feelings, confused thinking and thought-

less actions – all done in a way that has no connection at all with the Divine or spiritual life.

How to begin? – that is the point. How to get the necessary mental training? – that is the problem before us. Different thoughts constantly keep cropping up in our mind. When we wish to make the mind calm, it becomes more disturbed. It revolts the very moment we try to practise concentration. It suddenly takes the form of a tempestuous ocean in which we are in danger of getting lost completely. The whole mind is disturbed by mighty thought waves, and the more we try to calm them, the mightier do they become. So meditation becomes a very tiresome process in the beginning instead of bringing light and peace to our soul, as it should.

As in the case of a horse-trainer who has to take great trouble in following a systematic course for breaking in the horse, similarly, with a view to ‘break in’ the mind, we must follow a certain definite system of discipline from which we should not deviate, taking care at the same time not to become mechanical in any way. In our spiritual discipline there must be great definiteness regarding all points. It won’t do for us to put two legs in two different boats. We must learn to follow one course definitely without vacillation and to proceed step by step consciously, intelligently and patiently. And that is the way to attain the goal of spiritual life in due course.

2. THE SPIRITUAL PATH

Begin Early!

ONE has to begin as early as possible with one's spiritual life. Unless we have sown the seed of spirituality in our soul early in life, there is no possibility of creating the spiritual mood in later life. Those who are not spiritually minded while they live in the world can never be spiritually minded when they retire from the world. They will find that the old impure impressions have become so deep that there is no possibility of effacing them, that they have become the slaves of their instincts and impulses, and that they can no longer act in the way they would like to, cannot take up a higher and purer life, neither mentally nor physically. Our ideal is to make a beginning of liberation in this very life and to make the best of the time that is given to us.

The Lord's Grace

The Grace of the Divine comes to a person in the form of self-effort, in the form of the will to strive for something higher and more permanent than all these phenomena. Some speak of destiny, others speak of self-effort, while again others hold, "Yes, it is true that everything depends on the will of the Lord, but the Lord decides that I should strive my utmost. Self-effort comes to me as a manifestation of my 'destiny'. It is the will of the Lord that creates in me the desire for striving." But without purity and real unfeigned dispassion there can never be any spiritual life or even any deep spiritual striving. Unless we strive our very utmost and our best, the Lord's Grace will not descend upon us.

Control the Mind

What is most essential in all forms of spiritual life is to keep the greater part of the mind thinking of God, thinking of the ideal, and never to allow it to give its thoughts entirely to the world or worldly affections and relations even when occupied with some worldly duty. We must know how to divide the mind to some extent, so that we can make one part of it cling to the Lord and to the Lord alone, whatever be our occupation. Through constant practice, through unflinching patience, we may develop an

attitude of mind that enables us to think and to feel that whatever we do is a service to the Lord, and that we have no right to the fruits of any of our actions. 'O Lord, whatever work I do, I look upon it as a form of worship to Thee.'⁶ This service may be physical, intellectual or spiritual.

Watch the reactions in your mind brought about by certain people and things, and act accordingly. Avoid everything that is apt to rouse old, evil impressions and thoughts belonging to your former life. We cannot allow ourselves to run after worldly love and affection and have the higher Divine Love at the same time. God and worldly affection cannot live together.

Definite idea of the Path and Goal

We should have the ideal fixed that neither worldly nor heavenly pleasures are our goal, that our ultimate goal is Self-realization, neither this world nor heaven, nor any other world. Heavenly enjoyment is no better than earthly enjoyment, and so long as there is hankering after heavenly enjoyment, we can never attain the goal. We must yearn for God more than for His creation either in heaven or on earth.

Before we actually begin our spiritual life in real earnest, we must decide if we are really fully prepared to pay the price. We must fix once and for all our ideal, our conduct of life, and everything, and then stick to it whatever happens. If we wish to transcend all the unrealities, there must always be a certain amount of the dare-devil in us, a certain amount of fearlessness and true heroism. Unless we are prepared to sacrifice all our worldly desires and our sense of I-ness, we can never hope to realize the higher ideal. 'Give us discrimination, give us renunciation, give us devotion and knowledge'—let us pray to the Divine.

Discrimination

You must never associate too freely with people and must always use discrimination. If another person attracts you, just direct the mind into some higher channel, create in yourself some dislike or disgust for the person in question, so that that

6. Sri Sankara: *Sivamanasa Puja*.

person loses all charm for you. Later on this disgust is to be effaced so that you can look at that person with the same indifference with which you would look at a stranger whom you have never known. In spiritual life, although to a great extent you cut off your personal relations with others, you come to have a wider love and sympathy for them through the medium of the Divine. When one finds something higher, the lower ideal automatically loses its attraction and is put aside.

We should also practise a certain amount of control and discrimination regarding the food we take. And so long as we are in the body, the body must be properly taken care of and nourished to keep it a fit instrument for the realization of the Divine and for the Divine's work. There is much more body-consciousness in the person who is ill or weak than in the perfectly healthy and normal person, and we have to see that our body-consciousness is reduced to a minimum if we want to make good progress in spiritual life.

Unless our mind is to some extent pure and non-attached and is prepared for renunciation we can never even think of realization of God. Try to purify your mind as much as possible. Then the blazing fire of spiritual realization will burn away all desires.

Self-Surrender

Only one who has really passed through strenuous self-effort can give himself up and surrender himself wholly and unconditionally at the feet of the Divine. All forms of striving make the mind pure and fit for the Divine touch. And self-surrender can only be accomplished after having gone through one's spiritual practice with great perseverance and doggedness. Self-surrender can only come when our wings are dead tired like those of the bird sitting on the ship's mast that tries in vain to reach land when the ship is on the high sea and finally returns to the mast.

Too much activity is very dangerous, because it usually becomes like the aimless activity of the monkey. This kind of activity is just restlessness and we see it in people who are terribly afraid to be left to themselves. But on the other side you find a form of so-called self-surrender, that is nothing more than inert-

ness, indolence, lethargy. And this is just as bad as aimless activity. The true aspirant should always try to combine both, activity of the right kind and self-surrender.

Study and Practice

Religion is something different from and something more than book-knowledge. Through mere scholarship, through mere intellectual study you can never learn the Truth. When we think too much and too highly of intellectual life, we can never realize the essential truths of religion.

*'Let one study as well as he can, master the subjects, but after having become a great scholar, let him renounce desires and try to live upon the strength which comes from knowledge.'*⁷

One must be free from all guile, from all falsehood, all lack of uprightness, from all the perversities of the mind, and then become a man of meditation, if one wants to make real spiritual progress.

Having known the essentials of spiritual life, having formed a clear idea of the Divine, you should try to practise the disciplines. Do not read too many empty words. That creates only disturbance and trouble. Now, this does not mean that you should not study at all, but you should make it a point to study with a view to realizing the Truth, and along with your studies, there must be some real spiritual practice day after day. You must always train your intellect and have your fixed studies, thinking deeply on the studies, so that you would feel uncomfortable the day you have not studied anything deeply and, pondered over it and over the truths it contains. This daily study is to be made an important item of your spiritual practice.

Avoid Temptations

During the period of our spiritual training we must try as much as possible to avoid all temptation, both in its gross and subtle forms. We should salute anything that may become an object of temptation to us, from a safe distance. Let us not go

7. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 3.5.1 and Sankara's Commentary thereon.

near it. We must not rely too much on our own strength for a long time to come. We have such a dirty mind so full of filthy impressions that once it is really stirred up it may create no end of troubles. Lust and hatred, greed, vulgarity—all these are lying hidden in us waiting to make us their prey. And so we must be on our guard.

Always the trouble arises through our being too little aware of the danger in the form of a tiny and apparently insignificant ripple in the mind. The outer stimulus, even if it be a very subtle and scarcely perceptible one, slowly and gradually affects the mind. Sometimes even the memory of some old impure impression is enough to upset us, because the germ or the seed is always inside, never outside. Unless the seed be inside, it can never sprout.

Attachment in any form may be enough to muddle the brain and bring about the spiritual ruin in the mind of the aspirant, but when attachment and anger combine, the whole mind becomes chaotic, and all progress is stopped. All struggle for the Higher Life comes to an end when passion has its sway over a person. That is why we should carefully avoid any harmful stimulus even if it be a very subtle one, and keep our mind engaged with the higher thoughts. We should not give an opportunity to the lower propensities and impulses, and avoid as much as possible the company of persons of the other sex as well as that of those of our own sex who do not lead a strictly moral life, at least during the period of our spiritual training.

*'Fill the mind with Vedantic thoughts until you fall asleep or until this body of yours drops off.'*⁸

We should not give an opportunity to the passions to sway us. It is the nature of the mind to think, and if we do not give good and pure thoughts to the mind by avoiding all old impure associations, it is bound to think of bad and impure ones. So be up and doing. Always be on your guard and follow the path intelligently and assiduously.

8. *Yoga Vasishtha.*

3. THE WAY TO THE DIVINE

*'Like the sharp edge of a razor is the Path of Self-Realization, so the wise say, difficult to cross and hard to tread.'*⁹

Moral Life—A Stepping Stone

The Vedantin says, 'It is not enough if you do selfless acts and lead a moral life. It is not enough if you scrupulously perform your duties. Something more is needed. You must attain to the Highest Divine Knowledge and thereby realize the Highest Goal yourself.'

Selfless acts and moral practices are only means and stepping stones to the necessary purification of the mind and understanding, without which the Highest Knowledge cannot be attained by anybody.

Every aspirant must follow the path of Knowledge that removes all ignorance and false sense of personality and I-ness. This ultimately makes him realize the highest truth himself.

A strictly moral life and selfless acts, as well as daily studies and spiritual practices, are needed to remove all the impurities lying hidden in our minds. We should all walk in such a way that we may ultimately attain the highest illumination.

The Ways of the Man Of Knowledge

At present we identify ourselves with the body, whereas the man of knowledge knows that the body is only a temporary dwelling place, not his true Self.

It is true that he too acts and performs what we call duties, but he is ever the witness of his acts. He is at all times fully conscious of his non-identity with the body. He never believes himself to be a man or a woman, a youth or an old man. He knows himself to be different from and eternally beyond the mind even. He is the Self.

He may have the feeling that he acts, but this feeling is not

9. *Katha Upanishad* 3.14.

like our feeling, but is only a highly attenuated one in which there is no trace of real identification. His ego is like a shadow that cannot bind him at all.

Unless we have achieved perfect control of ourselves, it is not possible for us to understand the man of realization. First we should become perfectly non-attached to everybody and to everything and have perfect control over our bodies and minds. We must attain outer and inner purity. Then alone would the highest knowledge dawn on us, and then alone can we come to understand the ways of the man of knowledge. Not before.

Test of True Knowledge

He alone can realise the 'actionless Self—the True being—as the only Reality, who has purified his body and mind through perfect ethical culture. Otherwise any self-deluded man can pretend to be 'actionless' and thereby simply muddle his impure chaotic brain. Merely claiming to have attained same-sightedness will not do. A man must be put to the test and must be able to pass the test also.

*'With the heart concentrated by Yoga, with the eye of evenness for all things, he beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.'*¹⁰

When anybody claims to be a man of knowledge and at the same time passionately seeks different forms of sense-enjoyment, and different worldly distractions, rejoices or grieves through attachment, there is something seriously wrong with his so-called knowledge. The perfected soul does not care to run after the will-o'-the-wisp of transient human relationships and momentary enjoyment. His undimmed vision of the Truth prevents him from even turning to what is false and illusory.

Therefore the aspirant should prevent his mind from running after human attachments and the vanities of the world, even though it may take many years of intense struggle. Christ says, *'Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.'*¹¹ We should

10. *Bhagavad-Gita*, 6.26.

never lightly and thoughtlessly pass over the teachings of the great divine personalities; rather, we should ponder over them deeply, and then put their instructions into practice.

Everything becomes simple the moment we ourselves become simple, and everything becomes difficult as long as we become or remain complex. Realization is very easily attained by one who is properly trained and qualified. The aspirant comes face to face with the truth as it is. It is directly perceived. The spiritual ideal should be made real and living, so that it ceases to be merely an ideal.

During the period of spiritual practice we should think only of God and ourselves. We should forget everything else. We should try to rid ourselves of all attachments, even the attachments to our nearest and dearest. Jesus said: *'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.'*¹²

Let us not worry too much about anything other than God. We should live with the divine alone. This, it is true, is not the ultimate stage to be reached, but it is a very necessary stepping stone to its attainment. Ultimately we must realize the same Divine Being in all, love all because of Him and through Him only.

First we must learn to see the Cosmic Being at the back of the personal, and then we come to see the Absolute at the back of the Cosmic. The Holy Personality, the Incarnation or the Personal God takes us, as it were, by the hand and reveals to us step by step the higher knowledge. The realization of the Absolute—the Transcendental—lies always through the realization of the Immanent Divine Principle. No one can take a long jump and reach the Absolute without the necessary preparation, however great may be its appeal to the intellect. The more we succeed in creating within ourselves a Cosmic outlook, the more we feel

11. St. Matthew 19:29.

12. St. Luke 14:26, 27.

that there is neither man nor woman, neither subject nor object, but that all is the One manifesting itself through different names and forms.

We must learn to see Him alone even in all awful, terrible things, too, without ever allowing the awful, the terrible to overpower our mind. He is even in the gross, the impure, awful, but these vulgar things must never be permitted to affect our mind or to take possession of it.

To the extent in which we succeed in seeing the One alone, we forget all limitations and pairs of opposites; we forget the whole play of the phenomenal world. And we can do this if we see that everything else but God is insignificant and fleeting, of secondary importance, a mere shadowy, unsubstantial, passing show. God is the only Reality at the back of everything.

Be Always Watchful

If we be really watchful and really try to lead the life of a sincere aspirant, we notice all the movements of our mind, all the thoughts and impulses that rise in it.

Ordinarily we are dull and so careless about all this that we only become aware of the perilous state we are in after the horse of our mind has thrown us into the ditch. But before reaching it, it has gone all the way to the ditch quite unperceived because of our carelessness and lack of right striving.

Hold the reins tight. All accidents on the path are due to carelessness. So be on your guard. Be always careful. Never leave your mind unwatched, not even for a single minute. This is the general rule for all aspirants, whatever be the path they may follow.

Pray for Divine Guidance

There is a fine prayer that says:

'O Lord, do thou take charge of the helm. My six boatmen (the passions) are very turbulent. Take my boat to the other shore. Do Thou become my ferry-man'.¹³

Sri Krishna has nothing to say to the thoughtless, to the idle,

13. A Bengali Song.

to the lukewarm and half-hearted, none of whom is willing to pay the full price for what he wants. Real spirituality is dynamic, not passive. Sri Krishna's message is full of true manliness, virility and strength. And without these coupled with strict ethical culture and steady spiritual practice, there cannot be anything that can be called religion.

There is nothing as precious as discrimination and dispassion and an intense yearning for God. So Sri Ramakrishna says, *'You must ever and ever discriminate the Real from the unreal, ever reason that He alone is Real and everything else is transient. Always pray to Him with a yearning heart.'*

In the Bhagavad-Gita the Lord does not take part in the fight, but He is the friend and counsellor of Arjuna—the fighter. Let not the Lord Himself fight, but let Him be the incentive and strength to fight, always. And let Him be our friend and charioteer as He was to Arjuna.

True Freedom

Only the perfectly non-attached and pure can be real workers, for they alone do not work like slaves driven by their personal affections and aversions, and they alone do not bring bondage, delusion and attachment to others.

Real freedom consists in freedom from love and hate, affection and aversion, and in perfect sense-control and mind-control. As soon as the body and mind are really controlled, we feel even physically that life is worth living, because it is then that we cease to be slaves and puppets of personal love and desires, and are able to rise to the true stature of a human being.

If the aspirant steadily tries to feel the Divine Presence within and to forget everything else but God, no great dangers will arise from people or objects. Temptations will drop off until they leave him for good.

The Divine More Real than the World

We should closely examine ourselves and find out whether we really want God. If we desire the love and affection of other persons, or the things of the world, we can do without Him. And if we feel quite happy and satisfied when these are granted to us, it is a sure sign that we do not want God. In such a case we

only deserve it if we do not get Him. So every aspirant should ask himself now and then whether it is really God he wants and not something else. And if it is really God he can be sure that He will come to him, for God always comes to the devotee who really seeks Him alone. Says Sri Ramakrishna, *'If the devotee moves towards God one step, He comes towards him ten steps.'*

The whole point is that we cannot take all this dream of the phenomenal to be absolutely real, and, at the same time, think of God. This cinema-show we see here is not the Reality.

Christ says: *'He that taketh not up his cross and followeth me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it; and he that shall lose his life for me shall find it.'*¹⁴

The way to Divine Realization lies through self-effort and striving. Immortality can be attained only by one who becomes dead to all worldly attachments even while living in the body.

Our whole trouble is that we believe this phenomenal world and all the people we see in it to be intensely real, but two realities cannot have room in us. So, first of all, a void is to be created in the heart of every aspirant, and once this is done, he can fill this void with the Divine.

The true sages and men of knowledge do not trouble themselves about the multiplicity of the world. They see the One alone in the many and they think of and care for the One alone. They find their greatest pleasure in Him, a pleasure never to be had through personal affection or sense-enjoyment. And the cessation of all desire means the realization of Divine Consciousness. When all attachments and loves fall away and die, the soul realizes its own eternal Divine Glory.

'With the heart concentrated by Yoga, with the eye of evenness for all things, he beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.'

*'He who worships Me, dwelling in all beings, being established in unity, whatever his mode of life, that Yogi abides in Me.'*¹⁵

14. St. Matthew 10:38, 39.

15. *Bhagavad-Gita* 6. 29, 31.

4. WARNINGS AND HINTS FOR THE SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT

Concentration and Meditation

Without previously having attained a certain amount of sublimation and purification of our feelings and desires, concentration becomes very dangerous in the case of persons who have not prepared themselves properly for the higher life. It may lead to very bad effects. In a way, we all make the mind concentrated, but then we do not know how to manipulate it. This concentrated mind will run after sensual enjoyment and all kinds of worldly distractions and objects with a greater intensity for having become concentrated. So if we do not know how to handle it in the right way, it becomes a great danger. It is far better not to have concentration if one does not attain sublimation and purification at the same time. Therefore the necessity of purity, of non-injury, truthfulness, continence, etc., in thought, word and deed, has to be stressed very much. Without sublimation of all our desires and feelings we cannot progress in the spiritual path. It is after we have followed a strict code of ethics and morals that we should attempt concentration. The concentrated mind, if it is not purified, becomes a veritable demon and creates untold trouble for the spiritual aspirant.

The concentration of a worldly man on his gross material gain, profit and enjoyment; the concentration of the scientist on the experiments, for instance, on the structure of the atom or the constitution of the plant; the concentration of the Yogi with his analysis of the ego and the non-ego,—all these are but different forms of concentration, judged from the objective standpoint. But considered from the subjective point of view their contents differ very widely, and they lead to altogether different experiences and results.

The yogic seeker after Truth, having no faith in God as ordinarily understood, may begin with concentration and meditation on gross elements associated with time and space. He may next take up the subtle elements as the objects of his concentration and meditation, at first within time and space, and later beyond

their limits. Proceeding further, he may first make the mind (the inner organ), and afterwards the ego, the objects of his concentration and meditation. Knowing the true nature of these objects he ceases to identify himself with these limiting adjuncts, and having come nearer to his self he enjoys a wonderful state of bliss and illumination.

The Vedantic aspirant who believes in the existence of the Divine, may at the beginning meditate on the physical form of some great, holy personality, image or picture, symbolic representation of the Divine, first associated with time and space, and then without these limitations. Advancing further, he may meditate on the 'heart' of the holy personality or on the Divine Mind, and gradually imbibe the noble attributes associated with it. Later, he may pass on to pure consciousness, individual or cosmic, and thereby succeed in purifying and expanding his impure, limited consciousness, come in touch with the Infinite Being within his self, and even proceed to the highest Divine Realization in which the meditator, like a salt-doll coming in contact with the ocean, gets merged into the Absolute Divine Principle. Thus beginning with different forms of concentration and meditation associated with individualised consciousness, he may reach with highest Super-consciousness—the Absolute Reality, the One Undivided Principle—in which all subject-object relationship, nay, all relativity is completely transcended.

