

Ruslan Zhukovets

BEYOND THE VEILS OF  
**LIGHT**

ESOTERIC  
SUFISM





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ESOTERIC SUFISM

RUSLAN ZHUKOVETS

## ANNOTATION

In this book, the author delves into fundamental questions in the theory and practice of Sufism. The book is based on his own personal experience of mysticism. In accessible language, the author enlightens the reader on the secrets of mystical knowledge and mystic practices, discussing in detail how these practices should be performed and under what conditions. The book is unique for having been written by a contemporary mystic and containing both knowledge of the essence of the Sufi tradition and a deep knowledge of the mindset of the contemporary seeker. An open-minded reading of the book may prove an invaluable aid to the individual work of a true seeker.

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“Then to Me will be your return,  
and I will inform you about what you used to do.”

— QURAN, 31:15



## INTRODUCTION

Truth is revealed to those who seek it. To those who are prepared to go after it no matter the limitations, no matter the internal and external obstacles, of which there are many on the seeker's path. Truth is revealed to those who do not fear it, who are ready to reject all of their own prejudices and who are open to new experience.

In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell lamented that all the philosophy of the past hundred years had moved from the broader matters of world order to purely human affairs—the limits to our knowledge of the world and the meaning of life. The reason for this change is obvious—examining the creation of the world became a scientific endeavor, while philosophers arrived at the discovery of a rather banal truth: every human being is primarily interested in themselves, and only secondarily in other people. After this discovery, the rise of psychology became inevitable—a science that seeks in earnest to study the mechanical reactions of the human psyche. However, the researchers' own lack of self-knowledge has led to the whole subject of psychology being transformed into a series of theories made up of the projec-

tions and fantasies of their authors concerning “why modern man is the way he is.” Over time, it has become clear that these theories will never bring us any satisfactory answers or bring us to a new level of understanding of human nature. For this we have relied on mystics, with their experience in the knowledge of the self.

The moment that science began its triumphal movement towards explaining previously inexplicable phenomena and started uncovering the laws according to which the physical world existed, an opinion began to surface among many people that religious and mystical aspects of life should be consigned to the past. In relation to the God, who was meant to have been sitting up in the heavens, the God of the external, who manifests his presence in the external world—this was absolutely the correct opinion. You cannot see God with either a telescope or a microscope, that is a fact. And this could mean that He simply does not exist, or else it means only that in order to detect God’s Presence we must use different methods. These are the methods provided by the mystic paths, upon which the seeker may acquire their own personal experience of truth and the reality of God.

Religion is cluttered with rituals and demands that you believe in its dogma. By comparison to religion, mysticism is pure science, however strange that seems. Anyone who wants to may, by performing the recommended practices with due diligence, obtain *objective* and *predictable* results. Mystical work is based on the *knowledge of symbols*, which cannot be recorded or described by physics or chemistry, as they have nothing to do with the material world, but belong to the spiritual realm. Thus, when performing the practices, the seeker is in fact conducting an experiment, whose results, when the correct conditions are observed, are guaranteed and predictable. What is this if not scientific experience?

Every remotely serious religion has its own mystical movement which, as it emerges from the shadow of some belief or other, will often become a fully independent exponent of a spiritual or

mystic science and the bearer of a special knowledge. In this sense, long-existing mystical schools and movements are susceptible to that law which Gurdjieff presented to the world as the “Law of Octaves.” To simplify somewhat, this law states that any activity performed by people inevitably degenerates over time if it does not contain within it any impulse for renewal, which will usually come in the form of desired or undesired transformation. Through degeneration, the form of the activity performed may remain as it was before, but its essence will be lost completely or severely changed. Any understanding of the essence of the practice is also lost, and true knowledge is substituted for the murky veils of “meaningful” phrases that explain nothing. Ultimately, followers of these crumbling systems are asked simply to believe in this thing and that thing, and to follow instructions and perform practices that have been “consecrated” in the course of time. And so knowledge and understanding are substituted for faith, while the school of mysticism becomes a religious sect.

Practically every long-established mystical movement has been subject to degeneration in one form or another, and Sufism is no exception. As I have written before—the essence of any mystical work consists in establishing and maintaining a connection to God, though not everyone has what it takes to become a conscious conductor and a carrier of that connection. The customary mode of transfer—the transfer of spiritual knowledge and continuity from father to son, for example, is not always effective by any means, and in fact quite often leads to the very deterioration I have alluded to above. At least, this is the picture we now observe in a number of active Sufi orders.

Needless to say, the interpretation of various matters concerning the theory and practice of Sufism has undergone a simplification, taking on aspects of the most primitive mysticism, whereby anything that is not understood is declared inherently hidden and inexplicable. Some things are hard to explain, it is

true. They may only be lived, thereby to gain experience that goes beyond the bounds of what can be described in human language, yet it remains possible to delineate the mechanisms by which people may come to this experience themselves. In my view, there is now a real need to set out this collection of previously hidden truths that are explicitly tied to the Sufi methods of mystical work in contemporary language, bearing in mind people's current state of being.

Truth is revealed to those who seek it. Those who care only for themselves and their own states of being cannot come to an experience of the Ultimate. They will be limited by themselves, and their efforts will always rely on their own ego, which with this approach will become an insurmountable obstacle. There can be no escape from the bounds of the ordinary if a person's attention is limited and restricted to their own problems only. Bertrand Russell was right to a certain degree—philosophy, now locked up within the individual human being, has lost a part of the potential it once had. Mysticism has avoided this trap, laying its emphasis not on some cerebral understanding, but in direct comprehension of Truth. Sufis say that man is separated from Truth by three thousand veils - fifteen hundred veils of Darkness and fifteen hundred veils of Light. Those who are able to cast off all these veils shall attain a wholly untarnished vision of Truth. In casting off the influence of the energies from Darkness and Light, a person's powers of perception will be made complete.

In any truly mystical school there is a strict partitioning of information, and access to knowledge is limited. The matter of knowledge is a dangerous matter. The practical orientation of mystical work would render the involvement of any person who is not yet ready to partake in the practices quite dangerous. Work involving energies with high-frequency vibrations is similar to the impact of radiation—a person whose internal structure is not prepared for this sort of impact may suffer. Therefore a certain

amount of information is always held back, and this is where so-called esoteric knowledge comes in, which in every school of mysticism takes on its own specific form, and modes of application and transfer. This book presents a part of that mystical knowledge, pertaining to the Sufi Path and working methods.



## GOD UNVEILED

**M**any years ago a Master told me that God was an energo-informational substance, created by people for their own ends. Having no experience at all at the time, I was taken aback. Where do all the religions come from in that case and who is it that we serve? At the time, I had to take this statement under advisement, but it was a long time before I was able to come back to it in earnest. I needed God—without Him, it would have been impossible to put any effort into performing the practices; I would have lost my ultimate motivation. Back then, I could not conceive of how that informational substance could itself have been created, and for that reason I preferred to believe in the religious texts, where only good things were written about God. These texts consoled, inspired and motivated me.

Later on when I acquired my own personal mystical experience and more advanced powers of perception, it made me realize what a complex question was the question of God. It is in direct proportion to the complexity of how the world is put together, and to the Levels of Being, which are distinct in and of themselves. And the manifestations of the Creator are in turn distinct from the worldly Levels of Being.

There are three existential levels available to the perception of a person in their ordinary state of being. The first is the level of the physical world and the physical human body; the second relates to the ethereal body, in which emotional energies in particular manifest themselves. The third level pertains to the body of the lower mind, which is to say the mind that people use in their everyday lives. One must clearly comprehend that each body has its own corresponding Level of Being and its own *reality*. Every body has its own powers of perception and reaction speeds, and each one is subject to the laws of its own plane. Because these three bodies are intimately connected, it is quite hard to articulate how they interact with and influence one another, without the skill of awareness. It is even harder to see the reality to which each of these bodies is connected. Not counting physical reality, of course, which let's face it, surrounds us on all sides.