By themselves concentration and meditation may not have any spiritual value. As said earlier, they may even be dangerous if the person who practises them has not already attained a certain amount of mental purification and does not continue the process of sublimation at the same time. Concentration and meditation become spiritually effective to the extent to which the mind is purified of its dross, of all the dirt and filth and bad impressions and tendencies it has been allowed to accumulate through successive evil thoughts and actions. With the attainment of great dispassion and purity alone can the aspirant take up successfully the higher forms of concentration and meditation, ultimately leading to the highest Divine experience and freedom.

The Godward Turn

Every average person has the capacity to practise concentration and meditation, although these are usually directed towards persons or objects of gain and enjoyment presented to us by the world. In order to follow the spiritual life, no new faculties need be created all of a sudden. The old capacities and tendencies are to be given a Godward turn without diminishing their intensity, and then the worldly man is transformed into a spiritual man. So the true devotee prays: *'Lord, may I think of Thee with that strong love which the ignorant cherish for the things of the world and, may that love never cease to abide in my heart.'*¹⁶

The ego asserts itself again and again. So, says Sri Ramakrishna, make it the servant of the Lord. Desires and passions refuse to be controlled. Give a Godward turn to them, maintaining their intensity, so advises the spiritual teacher. Instead of yearning for the company of men and women, yearn for union with the Divine. See Him in all, but take care that you do not cheat yourself. He alone can satisfy the hunger of the soul. He alone can fill its void and give it permanent peace and joy.

Instead of being angry with those standing in the way of your sense-enjoyments, gross or subtle, be angry with all the obstacles lying in the path to the Divine. Learn to be angry with your lower desires, with your turbulent passions, with your very anger and avoid them all as your great and relentless enemies. Instead of wishing to possess another 'human doll' or fleeting worldly wealth, covet the Divine and His inexhaustible wealth which can never be lost and is alone able to give abiding peace. So, says the Bhagavata: *'Lust, anger, fear, affection, fellowship and friendship, when directed towards the Divine Being, lead to union with the Divine.'*¹⁷

At the touch of the philosopher's stone all the base metals of desires and passions, of greed and anger, lose their evil nature and are transmuted into pure devotion bringing Bliss and Immortality to the soul. *'Even if the very wicked worships Me, — the*

16. *Vishnupurana* I 20.19.

17. *Bhagavata* X 29.15.

*Divine—with devotion to none else, he should be regarded as good, for he has rightly resolved. Soon does he become righteous and obtain eternal peace. Boldly canst thou proclaim that my devotee never comes to grief*¹⁸ says the Bhagavad-Gita.

Time and again, says Sri Ramakrishna, 'Give a Godward turn to all your tendencies.' Especially in the path of devotion, all desires and passions should be consciously given a higher direction without allowing them to decrease in intensity.

The Process of Self-Purification

Let us take for example the question of anger. Why are we angry? Only because someone or the other is standing in the way of what we think to be the object of our enjoyment. This is the only reason for all our anger. Always we find that anger is closely connected with the overstressed ego or a strong sense of personality and without this strong sense of the ego and an inordinate desire for enjoyment, physical and mental, anger could never even rise in our hearts. So this ego, this desire for enjoyment, is the only cause of our becoming angry. If we do not desire any enjoyment, if we do not expect anything from anybody, but just give and act without ever expecting any return, giving up all expectations, there can never be any rise of anger. So we should get angry with our desires for sense-enjoyment and not with the objects as such. This is the only practical way of uprooting anger and of eventually eliminating it. And without eliminating anger and other associated evils to a great extent, we can never make progress in spiritual life. Lust and anger are the two greatest obstacles in the spiritual path. So they should be carefully avoided by all aspirants.

Thus, whenever there is anger there is some attachment or other, some inordinate desire or affection, for, truly speaking, without attachment to some person or thing there can never rise any form of anger. It is only our thwarted will to enjoyment that brings anger. But this should be understood more in a subtle sense than in a gross one. It need not necessarily be any craving for the grosser forms of enjoyment that lies as the root-cause

18. *Bhagavad-Gita* 9.30, 31.

of anger.

It may happen that a person is fully convinced of the evil effects of desires, but still is not able to rid himself completely of them. What is such a person to do? How can he rise above them? He can direct them all, directly or indirectly, to the Divine, give every desire, every sensual impulse, every passion a Godward turn, consciously and knowingly, with an effort of the will. If he cannot rid himself of the inordinate desire for music, let him listen to devotional, holy music, and all the time he is so doing, let him think of the Divine. If his artistic sense and his desire to enjoy are very strong, he should take up some holy form of art and make that a stepping stone for rising to the plane of the Divine. If he is very fond of the sweet fragrance and beauty of flowers and wishes to enjoy them, let him pluck the flowers, offer them to the Divine and decorate the holy altar artistically with them. If he desires to love somebody, let him love the Divine in that person and be thereby directly drawn towards the Divine. If done consciously and knowingly, all this acts as a great controlling factor, as a great regulating agency, helping us in sublimating our desires and in giving them a higher and higher turn and attaining a greater purity. But even here the ultimate goal to be attained by the aspirant is perfect control and Divine realization. Everything else serves only as a stepping-stone to that. Following the graduated steps we must be able to rise to the Highest sooner or later.

Unless all the filth and foulness which have gathered in the mind are removed from it, from all nooks and corners, our problem is not really solved. If some light just enters a room through a chink in the door and the rest of the room remains shrouded in darkness and continues to be dirty, nothing is achieved. There is no real spiritual illumination if just a tiny bit of light enters our mind and all the dirt and filth lying there are pushed away for the time being into some far-off dark corner. In such a case the man remains just what he was before he had this kind of 'glimpse'. Mere theories and philosophies do not help us in any way, however wonderful they may be. What is essential is the practical application, the sublimation, the removal of all the dirt lying hidden in the dark corners of the mind, not the so-called perfect

control of all the mental modifications (vrittis) as some people would have it, which only leads to self-induced sleep in the beginner, but not to any form of real illumination. People talking of the complete stopping of all the mental modifications (vrittis) at the very beginning of their spiritual life do not know what they mean.

Very often there is in us a certain amount of external control, but as distinct from this there should be real internal control. If we are outwardly controlled, but are not able to stop the activity in the sense-organ or in the mind, we cannot attain higher forms of control. If the senses, so controlled, are still eager to come in touch with the sense-objects, real control has not been achieved, but only its outward form. Even then a step has been taken in the right direction.

One form of control is to draw oneself away completely from the objects of the senses. Another form is to allow the senses to come in touch with things that are pure and not likely to harm the aspirant by rousing fresh desires in him. This is the better and easier method for most people.

'Oh, my mind, worship the Mother and repeat day and night the great Mantra (the mystic word) that you have received from your Guru. When you lie down, think that you are meditating on Her. When you eat, think that you are offering food to Her. With great joy Ramprasad proclaims: Mother dwells in all bodies. When you walk in the city think that you are going round the Mother Divine.'

The idea of this beautiful song is this: To connect consciously every thought and every single act of our life either directly or indirectly with the Divine, to practise the presence of God at all times.

Recognition of the All-Pervading Divine Principle

The Divine is everywhere and in everything, but we should learn to discriminate and act accordingly. We should learn to become more wide-awake and conscious. We should be more reflective and act less on the impulse of the senses and of our instincts, be they good or bad. We are so careless and easy-going in all this, that we follow the opposite course and bring no

end of trouble to ourselves.

We should fully recognise this idea of Unity but in the right way. At present we recognise this half-heartedly. And properly speaking, without acquiring true dispassion and detachment we cannot recognise it whole-heartedly and act up to it. If we were convinced that the One Undivided Principle exists in all, we could not have any strong hatred or any animal love for anybody, separated from the rest, but would only turn our eyes towards the Principle at the back of all. This does not mean that we are to be like fools.. No, we still should know that the tiger is a tiger, in spite of its being a manifestation of this One Undivided Principle. So we should not go and shake hands with it. We should know the Principle to be present both in man and woman, but this knowledge should not prevent us from discriminating and being careful so long as we are on this phenomenal plane. We should see the One Principle at the back of the worldly person leading an impure and immoral life, but we should not go and have intimate talks with him. This is very, very essential. And if we do not act up to this rule, our feet will slip one day, and we shall seriously come to grief. The aspirant can never be careful enough in this. To the extent that we recognise the One Undivided Principle in all, our hatred, our so-called human love, our attachment, would be diminished and lose all strength and influence. Wherever we find in an aspirant the desire to mix indiscriminately with worldly-minded people and with members of the opposite sex, there is something seriously wrong. His desires for worldly things and enjoyment have not yet lost their tenacity and no purification has been attained. So, spiritual progress and realization are altogether out of the question.

Ordinarily our attachment clouds our whole understanding. We must be able to stress the spirit more than the form, more than the personalities and sense-objects, but so long as our craving for sense-enjoyment, our clinging to this little personality of ours, continues to cloud our understanding, we can never really think of this One Undivided Principle, and thus we go on committing the same old mistakes over and over again. So dispassion should be cultivated as much as possible by all aspirants. Without it nothing positive can be achieved.

The Way to Divine Realization—The Highest Goal of Life

Christ says: *'He who loves father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.'* And that is perfectly true. Not only that, but also he who allows another to love him more than the Divine is not worthy of God. He who allows another to be more attracted by him than by the Divine is not worthy of God and cannot attain Him. When we make another person love us in such a way by not being sufficiently reserved, we are not worthy of God. So, in this, too, we should be very careful and be wide awake. We feel flattered, no doubt, we like being attractive to others, we like being loved by others as objects of enjoyment. But we are too impulsive and too unreflective to know that from the spiritual standpoint we create trouble both for ourselves and for others and prevent our progress. We should be dignified and well guarded. We should take such an attitude that others do not dare approach us in a wrong way. In short, we should try to possess greater and greater discrimination.

Dispassion has both its negative and its positive aspect. We should try to disconnect ourselves from others as much as possible and then connect ourselves with the Divine, so that later on all connection with others can be established only through the Divine, but never again in a direct way. Human love connected with the Divine can be gradually transmuted, but if it is not so connected, it degenerates and always ends in disaster and misery, whatever we may think to the contrary. All our relationships, if they be direct relationships, are only born with the body and associated with others through connections of the body only. There is nothing lasting in them that could ever bring peace and real blessedness to any of us.

It is really very strange that people suffer so much and still they are not brought to their senses, but cling to all these false identifications. Very often we forget the goal and take the means to be the goal. The whole world is bound by the desire for wealth and by the desire for sex. But we should learn to develop a new attitude towards both. We make money the highest goal of our life, and then we come to grief. We make love of a man or a woman the ultimate aim of our life, and we end our life in misery. We should become introspective and know what the real goal of

life is and then try to realize it.

Ordinarily there is in us such an awful identification with our body and our senses and passions that we just brush aside God. Whenever there is skepticism with reference to the Divine, there is some inordinate clinging to the self and to the senses and their objects because of which God is pushed out. So long as the individual is full of sense-enjoyment, desire for possession, of egoism and vanity, God has no place in his life. The Divine is pushed away by our creature-consciousness. If the mind becomes perfectly free from desires and passions, one realizes the Divine then and there. So if we do not realize God, if we do not even get a glimpse of the Truth, we need not ask why it is so. We should know that in the conscious and in the subconscious mind there are still strong desires in us, and we should first rid ourselves of these obstructions. So long as we allow them to remain, the question of realizing the Divine does not even arise.

We should break the sway of our impulses over us. The very moment these impulses rise in us, we should try to expand ourselves, for then these impulses at once disappear just as the waves disappear in the ocean. The man who knows how to expand his consciousness, who knows how to attain a higher form of consciousness, is not affected by such impulses that rise in the mind. One of the most effective means to rise above one's impulses is to come in touch with the Divine Consciousness, with the Infinite Presence which is always in us. And without knowing how to rise above our instincts, without knowing how to control and curb our passions and cultivate true renunciation and dispassion, without having tried to attain the purity of mind and body, there can be no spiritual life for anyone. So we should become more reflective and more discriminating. We should not be inconsistent in our thinking and in our actions. There should never be any haziness in the Vedantic aspirant. Vagueness and indefiniteness have no place in true spiritual life. Everything should be clear. We must have definite and right emotions and feelings, definite and right actions, and then only can we proceed to the Divine Goal and realize it.

5. STEPS TO MEDITATION AND SELF-REALISATION

Conditions for Meditation

For meditation and for all forms of spiritual practice the first point is a steady posture (Asana), usually a sitting posture. As Patanjali says: *'Any posture that is steady and pleasant will do.'* Squatting, no doubt, is very helpful, because the weight of the body is perfectly balanced in that posture, but it must be easy; otherwise it disturbs the mind of the person trying to do spiritual practices. For us, in India, it is natural, but for many Western people, it may take quite a lot of practice, and some may not even be able to manage it at all. Anyway, for those who can, it is the best posture for spiritual practice. Those who find it hard or do not care for it, may sit in any way they like, but keeping the chest, neck and the head erect without fail.

The right mood is essential for all forms of spiritual practice and without spiritual practice there never will be anything like spiritual life. The early Christians knew this perfectly well. So did many of the great mystics of the Middle Ages. But now the whole tradition of spiritual culture almost seems to be lost and must be revived. Without ethical culture and mental purity we can never come in close touch with the Divine.

In the case of a beginner there is always the great danger of his mind falling below the threshold of consciousness. This is to be avoided under all circumstances.

Some of the Virtues to be Practised in Spiritual Life

1. 'Ahimsa' or Non-Violence

The spiritual seeker should not harbour any ill-feeling towards others, whether they are good or bad. Realize how these ill-feelings disturb the mind. With a disturbed mind it is not possible to have any form of concentration. It is not possible for us to have concentrated minds and at the same time to cherish evil thoughts against anybody. I am speaking of high concentration which takes one nearer and nearer to Divine Experience.

2. Truthfulness

The spiritual aspirant must try to be truthful in thought, word and deed. One given to lying and hypocrisy can never succeed in spiritual practice.

3. Non-Stealing

This must never be taken in the gross sense only. Anything that we wish to possess at the cost of anybody else, anything that we get by unfair means from another, is stealing.

4. Purity

Physical as well as mental purity is absolutely necessary. Sometimes we commit the mistake of stressing only physical purity, because it is so much more difficult to achieve true mental purity. There are many who satisfy themselves by taking baths or observing outward forms but do not trouble to have a pure mind. It is, however, impossible to concentrate a dirty mind on higher things.

5. Self-Control

One who abandons himself to any form of sense-enjoyment cannot have any calmness or peace of mind. So he cannot practise well however hard he may try. And there is this great point to note: Before the aspirant takes up the practice of posture, he must have already gone through the whole of this ethical culture. So high do the teachers of spiritual life value purity and non-attachment.

To sum up

Now let us sum up what we have to do when we begin our spiritual practice.

We must practise a steady posture. We must calm the mind. We must make salutations to all the teachers of the world or to one particular teacher, if this appeals to us more.

It is always helpful to pray not only for our own spiritual welfare but also for that of others. Pray intensely for concentration, calmness, for singleness of purpose, and for your own spiritual welfare as well as that of other beings, so that they too may become pure, calm and concentrate on and devote to the higher life.

Rhythmic Breathing

There are some people who find rhythmic breathing very helpful. Mind and breath are always interrelated and always act on each other. But mere breathing exercise is not enough. Along with the breath we must give strong, spiritual suggestions to the mind. Inhale purity, fill yourself with purity. Inhale calmness, fill yourself wholly with peace. Inhale dispassion and renunciation. Burn away all attachment, passion and desire. Inhale strength and destroy all weakness and fear. Go on giving these intense suggestions to the mind again and again before coming to your real practice.

The Centre of Consciousness

After that, the thought of the Divine must be taken up. Where to think of the Divine? Where to have the centre of one's consciousness? Have it either in the head or in the heart. These two centres are safe, for everybody. Never should a centre below the heart be taken ordinarily. If we do not consciously raise the nerve-current at least up to the level corresponding more or less to the place of the physical heart, no spiritual meditation becomes possible. This conscious raising of one's nerve currents leads one beyond all sensual temptations and establishes one firmly in moral and ethical culture. For very dry and over-intellectual people it is advisable to take the heart. For emotional people the heart-centre may be dangerous and so the centre in the head may be advocated. But here instructions can be imparted to individuals only after having considered all their physical and psychic conditions and needs.

Think intensely of the particular centre and imagine it to be a centre of Divine Consciousness. Have the thought that Divine Consciousness that is within you is also in everyone. Individual consciousness is part and parcel of a consciousness which is undivided and indivisible.

In the beginning you may think of it as light, but really speaking what is meant is the light of intelligence, and this Divine Light which is in you pervades at the same time the whole universe and is one and eternally indivisible. This body of ours is like a temple of the Divine and, remember, each body is such a temple.

Having done all this, try to merge your consciousness in the Divine Consciousness, as in the case of the 'salt-doll' getting merged in the sea. This body-consciousness stands in the way of spiritual unfoldment, and as soon as we try to merge it in Divine Consciousness we get the idea that the soul is not the body.

Contents of Meditation

Meditation should not be focussed on the void. There should be no creating of a void in the beginner. This is very dangerous. Meditation must have some definite, positive spiritual content. Those, who find meditation on the formless too abstract, should centre their feelings on some holy personality. This is very effective in two ways; it leads them away from their too personal affections and aversions, and at the same time, intensifies their feelings in a good sense, makes them more definite, and leads them on to the light of the Spirit. If ever any picture of any person you used to love or to hate troubles you, set a picture of a holy form you have chosen as your ideal against that picture and set the feeling you have for your ideal against that which you have for that person, be it affection or aversion. Vivid pictures and memories must be counteracted by vivid pictures, worldly feelings by stronger and purer feelings.

One or the other of these different meditations on non-anthropomorphic symbols may be practised:-

1. The aspirant imagines he is like a bird flying in the infinite sky of Divine Consciousness without anything to stand in the way anywhere.

2. The aspirant imagines he is a fish swimming in the one undivided and eternal indivisible ocean of Existence, Knowledge, Bliss, without any obstruction whatever.

3. The aspirant is like a full pot immersed in water. The Divine, like water, is both inside and outside.

4. The aspirant is like an empty pot floating in ether. The Divine, like ether, is both inside and outside.

5. The aspirant imagines himself to be a point of self-conscious light immersed in the infinite and indivisible circle or sphere

of Light.

You identify yourself with the point of light, and then you feel it to be a part of an infinite sphere of light, and after that everything becomes just light, which is everywhere. Nothing but light is left. Either make this point of light expand or get it merged in the Infinite or let it move wherever it pleases, till it merges in the one infinite Light. Try to expand your consciousness during the time of your meditation. Keep your body-consciousness hanging on a peg, as it were, as least for the time being. Raise counter-currents against all your false conceptions and feelings which lie at the root of all your troubles. All such ideas as 'I am so and so, I am a husband, a wife, a child, a lover, etc.' come from this mistaken identification with the non-self.

Sublimation

There is too little attempt at sublimation. We must all learn to think in terms of the Spirit. Never stress the body-aspect. Learn not to think of yourself as a man or woman. It is very necessary and helpful to rise above body-consciousness as much as possible. Sublimation is of the greatest importance. Think intensely, 'I am not a man, I am not a woman, I am not even a human being. I am the Spirit, I am the Spirit.'

Repeat all these grand passages from Sankara's works. He says,

'I am neither a human being, nor a god; I am the Self, the Infinite Consciousness.'

'I am neither the mind nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor the mind-stuff. I am neither the senses of hearing, taste, smell, touch or sight, nor am I earth, fire or air. I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute. I am the Self, I am the Self.'

*'I am neither masculine, nor feminine, nor neuter, I am the Beneficent Being, the Light Supreme.'*¹⁹

Just blast the sense of false personality with the thoughts contained in these grand passages from Sankara. Bombard the

19. *Hastamalaka Stotra 2*, Sankara: *Nirvana Satka, Nirvana Manjari*.

false ego at the time of meditation. It must be blasted and if it does not at least become attenuated nothing can be achieved. So go on repeating:

'I am neither the body nor the senses, neither the mind nor the ego, neither the vital energy nor the intellect. Husband, wife, child, wealth or property is away from me. I am the Witness, the Eternal Indwelling Spirit, the Being Beneficent.'