And tellingly, in that reality it is impossible to find God. That, to put it frankly, is why every religion demands that its followers have faith, since it will never be possible to locate God on the physical plane or show Him to all who are willing. The atheists have a point, therefore, when they deny God's existence in this world. Their denial is based on their sensory organs, which are designed for perceiving the physical world and are of practically no use in perceiving anything from the spiritual realm. Their own limited abilities of perception and the self-evident fact that the world is able to exist with no direct or observable interference from God, enables this whole cluster of people to go on living contentedly with no thought and no recollection of the Creator at all. Everything is already in place. Such is their freedom—perhaps not freedom of will, but freedom of religion.

Thus, at the level of the physical body, there is no way of perceiving the reality of God. Perception by the five sensory organs a person possesses is very crude, moreover this perception is *adapted* for existence on the physical plane and has no other

purpose or function. The lower mind is capable of perceiving the *idea of God*, the idea of the Creator and some higher Source of life, but nothing more. As we know, the idea of God does not constitute real proof of the fact that He really exists, and does not eliminate those doubts that accompany every faith. Conviction is a poor substitute for actual experience, and yet thanks to the functioning of the imagination and its capacity for self-hypnosis, the mind may engender all manner of hallucinations and pseudo-experiences, and a great number of “spiritual” books have been written on this basis. Thanks to the imagination and this self-hypnosis, along with the strong desire for spiritual realization, a whole host of false teachings has come into being.

The ethereal body, when adequately developed, is able to perceive the subtle energies that surround it, and in particular the energy of grace. But by itself, grace serves only as indirect proof of a Higher Presence, and in fact does not make itself felt nearly as often as many would like. And a sufficiently high level of awareness is required for the sensitivity of the ethereal body to become heightened and refined. In the normal state, the sensitivity of the ethereal body is blocked by suppressed emotions and is at times thereby almost absent.

If a person were made up of these three bodies only, then it would all end there. However the design of a person is far more complex and this is why one has that peculiar irrational, mystical sense that somehow creeps in now and then, that the visible world is not the ultimate or the only reality. But because a person does possess these other bodies and centers of this *other* perception, one will occasionally find oneself in situations where one suddenly experiences things that do not fit into one’s normal picture of the world. There is also a feeling of the non-realization and the unsatisfactoriness of *this* world—everyone has experienced this in one form or another. It is this, the feeling of the non-realization of the self, that spurs people on to the search for what

is beyond the bounds of the ordinary. It is this that transforms them into seekers, and later into mystics.

This is the Truth: God, as we call Him, has no identity. Everyone who makes it to that boundary talks about the same thing—the Source of life has no name, no dimensions, it is possible to experience oneness with Him, but this cannot be properly expressed. It is a complex question, and it is impossible to comprehend the answer to it without the requisite experience. “Heaven and Earth have no humanity,” so says

The Tao Te Ching, and if anyone is looking to find in Truth a refuge for their sadness, then they may easily do so. Because there is no loving God the Father, with all those other attributes of His. There is a Force that gives life and death, that fosters and creates myriad worlds, that destroys, that is merciful and wicked... But one thing it definitely does not have is an identity, as we are accustomed to understanding it. The Force that sets the world in motion is faceless. It is difficult for us to comprehend how God might not want anything, particularly when most religions teach us that He always wants something from us. It is hard enough for us to comprehend simple things, so it is difficult to talk about complex things. It is believed that God enjoys creating, and so he creates worlds. Is that so? It is believed that the world exists because God so desires, and therefore the desires of human beings are almost equated to the desires of God, and that means people may influence the world in the most immediate way by simply thinking of what they want. So thanks to desires (and their almost divine power), people begin to feel that they are equal to God and want at this point to change, if not the whole world, then at least their own lives. This is what all popular mysticism and contemporary esotericism is now—a mixture of the sin of pride and the practice of magic.