'I am the light of the Atman, the light that is inside, the light that is outside, the light that is the inner Self. I am the Supreme Being, the Light of light, the Light Self-Existent.'

*'I am the Being Resplendent, and none else. I am Brahman – the Infinite-I, the Spirit. I am not subject to misery. I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute, eternally free by nature.'*²⁰

And then there is the beautiful prayer in the Upanishads:

*'May my body become pure. May I be free from impurity and evil. May I realize myself as the Light Divine. May my mind become pure. May I be free from impurity and evil. May I realize myself as the Light Divine. May my soul become pure. May I realize myself as the Light Divine.'*²¹

Ordinarily, in all our human relations, we commit the mistake that we wish to take up direct connections with others. We ourselves, as bubbles, try to come in touch with other bubbles. The two bubbles drifting in the ocean just come close to each other through the actions of the waves, but they think there should be direct connection between them, and so they cling to each other passionately, and commit the worst mistake of their life. The same action that has brought them together, will, one day, tear them apart, perhaps never to allow them to meet again. And this always means untold misery, and will always happen again so long as we human fools try to come in direct touch with other bubbles, instead of thinking of the ocean and being in touch with all through the ocean. All bubbles are bound to burst sooner or later. So there can be no stability in any bubble-relation. We should do away with vague romance and childish dreams and

20. Sankara: *Advaita Pancharatna, Brahmanandavalimala Brahmanuchintanam.*

21. *Mahanarayana Upanishad, 66.6-8.*

see things as they are. We must only have relationship with others through the Divine and it is only because we want to have direct relations with others, that all this misery comes again and again.

6. SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Tenacity needed in Spiritual Life

True religion is only for the chosen few. We should look upon it as a great fortune that for some reason or other our mind possesses an attraction for the higher and eternal things. And so we should see that we gradually and steadily proceed along the higher path, never flagging till we reach the goal. Our spiritual fervour is to be maintained with great care. But very often we run the risk of becoming slack. This, to many, means the end of spiritual striving after they have taken to the Spiritual Life for a certain time. Their minds are too restless and too outgoing to keep up the spiritual fervour and intensity for a long time, and to go on steadily and persistently with their practices, daily readings and studies. So we should be on our guard.

*'He is the only One that is stainless, sinless, changeless and unnameable, and is pure and Divine. There is no second. Whoever knows Him becomes He Himself.'*²²

To Know Him, that is the point. He cannot be known in a day, just after a little spiritual practice done in a haphazard, slovenly way.

To the true and steady devotee the Lord reveals His Glory. And the devotee's task is to be in tune with the Divine, with the Infinite, to attune his heart and soul to the Truth. Truth cannot be seen with these physical, human eyes. We cannot know the highest Truth without the help of a pure heart and of a purified mind. The highest Truth can be realized only by those who have the vision to see the subtle, whose mind is calm and one-pointed, whose heart is purified. The spiritual man finds the ultimate solution of the problems of life by diving into the very depths of his own being, by coming in touch with Truth, by coming face to face with Truth, not by simply arguing about it. There is within us something that is the eternal witness of whatever takes place outside and inside our mind. And unless we realize this per-

22. *Narayana Upanishad.*

manent element within ourselves, it is not possible for us to have even a glimpse of the permanent element outside ourselves.

Japa or Repetition of the Divine Name

The great task is: How to know the knower? How can that be known by which everything else is known? This is the great question of the Upanishad. In order to be in touch with the perennial source of all waters we must begin digging in our own ground, not in the ground of our neighbour. And we need not dig up the whole earth; it is enough if we bore a deep channel in ourselves.

Faith is most essential before taking up Japa. It does not matter if, at first, it becomes mechanical to some extent. The beginner finds that his centre of consciousness is continually shifting, going up, coming down and so on. This is most difficult for every aspirant. With infinite patience he should go on with his Japa at regular hours whatever be the result at the beginning. This is the only way to attain success in due course.

You must never allow yourself to get into a drowsy state during your attempts at meditation or your Japa. This is most dangerous. Sleep, drowsiness and meditation should never be connected in any way. If you feel very drowsy, while you are doing your Japa, just get up and walk to and fro in the room, till this drowsiness leaves you. When the mind is awfully restless and outgoing, we should tenaciously persist in our Japa, even do it mechanically, without giving in to this restlessness. In that way a part of our mind at least, would be engaged in Japa. Thus the whole mind cannot become or remain restless.

Imagine that along with each repetition of the name of your Ishta (the chosen object of meditation) or of your Mantra (mystic sound symbol of the Divine) your whole body, mind and senses are becoming purified. This faith must be made very firm because in a way this is the idea underlying Japa. The Ishta's name soothes one's nerves, calms the mind and brings about helpful changes in the body. When the mind is in a state of great tension or depression, begin at once humming the name and thinking of the Divine. Imagine that this is bringing about a balanced state, a new rhythm in the body and in the mind. Actually

you will feel how it soothes the whole nervous system, how it stops the outgoing tendency of the mind more and more. Rhythmic, regular breathing brings about calmness, a certain balance in the nervous system, and this again facilitates your spiritual practices. The holy thought also brings about a certain harmony in the body and the mind. Think that with each repetition of the Name of your Ishta or your Mantra you are becoming purer and purer. You cannot perceive the effects at once, but if you go on for some time, steadily and persistently, you will feel it, and then after some years you will be astonished to find what a great change has come over you. There is a great scope for experiment. This body is to be polarised and made rhythmic, at least to some extent, and the nerves, too, are to be polarised and made rhythmic. Through practice we must make the body, the mind, the breath, all of them, rhythmic. Then only can we come to have a proper mood for spiritual practices and meditation, and can do them in right earnest and in the proper way. Everything else belongs to the preliminary steps.

While doing your breathing exercises, try to give strong suggestions to your mind:- I am breathing in purity, breathing out all impurity. I am breathing in strength, breathing out all weakness. I am breathing in calmness, breathing out all restlessness. I am breathing in freedom, breathing out all bondage. These suggestions may be given while even doing your Japa. They are very helpful in preparing the ground for the real practices.

Hints for Meditation

Everything is difficult in this path. Visualization is difficult, control of the mind is difficult and meditation is difficult. Japa, too, is difficult, if done properly, but a little less so. So, new strength must be gained. And for this the suggestions mentioned are very helpful. Make use of the great power of sound and sound-symbols. You must try to feel that the Holy Name, the Holy Mantra, is purifying and elevating you. In due course you yourself will see that the rhythmic repetition of the Name to be the most essential part of practices in the life of the beginner.

Given here are certain hints for meditation. Immediately after having sat down for meditation, let the devotee say, with folded

hands, 'whether impure or pure, under all conditions whoever remembers the Lord, becomes purified inwardly and outwardly', and he will feel purity in body and mind. He may next imagine the individualised soul rising from the lower centres of the body to the centre in the head and becoming united with the Universal Spirit there. Let him further think that both the gross and subtle bodies and all things physical and mental have become merged into the Absolute, and he has become one with it. Next let him come down to the centre of consciousness in the heart and think that there has emerged out of the One ocean of Light, the effulgent Divine Form, the object of worship and meditation – and also the worshipper's own spiritualised form, freed of all impurities. Let the aspirant now worship and meditate on the Divine and also do Japa for some time, thinking of the Formless which permeates both the Holy Form and his own. Finally let him feel the Divine Presence both inside and outside. Let him pray:-

'Being subject to the impulses of the vital energy, intellect and the body, whatever sin has been committed by me in the state of waking, dream and deep sleep, in thought, word and deed, by means of the different organs of sense, may all that be offered to Brahman. I surrender myself with all that is mine at the Feet of the Lord.'

The right kind of prayer should have great intensity, concentration and one-pointedness. Without these, no prayer will be of any great avail.

Always take the help of the sound-symbol, for sound and thought are interrelated. Thoughts manifest themselves in different sounds. Now we find that the Divine Idea finds its expression in different Holy names, and there is an inseparable connection between the Holy Idea and the sound. That is why we make use of the sound in our spiritual practice. It becomes easier for us to call up the Holy thought with the help of the sound. We should see that we pass from the sound-symbol to the thought-plane; otherwise the sound does not help us. First comes external worship, and the next spiritual practice to be taken up by every aspirant is Japa and meditation, and finally the experience of the Divine Being everywhere, with or even without closing one's eyes. This is the highest stage, and one

can only attain it after having passed through all the previous ones step by step.

Even if a great tempest is about to rise in your mind and sweep you off your feet, go on with your Japa. If need be repeat the Holy Name aloud or at least audibly to you. Very often in a very disturbed state, silent, mental repetition is not enough. Try to establish a definite relationship between the sound-symbol and the Holy thought, so that the thought comes up the very moment you touch the key of the sound-symbol. The same thing h you touch a key, the corresponding letter is printed on the sheet.

So the moment you touch your sound-symbol the corresponding thought should arise in you and come to your help. But for this, a very definite association between the two must be established through systematic daily practice.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Japa is just like a chain. From one link we pass on to the next, and finally we pass on to God.' Japa is stressed in all paths of spiritual practice. And you should see that your Japa becomes better and better in quality. You should do your Japa consciously, intelligently, and have more and more of it as days pass. Always think of the chain and try to get hold of the next link. Thus you approach the Divine more and more and prepare yourself for meditation.

7. THE SELF IS TO BE REALISED

Indwelling Purity

*'The Self is to be realised. It should be heard of from the teacher and the scriptures, then reflected on with the help of reasoning, and then steadfastly meditated upon.'*²³

The best way of attaining real purity is to think we are pure by nature, and never to think of sin, of impurity, of weakness, of imperfection. No. We are all perfect by nature, but we have forgotten our eternal perfection and thereby go on committing no end of mistakes. But as soon as we regain the memory of our true essence, impurity, sin, and imperfection become nothing more than so many dreams.

This purity wells up from within, because it is ours and has been ours from times immemorial. It never comes from outside. It is not super-added to our nature, nor is it newly created. Spiritual life means this growth from within, though really speaking it is not even a growth, but only an unfoldment, for unless perfection and purity were inside and belonged to our essence, we could never be saved. The Divine is in us and works in us, as the light is in the air, as fire is in the red-hot iron ball; and as soon as we come to feel this, as soon as we get a glimpse of our real nature, of the Indwelling Principle in all, all weakness, falsehood, wrong thinking and wrong actions gradually begin to disappear in our life. Good thoughts, deeds and words are great aids, but they alone, without steady spiritual practice and awakening are not enough, and they can never transform us into something which we are not.

Examine Yourself closely

We should think of ourselves as souls, never as men or women, never in terms of relations of sex. We must dig up the wrong foundations and destroy them and build new right ones. Only after having done so can we begin to raise the new structure of spiritual life.

23. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.5.

Strong nerves are absolutely necessary for spiritual life. Both strong nerves and the storing up of energy are necessary conditions for success. There are many storms on the spiritual path of which you have no inkling now. Every aspirant should carefully study his own mind when left to himself. He should find out what persons, desires and tendencies occupy his mind when there are no outward stimuli. Smuggle in the Divine in some way or other when the mind is trying to deceive you, as it always does. This mind is to be watched constantly. When you find that it is careless in small daily things of life it is sure to be careless in meditation and the other practices as well. That alone which conforms to the Spiritual life is beneficial and is to be done by you.

There must be a completely new attitude towards ourselves, towards all men and women in the outside world, towards all mental pictures and memories in our mind. We should feel sorry when an unclean thought wells up in our mind, but this should spur us on all the more and make us more determined than ever. We should be thankful that we have come to know that such unclean things exist in our mind. If we had not known this, we could never fight them successfully. The greater the troubles, the more manly should be the fight, the greater our determination to remove them, the greater our relentless tenacity.

If really there is dirt and filth in our mind, let us know this fact, and know how bad it is. To know an evil as it is, is to win half the battle. It is always good for us to know the possibilities of our mind to do great mischief, so that we may be on our guard and become fully aware of its wily attempts at deception. What a terrible amount of misery man creates for himself and others by giving in to these impulses of lust, anger, greed, violence etc., etc. And all these impulses continue to lie deeply hidden in our mind, too, if we do not come to know them and annihilate them. Unless we turn our mind consciously to the higher life, it will always remain full of these impurities and troubles.

I am the Spirit free from all taints and impurities'

Never lose sight of the fact that the purificatory stages and disciplines are but phases leading to spiritual life but are not

spiritual life itself and that true spiritual life is not a negation, but the greatest and most fearless affirmation possible. It is the affirmation of our very own Self, the Divine Principle and Being in us not subject to any limiting adjuncts, not subject to sin or ignorance, not bound to anything, not fettered by anything, devoid of all forms of desires and wants, eternally free, eternally untainted by impurity and all the pairs of opposites, and eternally full of the highest Bliss and knowledge. 'I am He' is the greatest affirmation of Truth ever taught and ever realised in the process of evolution.

True Non-Violence

Let us try to be as hard as possible against ourselves, without any unnecessary or destructive self-condemnation. We should always use our discrimination even with regard to non-violence. The scorpion, no doubt, follows its own law of being when it stings, but we, too, should follow our own law and protect others from its sting if we can do so.

Buddha taught: 'Hatred cannot be conquered by hatred. It is by love that hatred can be conquered.' Christ taught: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you.' Evil can never be conquered by violence. The only weapon that conquers all is love and loving kindness to all creatures.

And what an amount of strength and undauntedness true nonviolence requires! We should not be weak, we should not be cowards, but we should at the same time be kind. The person who does not retaliate, however much he may be hurt, however much he may be offended by others, is a person of invincible strength, and he alone is a real man. All others are miserable cowards hiding their abject fear and cowardice under a cloak of braggartism, physical and mental, and never rising to the stature of real men.

Much depends on the regularity of our daily spiritual practices. Very often we are so careless in this. Without steady daily practice nothing can be attained in spiritual life. Spiritual life must be a life of dedication to the highest, a life of consecration, sacrifice and one-pointedness. So we should be more wide-

awake and more careful about our own thoughts for our own benefit and for the benefit of others to whom our thoughts, if they be thoughts of lust or greed or violence, are worse than poison gas, and the havoc our impure thoughts we contaminate people whom we do not even know. By our good thoughts we help others in their own struggle after purity.

It is essential for us to create the right mood before sitting for meditation. There must be steady regular practice. Let us rather die in the spiritual struggle than give it up. What does it matter if die? What really matters is that we realize the Truth, that we attain our full stature, our true being. If we struggle our utmost, if we do our utmost, we have fulfilled our duty. Then the rest must be left to the Divine. Here true self-surrender and resignation to the Lord must have their place.

True Spiritual Visions

In the beginning of our spiritual practice we do not get any spiritual experience, because that is only the 'scavenging' period when loads and loads of dirt and impurities have to be removed. Evil thoughts arise even if the mind has already been made strong to a certain extent, but then they no longer harm it and can easily be conquered. If a boat has a good and experienced helmsman it can face the storm without the fear of being lost. Unless this phenomenal world has been effaced completely, desires and passions, attraction and aversion, can never be annihilated in their subtlest form.

*'When he realizes the Atman as dwelling in all things and finds all things dwelling in his own self, the sage ceases to hate.'*²⁴

Until then the passions may still rise in the mind, but if we have strengthened our moral fibre through spiritual culture we are able to withstand them and drive them away. Until we feel the coming of grace, we must strive. Self-effort is indispensable in spiritual life. We can never attain real self-surrender unless we have really strived our utmost.

We can have a vision of the right kind only when we possess

24. *Isavasya Upanishad*, 6.

a very strong, healthy, chaste, pure body that is really able to stand all the reactions consequent upon such a vision, and when we possess a wholly purified and dispassionate mind and true spiritual insight that makes us feel we are neither the body nor the mind, nor men or women, but spiritual entities distinct from all these.

True vision, even with form, always contains the spiritual element and reflects the glory of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. And remember, it is always better to be a dualist with realization than a monist without realization. True vision with form is a step leading to higher and higher stages of spirituality, but theoretical monism without any realization leaves *you* nowhere. The Absolute is very far off, and what we are concerned with is qualified non-dualism at best that we are all parts of the Infinite Whole. If all the senses are stilled and controlled, in perfect condition, and if the mind, too, is in that state, then alone true vision becomes possible, not otherwise. There is a very marked difference between the hallucination of an overheated brain and the gaining of true vision. One test is that we attain more and more purity and greater and greater dispassion, holiness and concentration as the result of true spiritual experience.

When the devotee has caught a glimpse of the Transcendental, he no longer troubles and bothers about the right breeze, whether it is a hot breeze or a cold breeze or no breeze at all. He need not unfurl his sails any longer. Two other tests of vision are, bliss and certitude. Then the mind knows the experience is real. Then something in us knows it is true and it carries with it its own unmistakable light and conviction.

Daily Routine

There must be a fixed daily routine. Do Japa, repetition of the Holy Name with meditation on the Divine—1000 to 2000 times. You must have such a minimum, and that minimum is to be done and finished under all circumstances. In the morning never touch food before having done this minimum of your spiritual practice. On no plea whatever should we stop doing it. Our mind is now more or less like an untrained horse. It must be broken mercilessly and tactfully as a young horse is broken. Always be

on your guard against all dirty vibrations of greed and sensuality around you.

“Think of Me and fight, carry on your fight, and through My grace you will be able to vanquish the enemy and find peace,” says Sri Krishna. ²⁵And this fight takes subtler and subtler forms as we progress, and thereby becomes all the more difficult and relentless. The battle must be fought till the very end. Our struggle must become more and more intense. The subtler the world, the subtler and greater the struggle. Even if a bad thought rises in a dream, you must find no excuse for yourselves. Have some holy picture and some holy thought as the first thing and the last thing, directly before working and directly before falling asleep. Never think of other people or objects before having had this holy picture and holy thought before you and fill your mind with them. This is very necessary for the beginner.

Ramprasad, the great mystical poet of Bengal, sings: ‘O My Mind, why do you not put up a fence round the tree with the Mother’s Name?’

At the beginning we take it to be just a name and nothing more, but this name has its subtler aspect and takes us to the Divine. We cannot recognize its infinite potentiality in the beginning. When we do our practices steadily and regularly for some time, this mind of ours becomes tutored, trained, but even then, at times, (just like a trained horse) it tries to revolt. We are not yet sensitive enough. We do not clearly recognize our own motives. Sometimes our mind is allowed to find nice plausible explanations for our unspiritual doings and thoughts, no end of them, just to deceive us as is always the case in the untrained person. Tell your mind. ‘Let me see that you break down, if it complains against the great strain of the practices.’ If we try to lead the higher life, we should not mind our dying even if we really are to die in the attempt. And the mind will go on revolting and complaining for a long time. It says: ‘Look here, today you have had very little sleep. This may be bad for your nerves. Take care that you do not get a nervous breakdown. Stop your practices for a

25. *Bhagavad-Gita*, 8.7, 59, 56.

day or two.' Just give it some good kicks in such a case, whip it nicely, be very hard with this bad mind. Just as a horse gets whipped when it lies down with the rider, so you must give your mind a good thrashing if it revolts.

Regarding Asana (posture) you better have two different ones, one besides the principal one, so that you can have a change as soon as your body begins to hurt you. The central theme of spiritual practice is meditation and everything else is but a preparation for the mind to have the right mood. When the right mood comes, meditation becomes very easy. In India there is now a revival of practising different asanas, and they are said to be eighty-two in number. But it is not at all necessary for spiritual life to practise all those eighty-two asanas. The ease of an asana can only be realized after sufficient practice. Real asana is the posture in which the body feels steady and restful.

Some six hours of good sleep is enough for the ordinary spiritual aspirant. Eight hours is generally too much. Sleep, as such, is not so necessary as the conscious minimizing of our nervous and mental tension at all times of the day. In order to be able to meditate, we must be able to relax. We should first learn how to decrease the tension of our nerves. Very nervous people can never meditate. After that we should get control over our sentiments and feelings, even if they be good and pure, or elevated ones. By developing the spirit of self-surrender we should make the mind calm, attuned to the Infinite, and thereby free from all unnecessary anxiety and nervous and mental tension. If we are able to do this, we feel a sort of peace even long before being able really to meditate, a kind of rest and relaxation, physical as well as mental. We should make it a point to relax our nerves and mental tension as much as possible before our attempts at meditation. It is only with relaxed body and mind that real meditation can be practised.