Can you imagine a faceless Force that is inherently infinite in its potential? You cannot, because infinity does not fit within the

constraints of our wholly finite and limited minds. And here lies another Truth: all mystics who progress to the possible limits of human knowledge find that our Level of Being is a private and likewise limited instance within the extremely complex overall system of Being. And now imagine, in place of our four-dimensional world, worlds where there are many more dimensions, and time possesses qualities we are completely unaccustomed to. It is impossible for you to imagine such a thing, and yet, strange as it may sound, it is possible for you to experience it. In the kinds of states that mystics put themselves into, experiences like these are not out of the ordinary. When, for example, time stands at a new connection with space, and one event may occur at a fixed point in time, but yet be stretched out across several years. Repeated, that is, with unflinching regularity on the same day over the course of several years in a row all while remaining *the same event*, which appears in our world, but is in fact triggered from a different Level of Being. Mystics generally contrive to open doors like these that would be better kept close. But searches can sometimes lead to where people are better off not going. Scientists also discover natural laws, and this led us to the creation of the atomic bomb, but that chain reaction gives us a poor kind of energy.

When we try to imagine a faceless and indivisible Force, we cannot help but look for analogies from our world. Like the force of a hurricane, or the force of a tsunami, for example. Generally we bring to mind disasters. However, the problem is that all the natural forces we know about are subject to certain laws of creation, and not one of them is independent. God, on the other hand, is independent, great, and so on. In other words, God is the Force that gives life to all other forces, as well as the laws that bring them into being. And this is where we are forced to stop in our search for any analogies. Because not everything that we can touch has an analogue in this world. This is why all the higher-order mystical texts are so turbid in the way they are written.

Returning to the Source is compared to various processes—a droplet returning to the ocean, and other kinds of dissolution. We might be able to imagine an ocean of consciousness without fully understanding what we mean by consciousness. This is how we get those images that sell so well, creating the illusion of understanding among those who find in them the answers to their questions. All the stories about higher experience and building higher Levels of Being contain distortions and totally simplify the reality of the situation. Quite often, these distortions form the main substance of communication and this is when books appear like *Rose of the World*, very little of which is dedicated to the true state of things. There are also examples of extreme simplification—contemporary teachings in Advaita suffer from this affliction. The pronouncements of genuine mystics in Advaita are profound and truthful, but their contemporary interpretation, not even that but rather their dumb repetition and the simplification that comes with it, leads to the point where the lie becomes the main substance of a given teaching. Evidently, demand for simple things has found its supply. In reality there is nothing simple about immersion in the inner self or escaping the bounds of the three bodies described above. But without this immersion there can be no experience of God, no attainment of Truth.

Simplification and distortion are inevitable when Truth is communicated in words. There is nothing you can do about this—language belongs to the mind, and the mind is merely an agent of one of the human Levels of Being, and not even its highest. And so mystics consciously simplify things, in order to be able to pass on to those who are aware of the necessity of their own spiritual fulfillment some description at least, both of the Path and what it leads to. And this is the point where Truth becomes absent, as a result of which it is impossible to work on oneself. What does it mean to say that God is faceless, that he is remote, and so on? This would quell anyone's desire to move or make any effort. God's inhu-

manity must be concealed behind lofty words that can motivate people to go within, and exert effort without. And this is where every mystic, to whose lot it falls to train people, must find the words to ignite the hearts of those people.

And let us not forget tradition. Where there is a tradition, the work of the mystics is that much easier, because each tradition already has its own language and its own imagery that may be used to provide those who wish to set out on the mystic Path with everything they need. When there is a cultural context and people are already conditioned to certain conceptions of God, it is possible to speak to them in a language that is close to them and more or less comprehensible. And it is here that a perfectly natural question arises—what do we need conceptions of God for? Especially if they always contain these distortions and simplifications.