Everything must be definite, clear. You must know how to sleep and what to do with your waking time. Learn how to awake, how to fall asleep, what thoughts to have just before falling asleep. The life of the spiritual aspirant must be conscious and regulated in all its phases and aspects without becoming mechanical in any way. Before sleep make your mind calm by

filling it with some very holy and pure thoughts of the Divine or of a great Spiritual Personality, in a dispassionate and unstrained way.

Everything depends on the purity of the body and chastity of thought, and unless this is brought about, our tension can never be reduced. Our sleep is undisturbed only if we know how to think and feel properly in the waking state. The unconscious is to be influenced through the conscious, through conscious effort.

Kali, The Mother

Hideous as some aspects of Kali are, do you find Nature pleasant? Do you find all the manifestations of life pleasant? Is Nature not very often hideous too? Be consistent in your thinking, and do not cover the festering evil-smelling sores with fragrant flowers. Kali is represented with four hands, one boon-giving, one protecting, one destroying holding the sword, and one holding the decapitated head. And destruction is nothing more than going back to the cause. Thus Kali is the most perfect and the most significant symbol of the whole cosmic process ever conceived.

Everybody wants to worship the pleasant aspect of the Divine, but the terrible aspect has its place, too, and you see it everywhere in nature if you only dare to open your eyes and look at things without prejudice and passion. But what Mother really likes most of all is the 'cremation ground', the heart in which all the dross of life has been burnt to ashes.

The Tantrikas wanted to take an undaunted and synthetic view of the totality of life. Why only worship life? Why do you not worship death? Is there any reason in worshipping life only? Be consistent. The Truth is to go beyond all life and death. And this idea the best of the Tantrikas tried to perfect in every way. The symbol of Kali may be hideous to look at, although it has got its pleasant aspect also, but it is the greatest symbol that can be used.

Is our modern civilization all pleasant? Does it not imply death also? Is poison gas pleasant? Are guns pleasant? Are lust and greed conducive to peace? And do you not find unpleasantness,

ugliness and destruction in nature? Are not some of our thoughts hideous? Swami Vivekananda says:

“He who misery loves, And hugs the form of Death, Enjoys destruction’s dance, To him the Mother comes.”

Our heart is to be made consciously a cremation ground, the cremation ground of all our attachments, of all our impurities, of our selfish personality, of all wrong identifications with a man-form or a woman-form. This eternal struggle is the worship of the Lord, the only true worship there is, and should never unnerve you. Our trouble is that we worship only a God who would give us pleasure, sense-satisfaction and material blessing. But is not also misery His? Everywhere we worship the God who is full of boons and the giver of boons. And as soon as we think of a Thunder we are afraid. Siva as giver of boons is all right. Siva dancing the mad dance of destruction is horrible. Why? There is no rhyme or reason in our attitude!

In the name of a good and kind God the ‘faithful’ have brought so many people under the banner of Christ by bloodshed and unheard of cruelty, through force, through torture, through bribery, and are condemning three-fourths of the human race to eternal perdition. Whatever it be, in all popular forms of religion, God is God only when there is creation, when there is preservation; but when there is destruction, God has no hand in it. No, God is God only when He is God in all aspects, when He is the God of creation, preservation and destruction, and above all the God who is beyond all these.

So the present day reaction against the religion of a merely good God is to be welcomed. When you give the modern mind a good and kind God, it will throw Him overboard, but when you give it the whole, it will, in many cases, accept Him.

God in His aspect of Creator, Preserver and Destroyer is Mother and Mother again in her absolute aspect, beyond all these is Siva. Thus the relative aspect of God, as it were, is Mother, the absolute aspect of God, i.e., the same Mother in Her state beyond Creation, Preservation and Destruction, is Siva. Mother is dancing Her mad play of creation, preservation and destruction standing on Siva, who is lying motionless and out-

wardly unconcerned under Her feet, appearing to be dead, but full of Pure, Unmixed, Transcendental Consciousness inwardly. What infinitely wonderful symbols of Truth all these are!

Why be afraid of death? Death can be glorious. Where do we find the greatest play of Mother? Only in the cremation ground. It is as real and true as the nursery. In life and in death the aspirant should cling to the Mother, and the Mother alone, giving up both.

'Mother, even if Thou wouldst tear me to pieces. I will not leave Thee!' This should be the determination of the devotee.

It always so happens that he who has a great clinging for pleasant things gets misery. Physical distress is nothing compared with the mental suffering we all have to pass through in life. So, we should always know that Truth is beyond happiness and misery, and can only be attained by transcending them both.

Ramprasad sings:

'Oh, my fickle mind, never stop taking the name of the Mother at all times, come what may. You pass through misery. You may have more. What does it matter?'

No physical suffering can be compared with the havocs of the terrible tempests raging in the human mind, and all these tempests can never be transcended so long as we cling to life in its pleasant aspect only. We must be fully prepared to transcend both the good and the terrible aspects of Nature if we really wish to reach the Divine and attain real peace and blessedness.

The Atman, The Self and its Realization

Faith in oneself is absolutely necessary in spiritual life. But in the case of the truly spiritual man faith in himself means at the same time faith in God, because he has realized that his essence is the Divine and nothing but the Divine.

'By thinking that we are the Atman—the Pure Self—we gain infinite strength. Then through the highest knowledge we attain Immortality.'

Since the advent of Sri Ramakrishna in this world a new current has started, a new tide has come, and if we dare to throw

ourselves into this tide, the current itself will bear us along to the right goal. Only we must let go the worldly anchor, we must not be afraid, we must allow ourselves to be carried away by the swell of the tide. And if we then do a little swimming ourselves, we shall reach the ocean all the more quickly.

Sri Ramakrishna has, as it were, made a tunnel for us to protect us from the world. Get into it, then you will be safe. But before being able to do this, the ore must be completely melted down, and very often we have not the patience to do this.

The Atman is ever pure and sexless. All our troubles arise through our clinging to a false personality. Spiritual life is to blast false personality, pulverise the ego and make an end of all our littleness and limitations. And the thought of the Atman shakes the very foundations of this false personality and of all our false relations with others.

Real silence is the silence of the mind. It is stilling the mind and freeing it from all unwelcome thoughts. First attain the thought of the Divine, and then try to eliminate all other thoughts that cannot be directly connected with the Divine thought.

Mere external solitude will not make one forget the world, and that alone is real solitude in which one merges oneself in Brahman.'

We do not enter into solitude by merely getting into the forest or the monastery. We must know how to annihilate the world in our own mind. When you sit for meditation, erase all ideas of the world in your mind and think of the Lord alone, the Divine Immanent and Transcendent at the same time.

Think deeply on this conception of the Atman before beginning your meditation. Think that you are a spiritual being freed from the body, mind, passions, desires and all the rest. If there be such a thing as sin at all, it is this clinging to creation and to the personality.

Renunciation is the central theme of all spiritual life and of all those who have really followed it. Renunciation of wealth, and greed, renunciation of all forms and aspects of sex and lust, renunciation of the false ego. If we possess anything, we must possess it as trustees, not as owners, administering it on behalf

of the Divine alone. There must never be any sense of personal possession, however much one may happen to possess. When these conditions are achieved, spiritual life becomes natural and unstrained, and then God-vision or Self-realization is attained as a matter of course.

8. HOW TO ATTAIN SELF-REALISATION?

Why we are seeking Sense Objects

In every one of us there is a yearning for life, for knowledge, for happiness. All of us want to live and that consciously and happily. These—Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute—are the very essence of our souls, our true natures. And when we analyse the outside world too, we find the same thing standing at the back of all phenomena. Everything, living and non-living, stands before us as an object that exists, something that is. And everything has the capacity to force itself on our consciousness, possesses a sort of luminosity that shines in both the sentient and the insentient. There is no difference of kind but of degree. So in the inside world and in the outside world we find this abiding sense of existence and consciousness. Thus not merely in ourselves, but also in all outside objects, we get a glimpse of the Reality. All things more or less fulfil the want of every individual. We all run after the sense-objects, the outside things, in search of some particular sense-pleasure which we think we shall derive from the possession of that thing, whatever its nature may be. The desire for happiness is always there. Sense-objects only draw our mind because of the idea that we are going to derive some enjoyment from them. It is because of this that we feel tempted, not because of the intrinsic value of that particular object. Name and form hide the face of Truth in ourselves and in the outside objects, but all names and forms reflect dimly the glory of the Reality at their back. In us there is always a subconscious feeling with regard to this Reality. It may be very vague, very indefinite, but it is there. The task of all spiritual life is to make the indefinite consciousness definite. If we really want to come face to face with Truth, first we should begin with ourselves; find out that which exists in ourselves at the back of our ego.

False Identification

So long as there is a false identification and a false sense of personality, Brahman—the Truth can never be realized. There is this false identification in us, and during the time of this identification we see that we are shifting the centre of our consci-

ousness continually. There is such a thing as having one's consciousness rooted in the Transcendental, even while working or living on the phenomenal plane, but this can never be done so long as all this wrong identification with our body and mind lasts. Sometimes we identify ourselves with the body: O, I am hurt, I feel such physical pain. Sometimes again there is identification with the mind: O, so-and-so was awfully rude to me, I feel so worried, I feel so sorry. All this is wrong identification, but the common factor in this identification- "I, I, I" always this "I" that comes in different forms. And so long as this "I" lasts, we cannot even get a glimpse of Brahman. But there is one point to note. Even at the time of this wrong identification, we have the consciousness of something that does not change. And it is the task of the spiritual man to find out what that abiding and unchanging something is. What is this "I"? No thought of the finite is ever possible without the thought of the Infinite, however indefinite it may be. Positing one we posit the other, too. We cannot formulate the Infinite, Pure Consciousness, Atman; but although it can never be formulated, It can be realized.

*'The Truth can be realized by him whom It chooses and to whom It reveals Itself.'*²⁶ From the monistic standpoint, you are your own chooser, because this Self, this Truth, is not something distinct from you, and if you choose yourself to be the knower of this Truth and really strive for it, you become It. Spiritual realization is Self-Realization.

Be bold and face the Truth. There must be merciless self-analysis. First of all try to find and regain your own soul. Your soul is practically lost to you, and only after you have found it again, the question of this higher Realization will arise.

Spiritual life begins with the recognition of the fact that we are neither bodies nor masses of emotions, neither men nor women; we are spiritual entities. And it is necessary to have this ideal as the very basis of all our striving.

Freedom

It is essential for us to have a true conception of freedom. Do

26. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.23.

we want freedom for the senses, do we want license, or do we want freedom from the senses? Is it freedom to allow the mind to run after enjoyment, to be the slave of the senses? Is it freedom thus to dig our own graves? Or is it freedom to control all desires, to master all desires and become free from the senses and their cravings? This alone is what is called attaining to the Freedom of the Atman, and the freedom of license is no freedom at all.

As long as we cling to our slave mentality and allow ourselves to be driven like slaves by our senses, we cannot progress. Only the life of sense-control and purity leads to real freedom. There is no romance and no place for romance in spiritual life, neither materially nor mentally. It is a hard life, a life of struggle and strain. We want freedom and fearlessness. We want to break the limitations of the body and the mind and be free. And this we can never attain, as long as we cling to our different cravings. Self-Realization cannot be obtained without the renunciation of all our clinging to our own bodies and minds as well as to those of others.

Our great sage Sankaracharya says: *'A human birth, desire for emancipation and contact with great, holy men, — these three are very rare and are attained only through the grace of the Lord.'*²⁷ But then even these three advantages do not suffice. We must be eager to profit by them and willing to sacrifice everything for the higher life. Without paying the full price we cannot become free and fearless. And without freedom and fearlessness there is no happiness for us, either in this or in any other life. We must be eager to realize the Truth. We must be prepared to sacrifice all our petty sentiments and personal desires for the Highest. Then alone, one day, the Highest will be ours. Struggle, struggle, struggle. This alone is the only way. Let us bear in mind that salvation is to be attained in this very human birth.

Renunciation

Spiritual practice can never be successfully performed without true renunciation and dispassion, without giving up all old

27. Sankara: *Viveka Chudamani*, 3.

associations with reference to things and people. Only to the extent to which we are prepared to renounce our desires and passions and our clinging to others through attachment or through aversion, can spiritual practices be performed with profit and can any progress be made. Let us never allow our mind to delude us on this point. The mind always tries to bring forward some plausible reason or other—why we cannot renounce this or that thing, why we should be in the company of such and such person, why it is our duty to talk to him or her, etc. Never believe your mind in such cases. It is always out to deceive you and to be the spokesman of your sub-conscious or half-conscious desires. So we need not only Japa, prayer, meditation and other spiritual practices, but also renunciation and non-attachment. Only to the extent to which we succeed in having more and more of true renunciation, and non-attachment, can all our striving have any real, appreciable effect. When these two are combined, the practices and renunciation, it becomes possible for us to control the mind and begin with the cleansing of all its dirty nooks and crannies where we have allowed all kinds of filth to accumulate for ages and ages, through countless births. Things or persons, whom we love passionately, affect the mind; bring attachment, hatred and aversion. Attachment and aversion are only the obverse and reverse of the self-same coin. Never make any mistake as to this. They come under the same category. Hatred or aversion is love or attachment turned upside down. It is not something essentially different. We must get rid of all forms of attachment and of all forms of fear by becoming dispassionate and free from personal likes and dislikes. We must be kind without ever becoming too personal and there should never be any personal or selfish claim on anybody's love, nor should we under any circumstances ever allow anybody to have any personal claim on us or on our affection. Christ says: 'He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.' And there is nothing truer than this. But he who allows any other person to love him more than the Divine, is not worthy of the Divine, either, and will never attain the Divine, however hard he may try. We only get what we sow, and so long as we go on sowing all these petty affections and hatreds, these likes and

dislikes, fettering ourselves and others with chains of so-called love, etc. etc., we shall remain bond-slaves eternally, bringing misery on ourselves and on others. Misery will always come. In some cases it comes soon, in others late, but all have to pay for their folly.

And this is the secret which all who desire to lead a spiritual life should know. There is both love and hatred, and we cannot get rid of them all at once. So what to do? We may keep our love and our hatred, but we should consciously direct our love to the Highest, to the Divine, never primarily to any person or thing. Our hatred should be directed towards everything that prevents us from realizing our true nature, towards all obstacles, everything that stands in the way of our progress.

Stepping-Stones, leading to the Ideal

Without a working ideal spiritual life cannot begin at all. If we put this working ideal too high nothing can be achieved, but, at the same time, we should never lower the ideal as such, but rise to it step by step taking higher and higher working ideals. There should be faith in the words of the seers, teachers and prophets, faith in one's own potentiality and strength and purity. But mere faith is not enough. We must strive our utmost. Ethical culture means, chastity, continence, purity in thought, word and deed, purity in food, purity in one's company and associations, purity in what one hears. And chastity and purity are more important than the external forms of religion.

First comes physical purity. Then the mind must be tackled and controlled. The control of speech too is most essential. We should never listen to anything that is not perfectly pure and should behave in such a manner that others will not dare to discuss anything impure in our presence. We ought to maintain the steady flow of the under-current of pure thought, to keep our mind fixed on the goal. The under-current of pure thought will protect us and create around us an atmosphere of purity and morality. Bad thoughts vitiate the air and we must purify ourselves by good thoughts and purify each other also by good thoughts.

After that a new attitude has to be developed with regard to

all objects and persons that tempt us in any way, till perfect indifference with reference to them all is reached. We should keep strict watch over all the movements of our mind so as to become more and more conscious, more and more definite in everything. There should not be any unconscious movement in our life as long as we remain awake.

This is very essential, because in the first period of spiritual life—and the first period may extend over many, many years—body-consciousness becomes stronger, and the mind tends to wander more than it used to do before any practices were taken up. At the same time, affection and aversion become more prominent and dangerous if we do not scrupulously avoid coming in touch with their objects, mentally or physically.

For a time the body becomes the centre of consciousness for the beginner. So we should not allow ourselves to be hoodwinked by the subtle desires that may crop up and try to drag us away to their particular objects. The aspirant can never be careful enough in his associations and in the company he keeps during the first years of his training for the higher life. Many do not realize this and come to grief. So we should learn to be conscious, to be aware of our motives, stop all forms of drifting, prevent all expressions of a merely instinctive life.

Wholesome Daily Habits

There is one point which is very essential in the course of one's spiritual striving. All of us must learn how to take rest after strenuous work. It is very good to have a short break in our activity, after dinner, i.e., in the middle of the day if we can afford it. This is very efficacious, but very difficult for many to practise. For many it is so hard to have just a little nap or break of consciousness or even just a little break in the hectic and feverish activities of the mind, filling it again with the Divine Name and Thought, and harmonising vibrations of the holy sound.

We should also make it a point never to read anything worldly, worldly novels, fiction or stories, before going to bed or falling asleep, but to have some holy thought and some holy sound to dwell upon, to think with great intensity that we are going to sleep in the lap of God or some such idea, to fill our whole being

before falling asleep, with the Divine Idea and the feeling of the Divine. If we permit ourselves to read something worldly, this goes on working in our subconscious mind. As already said, it is very harmful to read worldly books before falling asleep, but we generally do not realize the extent of the harm we do to ourselves by being careless in this. The workings of the subconscious during the time of our sleep are very important and should not be lost sight of.

There is one more point which should be mentioned. If you awake at night, at once begin doing your Japa, in a quiet way, without any unnecessary strain. Let this bring relaxation to your body and mind. Then go to sleep again if there is time. Again during the time of your practices, Japa and sleep should never become connected. This is very bad. Before going to bed, do Japa a certain number of times, fill yourself with the Holy Sound and Thought and make it a point never to stop doing Japa before having reached the number you intended to do as a form of discipline.

Good habits are to be formed and strengthened. Then spiritual life becomes easier and loses much of its initial strain. Strictly preserve your fixed hours. Then meditation slowly becomes possible even when the mind tends to be very restless. There should be perfect regularity in the hours of your spiritual practices, because, only thus does the mind grow accustomed to them. And under all circumstances certain minimum is to be kept up in one's daily practices. The time of practices should be slowly and steadily increased in the case of the beginner and also in the case of the advanced student, and only later on can one make use of the undercurrent in one's mind, which enables one to keep part of the mind busy with the practices at all times, whatever one happens to do outwardly. Before that state is reached, the greatest regularity concerning the hours and the minimum amount of spiritual practices which are to be done is absolutely necessary in the case of all aspirants.

No Weak Excuses!

Because our mind is so full of tension and disturbance, of unsteadiness and different desires and impulses, we need spiritual

practice more than anything else. Never say 'O, today my mind is so terribly disturbed; today I cannot do my spiritual practice, I shall have to wait until my mind grows a little calmer, or until there is less disturbance outside.' Such an idea is a fallacy, because if you wait for the day on which there won't be any disturbance for you, you might just as well wait for the day on which there will be no waves on the whole ocean.

Our meditations will in due course soothe the nerves, calm the mind and give us steadiness and joy in all we do. Then only shall we begin really to enjoy the spiritual food we get through our practices. Until then everything is just drudgery, but we must pass through this drudgery first. Only when we feel a real craving for spiritual food should we know that spiritual life has really begun for us. So long as there is not this strong yearning for spiritual things, it has not yet begun, even if there be a certain liking for it, even if we feel attracted by the spiritual ideal during some of our saner and less sense-bound moments. And once this yearning has really begun, as its result, someday we shall get a glimpse of the Truth and this again would create in us a real and lasting taste for spiritual life, so that meditation would become a source of real pleasure to us. Our ideal is to attain to God-Realization and then to work with this God-Realization for the welfare of our fellow-beings. Work becomes perfect only then and does not bring with it any danger for ourselves or others. We must first of all fix our ideal, and then in connection with that we shall have to lead a spiritual life in practice, not only in theory. Devote some time to spiritual practices everyday. What the perfected soul does is always done in a perfect and spontaneous way, but we, at present, have to imitate it, doing all this in a more or less strained, artificial way in the beginning. This naturally means great tension and strain for us for a time. We should not place the cart before the horse. The perfect man is able to help others and to work without attachment, but we must first eliminate attachment before we may risk doing this.

9. HARDER THAN THE ADAMANT AND SOFTER THAN THE FLOWER

So long as we cling to the false puppets and idols we cherish in our hearts, it is not possible for us to have at the same time a sincere, deep yearning for the Divine, whatever we may pretend to have. It becomes all empty make-believe. But for everybody there would come a time, when these puppets, these human dolls, lose all their charm, and then only comes a true and deep yearning for the spiritual life; when the world and all things worldly become 'salt less' and insipid.

The whole world is drunk with the wine of ignorance, the wine of 'Sex and Gold', and has become mad. So it does not know what it should do. Here and there you just find one who wants a better wine, some different drink that counteracts the effects of this hateful worldly wine. But you will always find that such a person is persecuted because he dares to think for himself, dares to act for himself boldly and freely, dares to mould his life according to standards higher than those followed by the multitude.

At the beginning of one's spiritual life the love of God seems to be more destructive than constructive. It destroys all the dross and attachments, but though it seems to be destructive, it only fulfils the higher laws of life. The only true, eternal unchangeable love is that which fills the heart with the eternal rhythm and dispassion of true spirituality, loving nobody with clinging passion, and at the same time loving all with wonderful sympathy and same-sightedness. True love, breathing perfect purity, non-attachment and great intensity is always spiritual. But no love in which there is any form of attachment can ever be really spiritual, whatever else it may be, and however beautiful it may seem to our blinded eyes for the time being.

Only see how terribly restless people have become. They run restlessly and thoughtlessly to cinema-shows, to the opera, to the theatre, to the temple or to the church, to lectures of all kinds, to concerts, to anything and everything, sublime or ridiculous, because their centre of gravity is wholly outside them-

selves, if there is any centre of gravity left at all. Why just take the trouble of thinking, why fatigue the mind? This is their attitude; and thus they become more and more slaves to this outgoing tendency of their mind and get more and more entangled in the meshes of ignorance. There are some who may be sincere, but all their sincerity is of no avail, because they have no backbone because they are too soft.

We must cut off the very roots of all meaningless emotion-ism and false love, all persona) clinging to some man or some woman 'meant for us eternally.' Nonsense. All this may be beautiful romance, but never, never the reality. We must become merciless in this. There is no place at all for this kind of softness in spiritual life. The spiritual man must be harder than the adamant and softer than the flower. Some people may call this cruel, but is there anything more egoistic, more cruel and more enslaving than this so-called love of the worldly-minded, clinging to each other, enslaving each other, just for the sake of the satisfaction of some personal craving of theirs? They do not love the other person; they are really in love with themselves, with their own emotions and desires and their satisfaction. They want to make use of the other person for their personal selfish enjoyment, and nothing more. We must mercilessly strike at the very roots of all such forms of false love and have done with them once for all. Let the heart break, if it breaks. Sometimes such hearts must be broken, so that new light may come in; otherwise, for them, there will never be any progress.

So long as there is any desire for enjoyment, there can be no true spiritual life. Enjoyment, be it gross or subtle, and spiritual life can never go together. So long as there is any clinging to life or death or to some doll or other, there can be no spiritual life. This is one of the facts and eternal laws to be faced by every sincere aspirant. There is no shirking this question, and we must know whether we are really prepared to pay the full price for spiritual attainment or not. There should be clear thinking. No use muddling up things and just going on drifting or entertaining false hopes. First fix the goal and the means, mercilessly. Without shirking the issue you must do this, and then relentlessly stick to your chosen path, whatever happens, whether you live or die.

Know How to Die

We should always act in such a way that we may equip ourselves fully to be able to meet death with a smile. It should become the gateway to Immortality, to be welcomed, never to be feared. This life is nothing but a passing show, a phase, a life in a world of unrealities and shadows. Our future depends on what we think in this life, on what we are, never on what we appear or pretend to be.

Bear in mind: Whatever be the Truth, let us face it undauntedly! An unpleasant truth is always infinitely better than a pleasant falsehood, even if this truth breaks our hearts, even if it shatters once and for all our fondest hopes and illusions. Let the true light come to us under all circumstances, no matter whether the heart breaks or not. Do not care so much for the shattering of hopes and the breaking of hearts as for the coming of Truth and Light. Nothing is truer than the fact that some day the body will fall off. And we should so conduct ourselves that we have no occasion to repent for having wasted our precious time, our precious human birth and Divine possibilities.

The great poet Tulsidas sings: 'When I was born, I cried and others laughed. Let me act in such a way that when I die, I laugh and others cry.' This is the real task of our life. So we have a proverb in Bengal that says, 'Do whatever spiritual practices you like, but you must know how to die.'

Death is always of the body, never of the Spirit or the Self. So why fear death? Death should neither be courted nor be feared, neither should life be so. The bier is quite as real as the cradle, the burning-ground as real as the nursery, but we rejoice at the one and recoil from the other. Why? We should neither cling to life nor be afraid of death, because the Self is something, infinitely greater than this shadow of life, the phenomenal existence. We cling to our bodies and to those of others and think we have hold of life. We have hold of the mirage, the reflection of the reflection of the reflection, and nothing more than that, and go on hugging it to our breast. What an inordinate attachment to all that is not life! The true aspirant, he who has true spiritual yearning, neither clings to life, nor does he ever yearn for death, because to him, neither of them has any true reality. The world is

the training ground. We should act in the right way, so as to make the very best use of the short span of life given to us. We need not be afraid of death, neither of our own nor that of anybody else, if we just minimise the attachments of life and our personal relationships with the phantoms of others, with the men-phantoms and women-phantoms, of which none has any reality. Relationships based on the mirage always prove to be nothing but a mirage in the end. You cannot have real relationship with what is unreal and which has no ultimate being.

The death of our Great Ones has taught us great lessons. How wonderful was that of Swamis Ramakrishnananda, Prem-ananda, Brahmananda, Turiyananda—the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. ‘The worldly-minded and those who cling to their personal attachments alone are afraid of death. It is the body that dies, not the Self. We must be prepared to die for a righteous cause without any hesitation, and we must be fully prepared to see others too die for it. So our motto is: ‘To work for our own salvation as well as for the salvation of others.’ This is what Swami Vivekananda wanted us to do, and this is the guiding motto of the Order.

All these glorious lives are before us; show us how to live and how to die. We have only to mould ourselves according to the pattern they have placed before us again and again. Even if we fall in this battle of life, through newer lives we shall work with renewed vigour. Step by step, and stage by stage we shall move onward until we attain to the only goal of our life.

The Conception of the Self

Generally we ourselves create all the obstacles that stand in the way of our spiritual progress or Self-Realization. We think of ourselves in terms of the body and of the mind and do the same with reference to others. Then we go and take up direct relations with them as men and women, and then all the rest naturally follows in due course. On what does this whole life of the body and of the mind depend? On consciousness and not on any man-form or any woman-form or child-form, etc. etc. The moment the self leaves the body, the body becomes lifeless. All its charm vanishes. Nobody feels attracted by a dead form, be it

ever so beautiful, but what really attracts us in the man-form or in the woman-form is consciousness which we mistakenly identify with that particular body or mind. There is such a lot of blind infatuation in the world owing, to this superimposition on the Reality. Without undermining all these wrong notions and conceptions all over our body-bound and mind-bound likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions, we shall never be able to make any spiritual progress. If I love the life so greatly, why do I not look to that on which it depends for its very existence? We should learn to love the Self all the more, because only owing to Its presence is there any life in the body and in the mind at all. The cause is greater than the effect, and the cause of the life of my body and mind and that of all others is the Self alone, not any name and form. If I want life and love, permanent and unchanging, I must look to the Self and never to any of the limiting adjuncts. But it takes people many, many, lives to see this and realize their Himalayan mistake.

Our task is to go somehow or other beyond this Maya, this phenomenal world, and reach the Reality. And this can never be done without chastity in thought, word, and deed. Unity, ultimate oneness, cannot be reached so long as one remains physically and mentally tied to duality. There are some spiritual aspirants who say:—Lord, I am Thine, and others who say:—Lord, I am Thyself. There is a difference in expression but the ultimate goal is one and the same, when we clearly understand the standpoint from which both are viewed. In both the cases only the Lord remains as the sole actor and agent. The ego disappears. And this should be our aim and should be attained by us all.

Reincarnation is in no way the most vital point. What is of great importance is to try to get full illumination in this very life. None is forced to follow the spiritual path, but all those who have decided to do so, should do it with great enthusiasm and perseverance, never swerving from their paths, not even an inch. We should learn to be tremendously sincere and one-pointed and not allow ourselves to be swayed by indecision and doubt.

Tattvamasi

This great Vedantic dictum, really speaking, means that which

is at the back of the outside world and that which is at the back of myself is one and the same, the One Indivisible, Eternally Undivided, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The individualised soul in its real nature, and the outside world in its real nature are eternally one and the same.

Even our mind which creates all differentiation is Maya and nothing but Maya, — a part of the phenomena. And there comes a time for all sincere aspirants when this mind ceases to be, and there remains only the Thing-in-Itself, the Pure Being. But what this Maya is, none has ever been able to express in words. Sankara says: ‘We cannot say it is Sat or Asat, existence or non-existence, or even a combination of both.’

Maya or phenomenal existence is to be understood as something that exists during ignorance, but that ceases to be on the dawn of true knowledge. But till then, it is a fact of our consciousness. It is not nothing. Personal Maya is related to Cosmic Maya as a tree to a forest, as a wave to the ocean. Maya, Avidya, is not merely negative. It is not merely ignorance in the negative sense, but something positive, the nature of which cannot be described. Maya is a statement of fact, as Swami Vivekananda put it. At one time it exists, at another time it ceases to be, but while we are in Maya, we can never ask the question what Maya is. And when we are out of it, the question does not arise. We have to take Maya as a fact at a certain time, and find ways and means to get out of it. Neither existence nor non-existence can be predicated of it. It is all beyond human comprehension and can never be grasped by the intellect.

But although we cannot know the nature of the Maya, we can, however, transcend it, and attain to the Self-the Reality. May we be able to say with Swami Vivekananda:

*“There is but One — the Free — the Knower — Self,
Without a name, without a form or stain;
In Him is Maya, dreaming all this dream.
The Witness, He appears as nature, soul.
Know thou art That, Sannyasin bold, say —
‘Om Tat Sat Om’.”*

There is such a thing as evolution of matter, but there is absolutely no such thing as evolution of Spirit.

*'Of that being which is ever born, birth is predicated by some, but it is impossible that the unborn and the immortal could ever partake of the mortal. The immortal does not become mortal, or vice versa; for in no way is it possible that a thing can be changed into something quite the opposite.'*²⁸

There is no such thing as evolution seen from the standpoint of the Self. Evolution belongs to the relative plane of Maya or of the phenomenon alone. It neither undergoes evolution nor involution. It imagines itself to do this, but it never actually does. You are always the witness of your own actions and of your own meditation.

The body has to be made rhythmic, the mind has to be made rhythmic, and the building up of a purer mind is the most difficult task in spiritual life. We must make this body and mind very subtle and sensitive instruments of the Self, make them cleaner, so that they can give better reflections of the Truth. Your whole nerve-current must change. It must be made to flow upward. Your body must change. Your mind must change. It is not an easy task at all.

If we depend wholly on the Divine, It comes to our aid, but if we do what we please, we come to grief. Real self-surrender is a very hard thing and cannot be attained without great struggle and perseverance. The inner voice becomes still as soon as we turn deaf ears to it. Many people talk of this 'inner' voice, but in most cases what they hear is nothing more than the prompting of their own moral sense. The voice of the Divine cannot be heard so easily as people imagine.

First we must shake off our mental lethargy. We must so train the mind that, at least to some extent, we shall be able to have the thought of the Divine. One current should constantly be flowing God-ward, while the other part of the mind may busy itself with the affairs of the world. Always keep a part of your mind dwelling on the Divine.

The mind is soiled, has become dirty. There is no doubt

28. *Mandukya Karika*, 4.6–7.

about that. There is no doubt about our having led careless, impulsive lives. So, now, the mind can no longer take the colour of the Divine. Try to dye the dirty linen. It is impossible. First you must wash it, then alone can you dye it. Set fire to all your worldly desires and then cleanse the mind with the ashes that are formed. It must be a good, perfect cleaning.

The Holy Name and the Holy Thought, as it were, revive the heart that has become soiled and deadened by all the dirt of your worldly desire and inordinate affections which have accumulated there. They bring new hopes in place of the old deceptions that are shattered and lost. They bring real love in place of the old, impure affections that have become ashes and are gone forever. They bring real peace in place of the old shadow we wanted to clutch at before, but which always slipped out of our fingers. In place of falsehood, they bring truth. In place of uncertainty and desire they bring dispassion, because there is no want in the Divine, and he who has realized It does not lack anything and is satisfied, 'in the Self attained by the Self.'

Let us all struggle day and night that we do not accumulate any your carelessness. Let us strictly follow the instructions given to us for only then can the cleansing process be attained, our mind be given the Divine hue and spiritual life be made a reality, an accomplished fact.

10. DIVINE DISCONTENT

We must rouse a tremendous divine discontent, the discontent the mystics of all ages speak of. Unless we are able to rouse in the soul this Divine discontent which can destroy all our attachments to worldly things and desires, we will not be able to get real yearning for the spiritual realisation. There can never be any real peace in the world, though we must play our part in it as well as we can. There must never be any kind of slackness in our striving or any kind of satisfaction with our state of bondage. Such forms of satisfaction are very dangerous for all spiritual aspirants. We must consciously keep the fire of hankering and yearning for the Higher Life. We must never waste our energies for anything lower. We must never prefer the peace of lethargy to this restlessness for spiritual achievement.

There can be no security unless we have already proceeded very far towards the ultimate goal. Any devotee may come to grief or have a nasty fall at any moment before he has attained to self-realization. So we should never risk too much relying on our own strength before having advanced considerably.

Spiritual practice and prayer are needed. Constant prayer, day and night, constant meditation, constant thinking of higher thoughts would do us immense good. The mind of the beginner must be kept constantly busy with the Divine idea as to create habit. After having created the right habit, the path becomes smoother, and there is less strain in the life of the spiritual aspirant.

The only ultimate proof for everything is direct perception. If there be a God at all, He must be seen. He must be felt. Mere theorizing will never do. We have to believe in the words of those who have seen Him, we have to follow in their footsteps and then verify their experience in our own lives. Mere faith won't do, although it is necessary in the beginning. And, as Swami Vivekananda used to say, if anybody tells you, 'I have seen God, but you cannot do so', never believe such a person. All can see Him, although it may take years, and years, lives after lives, till we get the vision of God.

'O Lord, when will Thy Name cause streams of tears to flow from my eyes, and my voice be choked with Thy Divine Love?'

'One moment to me is like an age, my eyes are flooded with tears, the whole world is a void to me, all this because of the separation from Thee.'

How to Pacify the Mind

Filling the brain with all sorts of useless and impure thoughts, making the mind a chaos instead of making it pure and systematic, by doing all these we have lost all capacity to think in a dispassionate and consistent manner without considering our own selfish interests. We have very many ideas, even good ideas, but we have not the capacity of thinking them in a definite order and in a detached and dispassionate way. Very often we go on thinking and thinking the same thought, time and again in a mechanical way, but all this is useless. If you want the mind to be pacified, you must go through a series of meditations in a definite way. At the beginning, have fixed hours and manage to have some quiet time everyday. Do not mix with worldly people too much. First rid yourself of the too many different thought-currents which are warring against one another in your mind. Otherwise you can never maintain a balanced and dispassionate mood. Dispassion, true dispassion, is so very necessary for all spiritual progress, for facing problems of life as they are, not as we would wish them to be, and for finding solutions for them. The whole thought-structure must be overhauled and reformed. We have been living on empty dreams, created by our desires and when the whole edifice comes toppling down, we are left standing in the road without any help.

Through meditation the mind becomes stronger and clearer. It comes to regard the Spirit as more real than the world and slowly develops a kind of very strong non-attachment to everything. The will is also to be strengthened systematically. Intelligence is to be developed, the mind must be purified and our sentiments and feelings must be chastened. We must have a definite system of spiritual culture, whereas most people have nothing of the kind to follow. They just drift through life on their emotions and impulses. In spiritual life everything has to be sys-

tematized. One must maintain the true spirit without becoming mechanical.

'Gurus may be had by hundreds of thousands, but it is very hard to find a disciple.' Very few really care to follow the Path. Fewer are really sincere. Scarcely any one wishes to be on his guard and to avoid contact with impure people which is harmful. We find pleasure in such contact, instead of avoiding it. So for most of us there can be no real spiritual life. Out of thousands of people there may be one or two who really care to lead the higher life. It does not matter whether we attain to the goal in this life or not, the principal thing is to struggle, to fight, to become a man, to sacrifice everything if need be for the sake of realizing our goal.

*'Without doubt, the mind is restless and difficult to control, but through practice and renunciation it may be brought under restraint. Yoga is hard to be attained by one of uncontrolled self. Such is My conviction but the self controlled man, striving by right means, obtains it.'*²⁹

How to Minimise Doubt

If we really desire to live the higher life we should take the help of those who are leading it, not of moth-eaten books merely. Hence we are asked time and again to follow in their footsteps. *'This Atman cannot be realized through the study of the Scriptures, neither through the intellect nor through mere talks'*,³⁰ proclaim the Upanishads.

Doubt is a very great danger and can obstruct all progress in spiritual life, because doubt comes to all beginners at certain times. Doubt means a lack of faith in the Divine Being but we cannot rid ourselves completely of doubt before having attained to realization. Doubt will crop up again and again, but it should never be allowed to overpower us nor to make us waver in our decision to live the spiritual life. And here too, as in the case of doubt, holy company is very essential. By seeing the way such people live and by seeing their actions, doubt becomes mini-

29. *Bhagavad-Gita*, 6.35.

30. *Katha Upanishad*.

mised.

How is this Atman to be realized? *'You must hear of it, you must think deeply upon It, and then you must meditate upon It'*,³¹ says Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad.

'This Atman is to be realized by following the Path of Truth, by leading a greatly disciplined life, through right knowledge and perfect chastity',³² says Mundaka Upanishad.

External and Internal Solitude

Our ideal should be not so much external solitude, but the inward solitude that we must be able to create in our minds wherever we may be. This inward solitude is of great importance in spiritual life. Make the mind more and more indrawn, give it a glimpse of the real solitude and make it practise that at all times, at least to some extent.

Prepare the mind through great purity of thought, word and deed, then begin to lead an intense spiritual life. Solitude is not negative, neither is dispassion nor renunciation. We want to be in the company of God and not with anybody else. We wish to be not in the company of other beings, but in the company of the Divine at the time of meditation and spiritual practice. Merge yourself in God, and then there will be only one, wherever you be.

Danger of Concentration

In a way we make the mind concentrated, but then, we do not know how to manipulate it. This concentrated mind may run after sensual enjoyment and all sorts of worldly distractions and objects with all the greater intensity for having become concentrated. So if we do not know how to manipulate it in the right way, it becomes a great danger. It is better not to have concentration if one does not attain an amount of mental purification at the same time. Therefore, the ideal of purity, of non-attachment and chastity in thought, word and deed has to be stressed so much. There should not be any misunderstanding as to this fact. Without sublimation of all our desires and feelings we cannot

31. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.5.

32. *Mundakopanishad*, 3.1.5.

progress in the spiritual path, and if we do not follow a strict code of ethics and morals we should never even make an attempt at concentration. The concentrated mind that is not purified becomes a veritable demon. The fulfilment of all these ethical and moral conditions is absolutely necessary, and, without it all forms of spiritual practice become extremely dangerous and may lead to a nervous collapse. If you do not follow this code strictly and observe spiritual practices you may go mad. Therefore, never underrate the danger. If certain attachments and associations are not resolutely given up once for all with an effort of the will, no spiritual practice can bring any illumination worth the name.