From an everyday viewpoint, the requirement that people have for God is perfectly understandable—the presence of God and the morality that has as its source his commandments, lends human existence a higher meaning. The Presence of God in all those ideas that fill the human mind, enables people to focus their attention on the mystical part of their own being. But there is in all this another, more practical reason. It is impossible to make contact with those who are not there, and it is certainly impossible to work with them. The concept of a personal God is necessary for anyone who seeks the Truth, in order that they may transcend it once they have gained their own experience of the Transcendent.

It is impossible to interact with a Force that is faceless, indifferent and omnipotent. How could you communicate with it? You cannot resolve this problem simply by spreading God into everything around you, when every little bush or mountain can suddenly be made to represent Him. But you may well communicate and interact with a God that possesses a name and a history. This is the design of our mind—it needs someone to talk to, and

therefore God is something every seeker needs. If, as in Buddhism, God is absent, then one requires a Master, onto whom all of God's most vital functions are transposed. *All* of the mystical practices are built on interaction with God, regardless of the time, place or the form of religion or faith.

And there is your history—all forms of religion have their bridges for communicating with that which cannot be named. The only difference between them is the level of communication, nothing more. We have pantheism, polytheism, monotheism... And the only difference between them is in how technically they employ one image of God or another. From a practical standpoint, a single God is far less awkward than a host of gods, each playing its own role, and with each having to be addressed in time of need according to its own particular role. Polytheism means the energy from people offering prayers or performing rites is constantly spilling into different channels, which from a practical standpoint is too wasteful. This is why, incidentally, all mystical disciplines in all faith systems always restrict themselves to just one God. In Hinduism, for example, amid the diversity of different gods there is a cult of Shiva, and other cults, where believers worship one god, essentially creating a regular monotheistic cult. From a practical standpoint, this is the most proper solution, because the whole question of transcending boundaries and moving closer to Truth is a question of energy. And it has been a question of energy throughout all ages—most limitations imposed by religions on their followers enabled that energy to be preserved and afterwards to be directed along a defined course.

Pure monotheism generated much more effective mystical systems. Sufism—for all that believers and laypeople alike may say about it—represents one of the most effective paths towards experiencing that which cannot be expressed in words. Communing with one main God allows mystics to develop practices that can bring magnificent results. The path is made up of a defined

sequence of actions and stages that are essentially common to all. Actions demand corresponding efforts, enabling a person to grow beyond the bounds of the three lower bodies, which are of no benefit to them. Developing the higher bodies demands effort, and people who contend that you can reach enlightenment by simply realizing that you are already enlightened and always were, are being seriously disingenuous. No one is born with their higher bodies already activated, and this is why anyone who is looking for total realization really has to make an effort. Actualizing the higher bodies demands conscious efforts, sacrifice and conscious super-efforts—this is another law of our Level of Being, and we cannot do anything about it, however much we may want to.

Living in the world, in the reality of the three lower bodies, one may regularly experience happiness and bouts of passion, creating the impression of inner fulfilment. But within the confines of the physical body, the emotions and the mind, a person can never feel that they are fully realized. No amount of love or passion can fully satiate him—I shall not even explain why this is so, I have written about this so many times before. From the point of view of mysticism, a human being is a potentiality that must be realized, or else he is little different from an insect. From the point of view of mysticism, most people spend their lives in vain, prone to all kinds of passion apart from the single most important one—a passion for true realization. True realization is not the empty phrase it may seem at first glance. There are different types of external realization that can give short-term gratification, as any gratification is consumed by a new fear or desire. True realization happens only through inner growth, and it changes everything in the sense that it may only be said that everything changes. There is a change in perception, a change in the capacity for action, a change in the setting in which all human life flows. When you are able to live, conscious of yourself at the different Levels of Being, the physical world ceases to be the main or final one. This is what the body

becomes, though it is the main condition of our existence in the world, the main vehicle of our potential. Without manifestation—in one form or another—there can be no realization. God is also realized through manifestation—the world is a concentrated manifestation in which unlimited potentialities take on limited and finite forms.