The general rule is: If you have some worldly desire to fulfil, never pray for its fulfilment after you have begun your spiritual practices and meditation. First the desire must be renounced through discrimination. Then only spiritual practice can be begun. It is very troublesome to have a concentrated mind and not to be able to make proper use of it. It is good to have a devil's strength and will-power but it is not good to use these as a devil. We must know how to manipulate the concentrated mind. I do not even wish people to practise concentration before they have already attained a certain purification of the body and mind. It is so very dangerous, and very often people just play with fire. They turn deaf ears to what they are told and then suffer the consequences

Sufferings and Spiritual Life

There is a very fine Bengali song by one of the greatest poets, which purports to say:-

'O Lord, grant me the strength to bear Thy standard, since Thou hast been pleased to give it to me. Give me the devotion to bear the great pain that is unavoidable in Thy service.'

'I do not want even to get rid of this gift of suffering that Thou art giving me with Thine own hands. This misery will be my crest-jewel if with it Thou givest me also devotion to Thee. Give me work as much as Thou likest if Thou dost not allow me to forget Thee, nor, allow my heart to get itself caught in the entanglements of the world?'

'If Thou wishest so bind me as much as Thou likest but keep my heart open to Thee. Do Thou not allow me to forget Thee on any account.'

Everyone has to pass through the fire of suffering. It is necessary as a training. The will is to be subjugated, to be controlled, to be burnt, as it were, in the furnace. If you are prepared to do this, then take to spiritual life. If you cannot, if there is the very least idea of bargaining in you, if you do not wish to make any sacrifice for the sake of ideal, do not go even near it, but do and live as you please. There is no half-way course in higher spiritual life. For a time you will have to be between the anvil and the hammer. When the iron has become crooked, it is to be softened in the furnace and then hammered on the anvil. Only then can it take the right shape. The general rule is: Let us be bold and never cowardly. Let us have unspeakable sufferings, but let us face all these boldly, remain unaffected and move towards the goal.

There is another beautiful song speaking in the following strain:

'O Lord, if the door of my heart be kept closed to Thee, do Thou break it open and come to me. Pray do not go away from me.'

'If any day the strings of my heart do not vibrate with Thy sweet Name, pray wait standing, but do not go away from me.'

'If any day I place some one else on Thy seat in my heart, Thou, my eternal King, do not go away from me.'

'If any day my sleep does not break at Thy call, do Thou awake me with the blast and pain of the thunderbolt, but pray, do not go away from me.'

Passages for Meditation

'The Atman is one. It is absolutely motionless, yet swifter than the mind in its movements. It transcends all and hence the senses cannot reach it. It is perfectly steady and still. It outstrips all that run. In it does the vital energy sustain all the activity of living beings. It is ever moving and yet immutable. It is far and It is at the same time near. It dwells within all and yet it exists also outside everything. The wise

one who perceives all objects as existing in the Atman, his own Self and the Atman in every being, does not hate anyone for this reason. When to the seer all things appear as nothing but the Atman, then what delusion, what sorrow can come to the sage who sees that Oneness?’

‘The Self is all-pervading, self-resplendent, formless, scatheless, pure, unaffected by ignorance. He is the Great Knower, Omniscient, Transcendent, and Uncreated.’

‘This Self—our true Divine Being—is to be realized. We have forgotten It through ignorance. So this ignorance is to be removed through meditations and prayers.’

‘Under the cover of a golden brilliance the face of Truth lies hidden. Do Thou, O Protector, remove this cover so that I, who am devoted to Truth may realise It.’³³

33. *Isavasya Upanishad, 4-7.*

11. THE TASK OF YOGA

In Gaudapada's Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad we find:—

*'As belief in the unreal attaches the mind to the unreal, knowledge of absolute non-evolution frees it from relativity and turns it away from the unreal'*³⁴

In Sat, Being, there can be no question of evolution nor involution at all, and becoming is only true on the relative plane and then all becoming must have an end somewhere, and it must, one day, end in Being. Seen from the highest standpoint evolution is a myth, but the idea of evolution serves its purpose for a time on the relative plane. Our great thinkers were very thoroughgoing in everything they taught. They were not afraid of Truth and what it implies.

The Vedantin of the Advaita (Non-dualistic) school, knows there is no evolution in reality. What is real, cannot evolve. So Being alone is real and nothing that pertains to change or to evolution is real. There is never a break in the soul's consciousness, although the soul's consciousness may be clouded by Avidya (ignorance) and caught in all kinds of untruths.

The state of spiritual experience is not unconsciousness. It is something positive. It must have a positive content. It must never be negative, and it is the very opposite of inertness. Falling below the level of consciousness to the subliminal plane is not spiritual experience. Very often, this point is misunderstood and hopelessly distorted, especially by persons of a certain class who do not know what they are talking about.

In the state of spiritual experience the Self becomes conscious of Itself as It is. At other times It is identified with all the different modifications of the mind. And it is the task in Yoga to separate one's true Self, which, as such, knows neither evolution nor involution, nor any becoming, nor development. It is very wrong to say that that which is real can evolve, because evolution means change, and anything that can undergo any change can never be real.

34. Gaudapada Karika.

What we have to attain is Brahman-Consciousness, (Absolute Consciousness) as distinct from Jiva-Consciousness (Individualized Consciousness). But in the spiritual path there are some dangers which we have to meet, and one of them is to identify ourselves with the causal state of our personality or with the Anandamaya-Kosa, the sheath of bliss, as it is called, which is not the ultimate reality, but which makes us feel very happy and elated.

'Brahman is the self-conscious Principle that animates everything. It is the ear of the ear the eye of the eye, the mind of the mind, the source of all vital energy. Knowing thus the wise give up all false identification of the Self, with the senses and the mind etc., etc., and become immortal.'

'It is never perceived by the eye, nor by speech, nor by the mind. We know It not nor we see It. How to teach one about It? It is different from all that are manifest and known and is beyond even all that are manifest and unknown Thus have we heard from the ancients who explained this to us.'

*'What none can comprehend, by the mind, but by which the mind can be comprehended, which the function of the eye can be seen, know that alone as Brahman and not that which people worship here.'*³⁵

People have many attachments, but those who are not comparatively free from them do not really care for the teaching of Vedanta, or for the teaching of Christ. Such people do not like spiritual teaching at all, because all the Great Ones have preached non-attachment, stressed sacrifice for the sake of the Ideal as the only way. For people who do not lead a moral, pure, controlled and non-attached life, the teachings of Christ as well as those of Vedanta are absolutely useless. Such persons can never realize the spiritual goal. They have to go away, sad at heart, like the youth who came to Christ to ask Him what he should do. The young man was asked to leave the way of the world and follow the path of God. He was unable to do that. And so he could not follow the words of Christ and had to go away in sadness.

35. Kena Upanishat 1.2-5.

In but not of the World

It is not possible for us to take each individual desire and rid ourselves of it. No, a general, pitiless massacre is necessary. When we turn to the Divine, allow Him to light the Divine Light in us; all darkness will vanish at once. Then He, Himself appears on the battlefield and fights for us. The Lord does His work but we must also do our own part so long as we have our individuality or are still conscious of being individuals. We have to give up all bodily and worldly desires. We have to renounce all attachments and activities concerning these attachments.

That is the only way by which you can rid yourself of the troubles and miseries of life and the darkness that is shrouding you from the Light. Allow him to bring about your transformation, to give you the capacity to follow the Higher Life. Pay no more heed to the world than is absolutely necessary. You are always in the world, whether you live in the monastery or outside the monastery. You cannot run away from the world. But you must never allow the world to absorb your whole attention and energy.

The energy at your disposal, physical and mental, is so very limited that you have to use it for spiritual purposes and not waste it in the world and for the world. This, no doubt, means a tremendous struggle, but you have to pass through it. There is no comfortable shortcut. Try to be in tune with the Cosmic Power, and then this Cosmic Power works through you. This process is to be a conscious one, not an unconscious one as it usually is.

The mental world is infinitely vaster than this gross world. When we catch a glimpse of the glory of this inner world of thoughts, the external world and all its attachments lose all charm for us. But first of all we must prepare ourselves thoroughly in order to get access into this inner world of ours.

The Three Gunas

The Bhagavad-Gita says:

'Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, — these Gunas, born of Prakriti (Nature), bind fast in the body the indestructible embodied one.'

'Of these, Sattva, from its stainlessness, luminous and free from evil, binds by attachment to happiness and by attach-

ment to knowledge.'

'Know Rajas to be of the nature of passion, giving rise to thirst and attachment; it binds fast the embodied one by attachment to action.'

*'And know Tamas to be born of ignorance, stupefying all embodied beings; it binds fast by miscomprehension, indolence, and sleep.'*³⁶

Ordinarily we are the creatures of our moods, But if we sincerely wish to follow the spiritual path, we must stop being creatures of our moods. We must gain perfect mastery over them.

'Guna' means "rope" or that which binds the soul. The soul is caught in the meshes of these Gunas.

The State Beyond Gunas

Spiritual life should not be something abstract; neither should it be ego-centric. We should try to be Cosmo-centric. We should be conscious not of the point only, but of the whole circle in which we 'live, move and have our being'.

The task of the spiritual aspirant should be to attain the balanced state and, at the same time, to have his eye on that which is beyond the balanced state.

The secret lies in making ourselves Cosmo-centric. We are all parts of expressions of the Infinite Being and Consciousness. We must hold on to the anchor of our Being. If we do not, we shall be tossed again and again by the waves of delusion. If we do, then in the very depths of our mind there will always be a real calmness and balance. The storms and battling waves can only touch the uppermost layers of our mind, but never again disturb it completely.

If we are not able to bring about a transformation in our whole organism, even Sattvika (pure) food is of no use to us. The body of Sri Ramakrishna was too Sattvika to be able to assimilate any impure food. But mere physical food will never transform us. If the food I take through my eyes, my ears, my touch, etc., etc., be nor pure, the purity of the material, physical food I eat will be

36. *Bhagavad-Gita*, 14.5-8.

of little use. Spiritual life is not to be found in the kitchen-pot, or in the mere eating and drinking.

Our goal is to attain the transcendental state of consciousness beyond the Gunas or relativity. We should first know it theoretically, but then having known it thus, we should busy ourselves with the path and not so much with speculation as to the wonderful nature of Truth. If it is to have any effect, Vedanta must be made practical. Theories, wonderful thought-structures as such have no value in life. They just form one more of the innumerable delusions we cherish so much in the world.

The Gunas, standing for dullness, restlessness and balance, are like rungs of a ladder leading to the terrace. The indolent person must become active; the active person must become pure and balanced. And Sattva, purity, is the topmost rung of the ladder leading to the Truth, but not Truth as It is. Our purity must lead us to God-realization. Attain to the Divine means going beyond all the Gunas. Our goal should be to realize the Divine within ourselves and then to realize Him in all others also. The ideal man is he who is not bound by any of the Gunas, who has known God, who remains always indifferent to all actions of the Gunas. When by getting rid of the evil tendencies with the help of purer thoughts a spiritual seeker is able to get a glimpse of Truth, transcending even Sattva, and then later on comes down, he can come down only to the topmost rung of the ladder, and not to the lower ones. There he remains in the state of Sattva or purity, thinking and doing what is pure, and thus contributes to the welfare of all.

The sum and end of life is freedom of the soul from the ever recurrent bondage of births and deaths, freedom from the useless toils and troubles of the world, and the ultimate and final attainment of peace. The realization of the Self is the only way to perfect freedom. At the very end of the journey the spiritual seeker attains peace—peace ‘that passeth understanding’. One who ‘is freed in this very life’ promotes the welfare of the world by his living example both in activity and silence.

12. MAYA AND HOW TO TRANSCEND IT

Mind is nothing but matter, and therefore we must give a good, steady, relentless, severe training to the mind and cease to identify ourselves with it or its modifications. The Self is the Witness of all that is going on in the mind, but is different from it and is its master. It takes time to be able to control one's mind completely, and it takes more time to be in tune with the Divine. So the aspirant must have infinite patience.

This world is the Absolute seen by the mind through the coloured glasses of time, space and causation. Kant is quite right in saying this, but he does not know how this can ever be transcended, whereas the Upanishadic Seers say and know: 'Even this is Maya.' If we go beyond Maya, we realize things differently. Time, space and causation are modes of Maya. Phenomenal reality is Maya plus X or the Reality. Kant does not say that X or the thing as such can be realized or known. The Upanishadic Teachers hold that this has to be done by all seekers after Truth.

Maya has two aspects. One is its *veiling* power, clouding the understanding of man; the other is its *creative* power. Both are clouds. In its lower aspect Maya clouds the mind and brings about passions and attachments, for unreal things; in its higher aspect of non-attachment, prayer and meditation, Maya helps us to attain Freedom and Illumination. The lower one entangles us more and more. The higher removes our bonds and shows us the way to transcend it and to attain to Self-Realization.

That which binds us and that which frees us, both belong to the domain of phenomena, to the domain of the same Maya. Neither is real in the absolute sense. Wherever there are pairs of opposites, there is Maya, to some extent. Evil exists from one standpoint to a greater extent than good, but good and bad are eternally inseparable. If you want to have good, you must take evil also, or you must transcend both and have neither. Just as the holy man exists, so also does the unholy person, the criminal. The two go together.

Why create barriers? Happiness and misery, pleasure and pain go together. The correlatives exist under all circumstances.

So the ideal of the really spiritual man should be one of transcendence, one of indifference to the pairs of opposites. And so long as one is not able to transcend them, one should maintain and foster the spirit of indifference and non-attachment towards evil. Cultivate what is good and avoid what is bad or evil. The way to transcendence lies in first controlling evil by what is good, relatively speaking, and then getting rid of this so-called relative good, too. But first we must get complete attachment for good. Then only can we rise above it. We can get rid of the evil only by cultivating the good. Our good tendencies must be consciously cultivated, and then we must transcend the so-called good, too, and rise to the plane of Divine Consciousness beyond all relativity. We must be like the expert dancer who, as Sri Ramakrishna says, can never take a false step, although he does not care to follow every rule of dancing with a special effort of the will. Being freed from the conflict between good and evil, we must be able to do what is good and right in a natural, spontaneous way, being established in the glory of the true Self.

Obstacles to Self-Realization

The highest ideal is to attain the Absolute. Torpidity, distraction, attachment and enjoyment are the four obstacles to the realization of this Transcendental Consciousness.

'Torpidity is the lapse of the mental state into sleep because of the failure to rest on the Absolute.'

'Distraction is the resting of the mental state on things other than the Absolute, because of the failure to rest on It.'

'Attachment is the failure of the mental state to rest on the Absolute, owing to the numbness brought on by impressions due to attachment, even when there is no torpidity or distraction.'

'Enjoyment is the tasting by the mental state of the bliss of Savikalpa Samadhi—Superconscious State with subject-object relationship owing to the failure to rest on the Absolute. Or it may mean continuing to taste the bliss of Savikalpa Samadhi while taking up the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Superconscious state transcending subject-object relationship.'

'When the mind is free from these four obstacles and rests unmoved, like the flame of a lamp sheltered from the wind, as one with Absolute Consciousness it is called the Nirvikalpa Samadhi.'

*'Thus it has been said: When the mind is torpid, rouse it; when it is distracted, bring it back to calmness; when it becomes attached, be aware of it; when it is controlled, do not distract it any more. Do not linger on the bliss that comes from the Savikalpa Samadhi but be unattached through discrimination.'*³⁷

The Positive Method

One should stop all one's brooding over the past, whatever it may have been like. What is done is done for all time and can never be undone. So think of purity, think of what you are going to do in future, not of what you did in the past. He who thinks he is pure becomes pure. Try to efface all old associations and impressions by bringing in better and purer ones. You cannot become pure by thinking of impurity. You can never get rid of sin by constantly thinking you are a sinner. This is wrong psychology and will always produce just the opposite effect. If you dwell too much on the consciousness of sin and impurity, you lose sight of the fact that you can achieve something with your own spiritual striving. Always try to follow the positive method. Instead of thinking, 'Oh what a sinner I am, Oh how impure I am!' — just think, 'Purity is my birth-right and my true nature. I am free by nature. My very nature is purity and holiness, and so I am going to shed all that is impure and evil by giving up my false identification with the un-spiritual and the phenomenal.'

Swami Vivekananda says, *'If you have faith in all the gods and goddesses, but no faith in yourself, there is no salvation for you.'* The sense of sin can be very good in the case of some temperaments, and at the very beginning, but only if it serves as a goad to a better life. But a far better means to get rid of all these encrustations of impurity is to think of our eternal pure nature — the Divinity immanent in us.

37. *Vedantasara*, 210–215.

We are all our own ancestors, seen from the spiritual standpoint, and only reap what we ourselves have sown. Reincarnation, however, is not the most vital point. We have to try to get full illumination in this very life.

If our present life is the result of our own past, then only can we change our future. Karma is never identical with fate. The law of Karma is the law of self-effort, of intelligent, conscious striving, never a teaching of fatalism and lethargy.

Learn to stand aloof, as a witness of your different moods, without identifying yourself with them. Firmly take hold of your Japa, your practice, your reading, whenever there comes an inner or outer stimulus that may awaken the old, bad associations. Be a master in your own house.

Introspection

Spiritual life begins when we try to stop the outgoing tendencies of our mind and become introspective, and not before. It begins only when we learn to draw our mind away from the objects of the senses, but this means a terrible strain and struggle. There must be tremendous outward control, while trying to gain the inner control and it takes a long time to make this life free and natural. In the beginning, a complex is formed, although a worse one is avoided. But that does not matter, as later on with the disappearance of our false sense of personality, our false "I", the complex disappears by itself.

A really introspective mind always brings home to us all the events that are taking place within ourselves. We must become wide awake and fully aware of every thought that rises or wants to rise in our mind. Without getting control over our mind, we cannot advance and without becoming aware of what is taking place in our mind, we can never be able to control it. So this is one of the very first steps in spiritual life.

Different Weapons in the Struggle

At present, one part of our mind wants sense-enjoyment and sense-life, while another part does not crave for it any longer. You must try to develop an aversion for all things that attract your senses or are apt to rouse old associations in you. The mo-

ment you get real dispassion for all worldly enjoyments, the problem is solved. Then you come to taste something that is sweeter than these so-called pleasures of the senses, which are very insignificant after all. If you feel that temptation in some form or other is trying to sweep you off your feet, consider the evil effects of those bad thoughts or dwell on the life of a Great Soul who is the embodiment of all purity and renunciation. Healthy pride very often helps us in our striving. 'I am a devotee of the Lord, I want to follow the spiritual path, so faint-heartedness does not become me at all.' It is always a sign of weakness and cowardice to give in to one's desires and sense-impulses. If you cannot get control over yourself, then go to some fellow-aspirants, divert your mind, have talks with them on some holy topic or other. Do not allow yourself to be alone and go on brooding over the objects of desire. This only makes matters worse and then you are almost sure to slip your foot and come to grief. Force yourself, if you can, to read and study something elevating in such a case, whether your mind likes it or not.

At first, meditation, if done properly, just stirs the whole subconscious mind, and awful things lying hidden there come up, as a matter of course. So the aspirant must never feel afraid. The indrawn mind becomes terribly sensitive, and impressions that seemed to have no mark in the mind, are found to have made deep scars and lines. All such impressions must be completely effaced. And in order to do that one must face them boldly.

Your moral fibre must be strengthened at the same time. Try to take the attitude of the witness. Cease to identify yourself with your desires and cravings and with outside events. Even if your mind goes on raving madly, just watch it and try to disassociate yourself from it. You are eternally the witness of all the mental states. Never identify yourself with your thoughts. For the beginner (his is a very difficult step, but after it has been taken, everything becomes more and more natural, less and less strained.

Japa is a great help, so is the meditation on some Holy personality. The form is a gateway to the Formless, the All-pervading Spirit. Pray to a specialised form and try to visualise it. Then, if any undesirable form rises in your mind, you can remove it with the help of the form of your Ishta; merge it into that.

Never forget to give yourself a good injection of Vedanta. It is very helpful. First of all think of your own potential Divinity and the potential Divinity of all other forms, even of those that create troubles for you. If we ourselves are pure and holy by nature, we must manifest this even in the flesh, not merely mentally, in this very life. Herein lies the test of all true spiritual struggle. There must be realization in both physical and mental life. Our spiritual practices must help us in bringing about the needed harmony between the physical and the ideal. Spiritual life means tremendous steadiness and singleness of purpose. With the help of these alone can success be achieved.

'Neither the lazy, nor those who solely depend on Destiny can obtain their object. Therefore one should by all means persist in self-effort.'