And this is another bit of Truth: God cannot be known externally, He is not outwardly revealed. More precisely, His Presence is only outwardly revealed to those who are *able* to see. All the rest is inside. Man is the principal location of God's presence, if not the principal location of his manifestation. It sounds paradoxical, but in so far as any person is only interested in themselves, by moving around within themselves, a person may by mysterious means uncover there a multitude of manifestations of God, which, along with other wonders, is what forms the true inner world of every mystic. And the main center here is the Heart, which is identified by all mystics as the most important organ of perception. Although in this context, of course, Heart does not refer to the physical organ per se. And its role in perceiving the reality of God requires a separate discussion.

## THE HEART UNVEILED

**O**f course, the physical organ that we call the heart, that ball of muscles responsible for circulating blood around the body, and which thereby keeps all the organism's vital functions going, has no mystical significance. The positioning of the energy center does have significance, and when it is activated, it seems, from the senses, to occupy almost all the space within the chest cavity. At least, this is how we experience it, though this is only a projection of the physical body, and does not reflect all of the possibilities

that are opened up by this center.

We will begin with what is almost common knowledge. Kundalini yoga identifies seven energy centers we may and must work on. Other systems (including Sufism) name a different number than seven centers or deny their existence altogether. This is not hugely important, actually, as the heart center is the most important thing in mystical work anyway.

In the works of poets, the heart is the main source of love, and they are always trying to make it a gift of their love. This has caused people to specifically associate the heart with all of their sensory experiences, and above all love. So-called spiritual sick-

ness is also felt in the chest, rather than in the head. As far as these experiences are concerned, the mind is actively involved in their creation, but the actual energy of the feeling manifests itself in the chest—sometimes literally in the projection of the physical heart, but most often this happens via the center in the chest cavity.

Generally, adherents of theory of Kundalini Rising, whereby this powerful and mysterious energy passes through all seven centers from the lowest to the highest, make a lot of claims about the whole process of man's spiritual transformation being largely mechanical. They say that once the Kundalini has risen to the next chakra and the chakra has been ignited, this guarantees irreversible spiritual changes in the person. That is to say, the main thing is to build up enough pressure in the Sushumna (the energy channel located in the projection of the spinal column), so that the Kundalini goes up as quickly as possible, and that is all there is to it. Of course adherents of this form of yoga must also cleanse that channel, and perform all kinds of practices that promote cleansing and ascension, but this does not change the essence of the theory. What we can say on the essence of this particular question is that energy centers exist objectively in and of themselves. These centers are connections between the different bodies of a person; furthermore, they perform the function of transformers of energy across the various planes. The contention that each chakra is linked to a corresponding body number is not entirely convincing—it is far more complex than this. Besides transforming energy, some centers also have the function of connection, and for mystical work by far the most important is the heart center. In a mysterious sense, this center is also the most important to the life of any human being. It should be said at this point that all centers are to some degree active in most people. They perform the function of transforming energy, though in most cases they perform it poorly because they are almost entirely blocked by the suppressed energy of desires and emotions. And, for example, liberating

oneself from suppressed emotions by acknowledging and expressing them actively encourages the centers to return to their normal working condition.

What is important is that with the aid of specialized exercises and by creating the right conditions, the centers can be ignited quite quickly; and their susceptibility to the energy that flows through them becomes many times higher. On its own, though this “ignition” creates great opportunities for inner work, it cannot be an end in itself and does not signify that a person has reached some higher level. This achievement involves the technical aspects and possibilities of work, but is not an indicator of any kind of spiritual breakthrough. It is not all as simple as many would like it to be.