'Success in action rests equally on Destiny and on one's efforts. Of these two, Destiny is the expression of the efforts made in a previous life.'

'As a chariot cannot move on only one wheel, so without personal effort, Destiny does not succeed in accomplishing anything.'

'Surrendering all actions to the Divine, fixing the thoughts on the Immanent Self and abandoning all longings and selfishness, go on with your struggle without fear and excitement'³⁸

'Godspeed you in your journey beyond the darkness of ignorance.'³⁹

38. *Bhagavad-Gita*, 3.30.

39. *Mundakopanishad*, 2.2.6.

13. BE YE TRANSFORMED

Conscious and Intelligent Effort

The Cosmic Energy is flowing through us all. We are all instruments more or less. But when we consciously stop the expression of this energy through the lower centres and let it find expression through the higher ones, we feel always fresh, and there is no old age so far as the thought-life is concerned. Sometimes we are not able to maintain the activity in the higher centres through our old impressions and tendencies and then there is a strong downward pull, a real tug of war, which cannot be avoided if we are to grow at all. We can never stop the flow of energy, but we can give it a certain direction, consciously and intelligently, with an effort of the will.

Conscious, intelligent thinking is necessary. Conscious thinking removes the barrier, and when this obstruction is removed, then higher thoughts flow. First of all, give a conscious start, with an effort of the will, and then the flow proceeds.

Through conscious higher thinking we open up the higher channels. And then, when the passage is open, higher thinking becomes easy, higher thoughts flow, rush. But always the beginning should be a conscious one with an effort of the will. A new passage is opened, physiologically and psychologically, through which these higher thoughts can flow without any obstruction. 'Higher' really means 'deeper.' We speak in terms of outer space, but really it is 'deeper.' As I said, the start must be a conscious start. This is the preliminary work that has to be done, and everything else follows.

The finite is always in touch with the Infinite. On the lower plane this is unconscious, on the higher plane it becomes conscious, and you feel it. And what you have got to do is to rise to the higher plane, and then have higher expressions of the energy, higher activity.

The task of the spiritual aspirant is to make the higher centres work, and to stimulate them.

One should consciously stop the activity of the lower centres

and stimulate that of the higher ones, but stimulate it consciously. It must be a conscious, intelligent process.

Japa, prayer, meditation, etc., all these are meant to start the activity of the higher centres.

Sometimes you may feel the higher centre and the lower centre at the same time, i.e., both want to act at the same time. And then comes a terrible tug-of-war. That cannot be avoided, and everyone has to pass through that state. Then you have to stop the activity of the lower centre with a great effort of the will.

Developing Intensity

Through our daily spiritual practices, through our whole striving, the activity of the higher centres can become more and more natural, less strained. But this can never be attained before having passed through this state of war, as it were. A general purification of the body and the mind is necessary, if the obstructions are to be removed, so that the energy can find its expression through the higher channels and become creative on a higher plane. Creative expression can never be stopped, but its direction can be changed. And this is what has to be done by the spiritual aspirant.

There must be great intensity in our thinking, feeling, willing, and action. If a person can hate intensively, he can also love intensively. But intensity there must be. Our intensity gives the impulse to our thinking, feeling and willing and this intensity can best be brought about by stimulating the soul.

Feeling can be cultured, will can be strengthened, intellect can be developed, all singly, but if we are to stimulate the soul, all should be strengthened at the same time.

There are people who are moral out of cowardice. There are people who are good out of weakness and lack of intensity, and such people are lower than the bad person, the immoral person, because they have not yet reached the state of intensity.

Ethical Culture and Spirituality

Through general ethical culture, strict performance of duties, regular studies, intense and clear thinking we should try to develop the different faculties more and more, simultaneously. And

through our prayers, our Japa, our meditations, our studies we try to rise to a higher plane and stimulate our whole being. Practice plays a very great part in spiritual life, as in everything. There must be a certain amount of routine work, a fixed daily routine, if we want to grow.

Ethics and spirituality are inseparable. They always go together. Ethics is concerned mostly with our conduct, and this conduct is guided by our thought, by the attitude we have towards ourselves and others. Activity and thought are always interconnected. So, to the extent our whole attitude changes, our code of conduct also will change. If our ideas change for the better, our code of conduct also would improve. If there be a change for the worse, our conduct also changes accordingly. In order to evolve, we have to follow a certain code of conduct and, at the same time have to bring about a change for the better through our spiritual culture and disciplines. Spiritual growth means outgrowing our present state, so far as our thought-life is concerned, and also so far our activity and dealings with others are concerned.

Suppose we look upon ourselves as the body, then bodily enjoyment becomes the goal of our life. And suppose we come to think that the soul persists after death, and that our future life wholly depends on our present activity, physical as well as mental, what would be our attitude then? Then we must act in a different way, because everything is not going to be over with our death. So our attitude makes a good deal of difference as far as our daily conduct and our thinking are concerned.

Patanjali says in his Yoga Sutras: *'To obstruct thoughts which are inimical to Yoga, contrary thoughts should be raised.'*⁴⁰

Replace all bad thoughts that rise in your mind by contrary thoughts. This is not the solution, but this is all that we can do at present. We try to take the help of the good thoughts and brush aside the bad ones and then there comes a time when the bad thoughts have no longer any hold on us.

Sometimes we see a child that is most awfully jealous of its

40. Patanjali: *Yoga Sutra*, 2.33.

doll. But then, when the child grows, it comes to lose all interest in dolls whether they be its dolls or other's dolls. So is it in the case of the spiritual child.

Spiritualize the Attitude

We may identify ourselves with the body. Then we are men and women, and everything else follows as a matter of course. If we are able to think of ourselves and also of others in terms of the spirit, our whole conduct would change. This may take years and years. But that does not matter. Go on striving and struggling, and then, one day you will see the light, at least you will catch a glimpse of it.

At first comes the new attitude towards ourselves and then towards others. When we are able to dissociate the Principle from the personality in the Holy Personality, we begin to get a glimpse of the Principle in ourselves also, however low we may be.

To the extent we dissociate ourselves from the false personality and identify ourselves with the Principle, we get strength, we get purity, we acquire clear thinking and clear action. To the extent we identify ourselves with the Divine in us, we become saintly. When a person is outgoing, he becomes a sinner. When he becomes indrawn, he becomes saintly.

The Principle that is in the greatest Holy Personality is in us too, but is covered up with a mass of dirt and filth. And all this dirt and filth have to be removed.

We are constantly thinking: 'I am a woman', 'I am a man', and act accordingly. But if we are able to change our attitude, to overhaul our thought-world, our whole code of conduct would change too. So what really matters in spiritual life is the change of outlook. First we try to give these injections during the time of meditation, and then, through practice, we shall be able to have this idea at other times too, and then there will be a changed activity.

The outward activity always influences thought, and thought activity again influences all our actions. Let the thought that you have during meditation cling to you at other times also.

Stressing The Divine Principle

At the beginning of our spiritual life there is no realization, but

we have to take the help of imagination. Imagination must be made vivid and stimulated, but imagination of the right kind, not imagination of something that is not, but imagination of something that is. We should try to imagine the Principle that lies at the back of both good and bad. We should stress the Principle and stress neither good nor bad. This is the only solution. There is no other solution. Unless we are prepared to face some day even the evil and see the Divine even in that, our problem is not solved. We should learn to put greater stress on the substance than on the form, greater stress on the Principle than on good and evil. We go on busying ourselves with good and evil, without caring for the Principle which is beyond both good and evil. We should say: 'Forms are not important to me. I care more for the Substance.'

There are some worshippers of Kali who associate the whole womanhood with the Goddess, and all men with Shiva, the great God, and then finally God and Goddess merge into the Principle out of which they came. Thus these worshippers solve many problems. What a difference it makes, if a person looks upon all women as the Goddess and all men as the Great God!

There are some other devotees who associate all men with Ramakrishna's form and all women with the Holy Mother's form, and then finally, transcending them, reach the Principle which stands at the back of both. Only thus can our problems really be solved. Now at the present stage, the evil thought, the evil form may be brushed aside, but this can never be the solution. There must come a time when we see the One at the back of both good and evil. And then good and evil will cease to affect us. In one Form Mother comes with blessings, in another form She comes with poison, but always She is the Mother.

All good and evil, all limitations, etc., are on the relative plane only. Both good and evil imply limitation. Whenever we speak of personality, it means limitations, even in the highest personalities and also in the greatest of Holy Personalities. When we are not able to rise above limitation, let us at least eliminate the bad limitation and have good limitation, remembering always that both are limitations and will have to be transcended some day.

Face The Great Spiritual Task

There is always a period of transition in the life of the aspirant. During that period he has no fixed centre of consciousness. It is the most troublesome period for spiritual aspirants but then never stop your spiritual practices, your Japa, your prayer, your studies, and your meditations. After the period of unsettlement, there comes a settlement, but during the period of unsettlement we must hold on to the chain and go on with our routine spiritual practices.

And to begin spiritual life, one must always be true to oneself. The child need not be ashamed of his or her childhood. Only we must always see that we outgrow our present state.

Embodiment is an awful limitation. It is something terrible, but we should try to think more and more in terms of the unlimited, so that we may be able to express the Infinite Being in all forms of consciousness, in dreams, in the waking state, etc.

If you just counteract a bad thought by bringing in a good one to obstruct it, the problem is not solved. You have brushed the bad thought aside for the time being, but its seed is still there and may sprout again any day the moment it is watered and manured. Until the seed is burnt, it will go on sprouting, but when the Highest Knowledge burns it, it can never sprout again. This is the state where there is no bondage.

Now, even if we know that the seed may sprout again, that all bad thoughts and tendencies are still there in seed-form before having attained the higher realization, this should not make us hopeless in any way. We must say: 'So difficult is the task, that I must have greater and greater determination, greater and greater one-pointedness.' We must try every possible means to proceed along the path and reach our goal. No use minimizing the danger. No use exaggerating it. All these difficulties should strengthen our determination; we must overcome the difficulties, and reach the goal.

Swami Vivekananda says in one of his poems:

*'Constant defeat, let that not unnerve thee,
Shattered be the little self, hope, name and fame.
Set up a pyre of them, and make thy heart a burning ground*

And let Shyama dance there.'

'Unending battle – That verily is His sacred worship.'

When all the desires are burnt to ashes, then alone the Divine would appear. Kali's seat is the cremation ground, and the real cremation-ground is in ourselves, in our heart. The very slightest clinging to the self is bad, is an evil, a sin. And so long as there is any clinging to our little likes and dislikes, there is no place for the Divine. And this clinging must be understood not only in a gross sense, but in a very subtle sense.

14. TO SUM UP

Ahimsa—Non-Violence

Ahimsa is the highest goal, but if you practice ahimsa, non-violence out of cowardice, it is no merit at all. Real non-violence means the greatest strength and power of endurance a human being can attain to. It means the greatest courage and undauntedness coupled with the greatest love. Ahimsa in which there is the very slightest trace of aversion or hatred is not non-violence. We must proceed step by step towards it. Do not stand in anybody's way, do not preach hatred or aversion against anybody, sinner or saint, do not trample under foot anybody, whoever he be. Do not elbow out others, do not sacrifice the interests of others to yours or that of those who are dear to you. In the animal kingdom, struggle and the so-called survival of the fittest is necessary, but if we wish to be men, we must go beyond all the rules prevailing in the animal kingdom and in nature. We must have the idea of love and non-injury in thought, word and deed. We must not be swayed by our impulses, we must rise above attraction and aversion and learn to be and remain the witness of everything. We must always be prepared to help others, even at the greatest sacrifice but, we must never allow ourselves to be used by others for their selfish interests.

Physically as well as mentally Ahimsa is to be practised. The mind must be purified of all impure impulses and thoughts. We can have real Ahimsa only if we really advance. The ideal of Ahimsa and the full realization of Ahimsa in our own life are very wide apart. So we must consciously proceed in the right direction and learn to analyse all our motives and impulses in whatever garb they come. At a higher stage you develop such a soul-force that people dare not take advantage of you. Do not be soft or sentimental when a principle is involved. Do not yield, whatever happens. We must learn to compromise less and less. The higher goal should never be lost sight of. We do not want to make a virtue of softness or bonelessness, but we have to fight all ideas of violence in our nature. Ahimsa does not mean softness. The world is so bad that you cannot live in it if you do not

go on hissing. But the limit of hissing should never be passed.

Vedantin And Yogi

The Vedantic path is different from that of the Yogic. The Yogi need have no conception of the Divine as ordinarily understood. So his concentration can be fixed on anything, any gross or subtle object and his realisation comes to a perfect withdrawing of the senses from their objects and a perfect stopping of all his mental activities, i.e., he realizes the Purusha as distinct from the world. Prakriti remains, but the connection between Prakriti and the Purusha is severed. With the Vedantin there can never be any kind of Samadhi without Brahman-Consciousness and with him, in the highest state of realization, Prakriti ceases to be, i.e., he realizes the whole phenomenal world to be non-existing, as in the case of the snake and the rope in which the snake never had any real existence and only continued to be so long as the person superimposed the idea of the snake on that of the rope through mistake. For the Vedantin the highest realization is an absolute state in which the soul realizes its own reality without any adjuncts, and for both, the soul and the outside worlds, the reality is the same. The soul, ridding itself of all that which is non-self, i.e., of all the limiting adjuncts, and the world free from all its limiting adjuncts, are both one and the same reality, the One Undivided and Indivisible Principle that alone has any real existence. In our ordinary state of consciousness Purusha or the Atman is, as it were, mixed up with the ego, the mind, the senses and all their sensations.

First the Yogi tries to think of gross matter, and then, later, he passes from the objective to the subjective and from there to the ego. The goal before him is the Purusha without getting merged in Prakriti.

*'Through tapas you must know what Brahman is.'*⁴¹

Patanjali says,

'Success is speedy for the extremely energetic. The success of Yogis differs according to the means they adopt,

41. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 3.2.

*mild, medium or intense, Or by devotion to Ishwara. Ishwara is a special Purusha untouched by misery, actions, their results and desires. In Him becomes infinite that all-knowingness which in others is only a germ. He is the Teacher of even the ancient teachers, being not limited by time. His manifesting word is "OM".*⁴²

Japa—The Practice For This Age

Japa purifies the mind and makes it more introspective, removes the obstacles, physical as well as mental, and makes the body and the mind fit for realisation. You should never underrate the value of Japa properly done. In the beginning many people cannot grasp the utility of Japa, and that is only natural, but as we advance we come to realise its tremendous utility and efficacy, especially when the mind is dull, Japa serves, as it were, a kind of ladder which helps us in rising to the heights of spiritual consciousness.

The cosmic sound in its subtle aspect arises from the Divine, and if we are able to follow it we approach nearer and nearer to the Divine. 'OM' has its gross, subtle, causal and absolute aspects. The obstacles that stand in the way of the beginner are: disease, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, clinging to sense-enjoyment, false perception, non-attaining of concentration, and falling away from concentration, when it has been attained. With infinite patience one must follow the path of Japa and meditation. Japa is specially suited for this age and the only practice that everybody can follow. What you have to do now is to raise a certain thought in your mind and after that to make it flow in an unbroken stream. The movement of the beads should not be mechanical but it must be accompanied by the movement of thought. Mere movement of the beads won't do. It has no effect at all.

Japa, if it be real Japa, is Dhyana (meditation) with interruptions and Dhyana is Japa without a break. When the mind becomes a little concentrated you will find that this current is maintained. Somehow the thought then flows to some extent along

42. Patanjali: *Yoga Sutra*, 1.21–27.

the right channel, whereas now it is flowing too, but flowing in a wrong direction.

Vedantasara

'Both the intellect and the Consciousness underlying it come into contact with the jar. The intellect destroys the ignorance regarding the jar, and the underlying consciousness manifests the jar.'

'Just as the light of a lamp coming into contact with the jar or cloth existing in darkness, dispels the darkness which envelopes them and through its own lustre manifests them as well.'

'Till such realisation of the Consciousness which is one's own self, it is necessary to practise hearing, reflection, meditation and absorption (Samadhi)'

'Hearing is the ascertainment through the six characteristic signs that the entire Vedanta philosophy establishes the one Brahman without a second.'

'Repetition is the frequent presentation of the subject-matter in the section, as, e.g., in the same section, Brahman, the One without a second, is repeated nine times in the sentence, "Thou Art That."

'Reflection is the constant thinking of Brahman, the One without a second, already heard of from the teacher, by arguments agreeable to the purport of Vedanta.'

'Meditation is a stream of ideas of the same kind as those of Brahman, the One without a second, to the exclusion of such foreign ideas as those of the body etc.'

'Samadhi is of two kinds, viz. that attended with self-consciousness and that without it.'

'Savikalpa Samadhi, absorption attended with Self-Consciousness, is that in which the mental state taking the form of Brahman, the One without a second, rests on it, but without the merging of the distinction of the knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge.'

'Nirvikalpa Samadhi, absorption without self-consciousness, is the total mergence in Brahman, the One without a second, of the mental state which has assumed its form, the distinction of knower, knowledge and the object of knowl-

edge in this case obliterated.'

'Then, just as when salt has been dissolved in water, it is no longer perceived separately, and water alone remains, similarly, the mental state that has assumed the form of Brahman, the One without a second is no longer perceived, and only the Self remains.'

'Therefore there is no apprehension of its being identical with the state of deep sleep. For though the mental state appears in neither, yet the difference between them lies in this that it exists in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, but in deep sleep it does not.'

'The steps to the attainment of this are general discipline, particular discipline, posture, control of the vital force, self-withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and Savikalpa Samadhi, absorption with Self-consciousness.'

'General discipline, Yama, consists of non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-acceptance of gifts.'

'Particular discipline, Niyama consists of cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study of the scriptures and meditation on God.'

'Asana, posture, means the placing of one's hands, feet, etc., in particular positions, such as Padmasana, etc., etc.'

'Pranayama, control of the vital force, refers to exhalation, inhalation and retention of breath which are means to the control of the vital force.'

'Pratyahara, self-withdrawal, is the withdrawing of the sense organs from their respective objects.'

'Dhyana, meditation, is the intermittent resting of the mental state of Brahman, the One without a second.'

'Samadhi is what has already been described as attended with self-consciousness, Savikalpa.'

'The Nirvikalpa Samadhi, of which these are the steps, has four obstacles, viz. torpidity, distraction, attachment and enjoyment.'

'Torpidity is the lapse of the mental state into sleep because of the failure to rest on the Absolute.'

'Distraction is the resting of the mental state on things other than the Absolute, because of the failure to rest on it.'

'Attachment is the failure of the mental state to rest on the Absolute, owing to numbness brought on by impressions due to attachment even when there is no torpidity or distraction. (The lurking desires for pleasures once experienced.)'

'Enjoyment is the tasting by the mental state of the bliss of Savikalpa Samadhi owing to the failure to rest on the Absolute. Or it may mean continuing to taste the bliss of Savikalpa Samadhi while taking up the Nirvikalpa Samadhi.'

'When the mind, free from these four obstacles, rests unmoved, like the flame of a lamp sheltered from the wind, as one with Absolute Consciousness, it is called the Nirvikalpa Samadhi.'⁴³

In Samadhi there is the spiritual consciousness, but in deep sleep there is no element of spiritual consciousness. The fact of spiritual consciousness being present and maintained differentiates one from the other, and it is the spiritual consciousness that brings about transformation. Then you come down from the heights an altogether changed, an altogether transformed man, whereas from the state of deep sleep you return just as you were before entering it.

Without preservation of the vital force it is not possible for anyone to have real concentration of any kind, whether spiritual or non-spiritual. That is why continence and discipline are necessary for all forms of spiritual life before one can attain to any form of realization. And all the Great Ones have taught this, in the East as well as in the West.

Ordinarily the mind is constantly running after sense-objects, and in order to fix the mind on the object of meditation, we must draw it away from all sense objects, be they good or bad. Never allow the mind to be diverted from its own aim by any other thought. The Vedantic spiritual culture is always associated with the conception of Brahman.

In Dharana there are many breaks. In Dhyana there are breaks, but between these some connection is maintained. In Samadhi we have one unbroken flow of spiritual consciousness like the

43. *Vedantasara*, 179–209.

flow of oil that is being poured from one vessel into another.

The man who has not even Dharana is the slave of his mind that goes in all directions. But as soon as a person gets at least to Dharana, he can fix the mind and fix it again and again the very moment it begins to run away, and so one state gradually merges into Dhyana, Dhyana into Samadhi and finally Savikalpa Samadhi into Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

The Bhagavad-Gita on Yoga

'As a lamp in a pot sheltered from the winds does not flicker, even such has been the simile used for a Yogi of subdued mind, practising concentration in the Self.'

'When the mind, absolutely restrained by the practice of concentration, attains quietude, and when seeing the Self, one is satisfied in his own Self; when he feels that infinite Bliss, which is perceived by the purified intellect and which transcends the senses, and established wherein he never departs from his real state; and having obtained which, regards no other acquisition superior to that, and where established, he is not moved even by heavy sorrow; let that be known as the state called by the name of Yoga—a state of severance from the contact of pain. This Yoga should be practised with perseverance, undisturbed by depression of heart.'

'With the intellect set in patience, with the mind fastened on the Self, let him attain quietude by degrees: let him not think of anything.'

'Through whatever reason the restless, unsteady mind wanders away, let him, curbing it from that, bring under the subjugation of the Self alone.'

'Verily, supreme bliss comes to that Yogi of perfectly tranquil mind, with passions quieted, Brahman become, and freed from taint.'

'The Yogi freed from taint of good and evil, constantly engaging the mind thus, with ease attains the infinite bliss of contact with Brahman.'⁴⁴

Slowly, steadily, build up your meditation. Fix your mind on

44. Bhagavad-Gita, 6.19, 20–23, 25–28.

the Self. The candle may flicker before you attain Samadhi. But before you attain Samadhi, let the candle burn at least. See that it continues to burn, but stop its flickering.

The Two States in Spiritual Life

There are two different states, the state of the aspirant and the state of the perfect man. Of the first Sankara says, *'He avoids the company of people, looking upon them as poisonous serpents. Even the most beautiful form he looks upon as a dead body, and objects of sense-enjoyment, he avoids as he would poison.'* This is in the beginning when the aspirant wants to lead a pure life without having overcome his passions and desires. But when he himself has realized Truth, all this sense of hatred and of aversion passes away. So Sankara says, *'The whole world has become to him like a Divine pleasure-garden. All trees appear to him to be the wish-yielding tree in heaven. All waters appear to him as the holy Ganga water. All acts become to him consecrated acts. All sounds, whether gross or refined, good or bad, become to him the Vedic sound. The whole world becomes to him the holy city of Varanasi. Such becomes the vision of him who has realised the Truth, who has known Brahman.'* Then all fear of temptation has left him. At that stage he has gone beyond its sway. But these two stages should be clearly separated. First we must make use of the staircase, and only afterwards, when we ourselves have reached the terrace can we look down the staircase as something very small compared with the terrace and its amenities.

All Dependence on Externals is Misery

It is only the wise person who turns his mind and senses inward. We must have dispassion for all enjoyments in this life and in future lives. We must be able to discriminate between what is eternal and unchanging and what is transitory and fraught with pain and danger. We must come to possess the six ethical virtues: tranquillity of mind, restraint of the senses, renunciation of desires, endurance, placidity of mind, and faith. And lastly we must possess a burning desire for liberation from the trammels of nature. This means we must have a tremendous yearning for the Truth.

Learn to see things as they are. Everywhere on the phenomenal plane you find filth and flowers side by side. They are eternally inseparable so long as we do not go beyond the plane of manifestation which is the plane of the pairs of opposites. During the time of your early Sadhana create a disgust for the world and its expression through these pairs of opposites.

The first step towards realisation of God is to see in this body the greatest temple of the Divine. Only when the aspirant realises Him in the very depths of his own being, he realises Him in all. The human body is the greatest temple of God, for in it we have to realise Him. *'All dependence on externals is misery. Dependence on the Self alone is Bliss.'*⁴⁵

Constant Struggle a form of Worship"

The soul's path is not a path strewn with beautiful fragrant flowers. We must never be afraid of tremendous struggle. Spiritual life means this, but then there is pleasure in weathering the storm, there is pleasure in struggling. You get greater strength, greater steadiness and greater knowledge. Swami Vivekananda used to say, *'Constant struggle is a form of worship to the Lord. Repeated defeats should not unnerve thee. Let all thy hankerings, all thy desires be reduced to dust. Make thy heart a cremation-ground, and let the Mother dance there. God comes only when the heart is pure. Let the Mother dance there.'*

The mind has many compartments. Some of them you must lock up carefully, and then set fire to them. Other compartments must be unlocked, but finally you must set fire to them also, for Truth is beyond both.

Unless we are prepared to rise above the temptations of the senses, it is not possible for us to lead a really spiritual life. The senses must not be given food, they have to be curbed. Very often we imagine that if a certain desire were satisfied, it would leave us, but the truth is that every time a desire is satisfied it becomes stronger. You cannot really satisfy any desire. Desire, as such refuses to be satisfied and only begins to clamour all the more, the more you try to satisfy it.

45. *Manu Smriti*, 4.160.

*Verily this desire for enjoyment never becomes satisfied through enjoyment. The desires go on increasing and become more and more intense as is the case of the fire when clarified butter is poured into it.*⁴⁶

If this be the truth, we must cry halt somewhere and turn the mind wholly to truth.

Unless we are able to rid ourselves of the temptations presented to our mind by the senses, unless we are able to achieve the control of this unruly mind, it is not possible truly to turn to the Divine and to make Him the pivot of our life.

Especially during our meditation our desires become very vivid, take a terribly definite shape. So do our attachments. It is a severe test that comes to all of us without any exception. And physical temptations are nothing compared with mental temptations. The finer our world becomes, the more sensitive we grow, the greater the struggle. So the thoughts of the different Great Ones and of their attitude towards temptation should give us greater and greater strength to fight the battle successfully. Hence when sitting for meditation always send salutations to them.

Morning is the best time for the practices and meditation immediately we get up from bed. Always early morning is the best time, but then, we should practise Japa and meditate at least for a few minutes in the evening, when dusk is falling, too. If we have time enough it is good to perform our practices at the time of the four junctions of the day, i.e., at dawn, midday, nightfall and midnight, because they mean a change in the current and in the vibrations. If we cannot do so much, we should at least stick to the early morning and nightfall practices.

The general rule is: practise rhythmic breathing, because breath acts on the mind just as the mind acts on breath. The breath becomes very much attenuated during japa. Whenever the mind is really concentrated, breath is minimised. This is a great sign by which to measure the stage of concentration we have attained.

Tests of Progress

Our progress is always to be judged by our purity and non-at-

46. *Bhagavata*, 9.19.14.

tachment, by our introspection and discrimination, by our peace and selflessness. The test is whether we feel purer and become less attached, whether the trend of the mind is away from all sense-objects and manifestation and rising higher and higher. The test is whether we are slowly becoming able to stand on our own feet spiritually when we pass through moral and spiritual tempests which all striving brings. We have to colour our whole mind with the Divine and centre all our feelings and endeavours on It alone. We must shift the centre of our whole interest, not only the physical nerve-centre in the body.

It is the great task of the devotee to increase the capacity for noble thought, but this noble thought must not be given any outward expression in the beginner. Drive it deep into your mind, for then it gets tremendous power. You see when an elephant gets into a small pond, the whole water is disturbed and begins to overflow the banks. But when it gets into the sea, there is no change at all.

Maya's net is spread everywhere, and somehow we are all-way caught in it. We are able to make progress if we succeed in throwing aside all the stumbling blocks that lie in our way in the form of 'Woman and Gold' and undauntedly forge ahead. *'Arise, awake and stop not till the Goal is reached.'* We should go farther and farther without looking back, without caring for the small, petty, transient things of phenomenal life, without giving in to our desires and impulses, for then alone can we gain true freedom.

We must rise to a plane which is beyond all desires and impulses, above the good ones and the bad ones. For from the good emotion to the bad emotion is but a very short way. Never should there be any uncontrolled experience of love. Never allow love to be expressed or to seek expression on the physical plane. Avoid any kind of emotionalism if you want to lead a spiritual life. Keep your emotions under control and learn to direct them into the right channels.

Helpful Imaginations

Certain imaginations help us very much. Think of yourself as a Divine spark that is associated with the body, with its centre between the eyebrows. Imagine a house that is lighted in the up-

per story. Imagine the light of the soul to be between the eyebrows. There must be a fixed centre of your consciousness. It is this: The lamp is always placed in a certain part of the room and its light never penetrates equally into all corners of the room. Having a fixed centre of consciousness in one of the higher centres is the only remedy against all lust and sex-troubles and infatuation for a man or a woman.

Imagine very vividly that only one undivided mass of Divine Effulgence exists everywhere. Dissolve everything else into that till nothing else exists anywhere. Sometimes in meditation merge the subject and the object in the Infinite and Limitless Ocean of Light.

The Centre of Consciousness

If you really care for Jnana or wish to dwell on the Impersonal Aspect, you will have to withdraw the mind completely from the lower centres, and fix it firmly in the higher centres of the head, because the highest part of the body is the seat of the Paramatman. There alone can the individual be merged into the Universal. There alone full illumination and transmutation are possible.

And there is one very important point to note in our striving. When we judge ourselves, we should always judge ourselves from our weakest point, never from our strongest. The strength of a chain consists wholly in that of its weakest link. And we can only know where we really stand by testing the weakest link of the chain in ourselves, not by overlooking it and complacently dwelling on the stronger links.

Raising one's consciousness really means giving the brain-centre alone the work and guidance, and never to any of the lower centres in the body which are connected with it. It means forgetting the body and its impulses and coming in touch with subtler and higher currents.

The flow of the vital fluid should be upward too, never downward. All gross and physical manifestations of the vital fluid have to be avoided by the earnest aspirant, even if now and then such a thought arises in his mind, even if now and then the centre of his consciousness shows a tendency to go down. Our task is to

control the centres and to learn to switch off the current at the original power-station. Try to control the different centres from the power-station, from where it can be easily and naturally done. If you do this, there will be just enough nervous current to flow through the entire system to keep it in a fit and healthy condition, but not more than that. The downward flow of all the current that is not absolutely necessary for that will be completely stopped.

15. VEDANTA (The end of knowing)

There must be expansion of heart, expansion of intellect. There is love in almost all human beings, but what we generally give the name of 'love' is more or less the animal nature, containing physical elements and mostly belonging to the realm of body-consciousness of which in almost all cases of this so-called love there is a higher or a lower percentage present in the 'lover'. Love that contains these elements of physical desire or desire for enjoyment on the physical or mental plane, can never be 'love' in the true sense, in the sense in which the term is being used in spiritual life. If there were another word, I should avoid using the word 'love' at all, because the ordinary associations roused in people on hearing this term are almost the opposite of what love really is.

Our love is mostly a combination of both, i.e., of true love and the animal nature. But as love becomes free from all animality, even in a very subtle form, as it becomes spiritualised, it begins to express itself in its true colour of pristine purity.

We should all be very careful when using the word 'love', especially so in the West, and even avoid using it altogether as much as possible, because, as I said, of the wrong associations it calls up in the minds of others.

The love that the Christs, Buddhas, Ramakrishnas etc. of the world mean is very, very different from what is understood by 'love' by the average Christian, Hindu, etc.

There is knowledge in almost all human beings, but not the higher knowledge. Intellectualism, dry intellectualism has nothing to do with the expansion of the intellect.

Manhood is worth the name in proportion it frees itself from the fetters and limitations of animal nature, i.e., gets rid of the animal and physical desires and makes progress towards Divinity. And real manhood that knows no desire, no passion and attachment—real manhood and Divinity are not two essentially separate things at all.

The animal impulses etc. are obstructions in the way of real

manhood and its achievement by a person, and they are in no way part and parcel of manhood, of being a man, as such. Most human beings live like animals or even worse than animals, but that does not mean that animal life is part of human life, that it belongs to the human plane. This would be a wholly mistaken notion. It only means that the people leading such lives are not human beings really. They have not yet risen to the stature of a human being.

We do not want worms grovelling in the dust, but men, real men, in Vedanta, men expressing and living their eternal, innate Divinity and purity. What we generally call 'men' are not men but helpless slaves to their senses and cravings and impulses. They do not deserve even being given the name of 'men' They do not know what a man really is.

The reason why we want to live eternally is that our real nature is eternal. First this false identification with the body and all its upadhis (limiting adjuncts) must be got rid of. The body, the mind, the inner organ (antahkarana) etc., can never be eternal, and so long as our identification with them lasts, there can be no eternal life for us.

Whatever becomes the object of your consciousness is Maya (phenomenon), and you must separate the knower from the known, the 'seer' from the seen, the witness from all the things he is witnessing, the perceiver from the things perceived. There must be merciless, clear analysis and clear thinking at every stage of the spiritual journey.

When we remove the veils of Maya, we find X and Y are one and the same. Of that which Kant calls space, time and causation, the Vedantin says that it belongs to Maya, too, and that it has to be transcended. Kant did not see any means to transcend it, so he said that the thing-in-itself can never be known. Vedanta knows the means and tells you how to do it, goes a step further than Kant.

Kant did not know the possibility of transcending the mind and the world of phenomena, of separating the 'seer' completely from the seen. Physical objects are always percepts, being perceived by one or the other of the sense organs. The sense or-

gans themselves become percepts to the mind. In its turn, the mind becomes a percept to the Self which is always the witness or the perceiver and can never become a percept as this would mean a regression *ad in-finitum*. We must stop somewhere.

In Vedanta consciousness is always stressed. And we should never lose sight of this fact; otherwise there is the danger of our muddling up everything and losing sight of the true issue.

In deep sleep, Consciousness is present. After awaking from sleep, we say, 'I knew nothing'. But to enable us to say, 'I knew nothing', Consciousness must have been present. One cannot, therefore, predicate a time when Consciousness is not.

The perception of the snake in place of the rope is not false in the sense of there being absolutely nothing to account for the appearance of the snake. The rope forms the substratum, the basis, on which is superimposed the idea of the snake. The 'snake' is in no way based on a mere nothing. Maya is not illusion in the sense of mere nothingness.

Vedanta is not sheer idealism as some people think.

It is only when one believes that something is distinct from himself that he has a desire for the possession of that something whatever it be. The very fact of his having any desire at all is proof that he has already developed the idea of his being a subject, and that everything other than himself is an object to him. That is why perfect desirelessness in a really liberated soul follows as a matter of course, and no soul that is not desireless is liberated. Each soul, having realised the one without a second, has nothing to desire as there are no objects for such a soul.

Even the annihilation of anything requires a conscious witness, and that is the Self. There is no annihilation without some Consciousness being present. Our efforts should always be directed to get rid of the notion of the reality of name and form which are only superimposed on the Self during the waking and the dream states.

The screw is to be unscrewed now, just in the reverse order. The process of evolution and superimposition has been shown. Now comes the process of going back to the cause, of involution. From the gross to the subtle, from the subtle to the causal,

and then a long jump. And the first steps are a life of preparation, of scrubbing and cleaning, for, so long as any impurity is to be found in the mind, the reflector can never reflect the light of Consciousness properly and perfectly. And our mind is only the reflector. That is why all those layers of dirt and dust must be taken off before the mind can even begin to reflect the light in the proper way again. The light as such is the whole trouble.

Contenance, Brahmacharya, the strict fulfilment of all preliminaries are absolutely necessary if you want to be able to take up the higher forms of spiritual practice which alone can lead you on to the realisation of the Absolute State. And if you do not care to take up the spiritual life in right earnest, practically living it, then all these readings and talks have no value at all and become useless, a mere waste of time.

The Vedantin believes in evolution as a stage, but never as the ultimate goal; and to him even this evolution is merely an appearance, never an absolute reality. So if we speak of evolution at all, this is only meant in a very relative sense, not as an absolute fact. As an absolute fact there is no such thing as evolution at all.

The whole trouble is that to us the appearance has become real, and the reality unreal.

It is a most ludicrous situation, really speaking. But being the fools we are, we have to pay the price in misery and suffering and no end of disillusionments.

We must be able to stand the destructive aspect of truth. First, truth burns many things in us: false attachments, false hopes, all worldly desires and all worldly loves. And all these have to be destroyed utterly, if we really want to clean our reflectors.

If you are really prepared to follow the spiritual path unconditionally then you have to get rid of all such dreams, the gross dreams and the subtle ones and the very subtle ones also. And this means tremendous courage, tremendous heroism, tremendous bravery and undauntedness. By those who are weak, who have got weak nerves, who are vacillating, truth cannot be realised. And seeing that the dream is going to break anyhow, why

not go and break it consciously, purposefully, manfully? Every dream is going to break sooner or later, why create new dreams? Why not stop dreaming altogether?

All wrong identification must be broken. And this means pain in the beginning. Blessed pain, pain that is the forerunner of freedom and bliss.

The darkness of the world is illumined by the soul, but we do not know its true nature and do not see its darkness, but take the reflected light to be its light.

Evolution can never be an ultimate fact to the Vedantin, as I said. It, too, is a mere appearance, the rope that is being taken for the snake. Never more than that. It is true at a certain state; it is no longer true after we have gone beyond that stage on our path to Truth.

This is not a question of something becoming something else. It is not the milk becoming curds; then it loses its true nature. But it is the rope 'becoming' a snake. And when this mistake has been made, when the rope has been mistaken for a snake, then it brings in all the troubles of a real snake:—fear, etc., etc.

The world-dream only appears to be real so long as we are not awake, so long as the vision of the Atman has not come to us.

And our waking state has no greater reality than our dream state. Both are equally unreal.

It is very important to be able to stand the destructive aspect of Truth. It must first of all burn away all our false hopes, false identifications, false pet ideas, all our false worldly aspirations, all our small, petty, greedy loves. Then only will Truth reveal itself, not before. But who really wants them to be burnt? Who wants to pay the price and reach the goal? We have got the means, the method of the Great Ones, but we are so perverse that we always postpone our own efforts and go on deriving intellectual enjoyments from these fine ideas without realising their truth ourselves. That is not the way that will take us nearer the goal.

Very often we want to dream our miserable, contemptible,

petty, little dreams of love and power and self-glorification. We want to hug them to our heart's content, and cling to them as long as we possibly can, till they are torn away from us.

As I said, if you are really prepared to follow the spiritual life you must do away with all dreams, gross dreams, subtle dreams and very subtle dreams, even if they are good dreams, relatively speaking. There must be merciless scrubbing and cleaning and readjustment. A new outlook must be created, sacrificing old notions and pet ideas, prejudices etc. Tremendous and uncompromising boldness is necessary. Those who are manly, who are bold and strong and purposeful and reliable alone can attain to Truth. Not others. It is such a wonderful adventure. In Vedanta there is no place for the weakling, the worms grovelling in the dust, the sinners, who go on crying, 'Oh, I am a sinner, I am a sinner, what can I do, I am a sinner', and then merrily and carelessly continue to sin, to wallow in the mire, and wail and cry.

Truth is not to be attained by the weak. If purity is ours by birthright, why not manifest purity? If love is ours by birthright, why not manifest love? If bliss is ours by birthright, why not manifest bliss? If freedom is ours by birthright, why go on being slaves to our senses, to our body, mind, and ego? Break the dream mercilessly. Learn to stand on your own feet, a man's feet, manfully!

Swami Vivekananda says in one of his poems:

*'Be bold and face the Truth.
Be one with It.
Let visions cease,
Or, if you cannot, dream then truer dreams
Which are Eternal Love and Service free!'*

This is the ideal, and the ideal must some day be made real. It must not be allowed to remain only an ideal. Mere theories and elevating thoughts and superfine intellectual niceties will not do. Money is not the difficulty at all. Men are. We need workers, people willing to do their very best for their own welfare as well as for that of others, people willing to lead a life of spiritual service. So I am trying to do intensive work with small groups, instead of extensive work. First, we must create the workers, the selfless

workers that will bring the life to others through their examples of their selfless service and love. That is what is needed. Money will look after itself. If you are true to Sri Ramakrishna, he may, one day, make instruments of some of you, and then you are safe. But he watches the sincerity of an aspirant for a long time before he does this. Perfect sincerity, perfect purity and dedication, that is what is needed by all of you. Then, one day, some fine work will be done.

OM TAT SAT