Sufis have always worked primarily on the fourth center, called the Anahata in Hinduism. For this, they changed the *lataif*—the practice of concentrating on the heart center and its “petals”, again, according to the commonly accepted Hindu description of the chakras. And this is what happens as a result—as soon as the heart center becomes active, when it begins to ignite, all the other centers are ignited by it. This effect is achieved over a period of time, but it happens to almost everyone who performs the practices with sincere devotion. And the order in which the centers are activated is not particularly important, considering that the heart is still the main center. At least, to begin with. Strange to say, among contemporary people, the first and second centers are the slowest to be switched on, which speaks to how mixed up we are now in our heads—or rather, our minds—and how much suppressed fear we now have. But this is not the most important thing either.

The possibilities of the centers are not limited to only one transformation of energy, after all any energy only ever exists in motion. Without motion it becomes matter, as we know. Therefore energy flows through all the centers, that is clear, but in addition

they may receive energy from outside and also give off energy outwardly. It is clear that each of the centers works with different types of energy—different both in terms of the frequency of their vibrations and their “substance”.

The second center—*svadhisthana*—works, for example, with sexual energy and those energies that are directly or obliquely connected with human sexuality. This is where you get your fear, your sense of shame... That same deep-seated, suppressed fear that blocks the normal flow of energy in the second center, and the ability to reach orgasm (or gain gratification from sex) is lost, in both men and women. As I have written before, due to their inability to flow freely, suppressed emotional energies settle and *crystallize* in the physical body, causing the development of disorders and various different diseases.

The heart center is blocked most of all by sorrow, but the desires connected to it also have an impact on its sensitivity. In a mystical sense, the Heart thereby performs another vital function—the function of a connective channel. An activated heart center and an open Heart are far from the same thing. With activation comes a more intensive flow of energy in the center, it *reignites*, as it were, and increases its productivity. With the *opening* of the Heart, a conscious connection is established with the Higher Levels of Being, but this is a different situation altogether.

Strictly speaking, the connection of the Heart between God and man always exists. It is only that man is not normally aware of it, and this is why there is the illusion of the absence of any such connection, which comes with the illusion of one’s separation from existence. However, man is *always* receiving impulses of knowledge and will, in spite of his unconscious state in relation to them. Impulses of knowledge in a person’s ordinary state come in the form of intuitive insights, when they know exactly how they should act, yet there is no logical explanation for it. Impulses of will include both desires and the sudden incitement to action

which also has no logical basis in terms of a person's normal motivations.

Were the Heart of a person not so badly blocked, and were there not so much hideous confusion in the mind and in the senses, then these impulses would be perceived that much more easily and more often. As it is, they come so indiscriminately that they are of almost no use to the person. But we shall speak about this in a little more detail below.

Essentially, an open Heart is a doorway to another mode of being, and to a life in which there is no longer the illusion of separation. Thanks to the Heart, a person may constantly sense a connection with all other people—with almost all humanity. This is felt more closely than the connection with the Creator, for example. It is rather difficult to describe, but an analogy might look something like this—at the energy level, all people are connected in one huge net, every thread of which ends at the heart center of a separate person. With an open Heart, sensing, and subsequently the seeing this human Level of Being makes it an objective reality, while in the ordinary state this level, along with many others indeed, is inaccessible to people's perception, and this allows them to live inside an illusion. Many people unconsciously feel that they are connected to others, but a confused feeling is worth little in comparison to certain knowledge. Because of this connection, large numbers of people can for brief periods become consumed by the same desires and feelings (for example, indignation), it just wouldn't be proper to speak of it aloud.

Moreover, the true seeker must go much further in realizing the openness of his Heart. And that is where infinity opens up. There is no other way to put this: At some point, entering the Heart through concentration, a person may find their way to the infinite space. That is how it is perceived, and although it is impossible to travel through it, it is possible to immerse yourself into that feeling of infinity and stay to there for as long as the soul desires.

Along with the feeling of infinity comes the feeling of freshness and peace, which form the permanent “setting” that is present in the open Heart.

And finally, at a certain point one experiences in the Heart the Presence and a connection to the Source. For the mystic, this connection is absolutely explicit and absolutely real. Indeed, its reality is confirmed all the time by the experience that comes through the process of communication with God. As soon as one becomes conscious of this connection, complete Surrender and the conscious submission of one’s life and one’s will to God become possible. And after this, the existence of the mystic becomes so mysterious that it is hard enough to talk about it, and without any kind of personal mystical experience simply impossible to believe.

## IMPULSES OF KNOWLEDGE & IMPULSES OF WILL

**T**he whole world hinges on connections at all different levels, and a connection is essentially a kind of interaction. For example, the atoms in a single molecule interact with each other via chemical connections. The connection that appears in the open Heart also brings about interaction with the Higher Levels of Being. And this interaction has two main aspects (besides awareness of the existence of the levels themselves)—one relates to knowledge, and the other to the will.

Just as the connection to the Ultimate is unique for each person, so the knowledge that he receives through the Heart channel relates specifically to what he is concerned about at that particular moment. This is how intuition works—it answers the question that is most important right now and troubles a person most. Intuition has the same appearance as the impulses of knowledge, which may act through the Heart. In an ordinary state a person just cannot feel these impulses happening and only rarely receives flashes of intuitive knowledge across large interstices of time, and not just whenever he wants to. With an open Heart, the intuition channel is also open and is *constantly* active. In this state a person can always sense whether or not he is traveling upon the

correct course for him and how any given situation will turn out for him. He may also know this about certain other people, but only those with whom he has a good energy connection.

It should be pointed out here that people involved in predicting the fates of others are not using the heart center channel, but the abilities of the fourth, *mental*, body and the sixth center, often called the “third eye”, that is connected to it. The sixth center and the mental body each have their own capacity for perceiving all different kinds of information, and it is because of them that so many different predictions are made, and also the miracle of insight. They are all enthusiastically exploited by mediums and the like. As we know, predictions rarely come true, because the mental body is subject to a set of laws and cannot know *all* the possible iterations of fate and its alternative outcomes. An activated fourth body by no means indicates the presence in that person of an open Heart. On the contrary, those who fall into the trap of the abilities that it possesses thereby retreat from the possibility of getting to the Heart.

Intuitive knowledge never fails, although it may not always have a logical basis. It is almost always connected to the will—either the desire (or the necessity) to do something, or the desire to find out how a situation that you have gotten yourself into will turn out for you. In fact, the knowledge that comes through the Heart channel always appears in the form of an answer to your own personal question, even if it has not actually been formulated as a question. This is how interaction with God and His kindness manifests itself.

And also: In so far as the knowledge that arrives along the heart channel does not touch the mind and does not pass through its structure (as distinct from information delivered through the sensory organs, for example), it always takes the form of a feeling. A specific feeling, indicating by its own shift the correct or incorrect choice, or giving a sense of conviction that everything is

proceeding as it must. This “as it must” touches directly upon a person’s fate and his will, which is first and foremost connected to his desires.

Desires themselves, as we know, are formed in the mind, and this is patently obvious. Say a person believes in the existence of heaven and as a result of this he wants to go there. Or a person has the idea that all people are equal, and he wants for everything in the outside world to work out exactly the way it does in his own head. And he is ready to fight for this. Yet in all this the *energy of his desires* has nothing whatsoever to do with the mind.

If you look for where in the body the energy of desire comes from, you may convince yourself without too much difficulty that you can feel it somewhere in the chest cavity. The original impulse of the life force which is later transformed into desire, also comes to us through the heart center. This force is a part of the Downward Stream of Creation, which I have written about before, and which I shall perhaps write further on in more detail. It feeds on all living things and is the main impulse that gives all living things the *will to life*. So whenever we receive an impulse from the life force, we feel it near the heart center. At first it is pure energy, without any shape, but the mind quickly directs it to the channel of desire.

It must be understood that after a certain point in life we rarely get *new* desires. Generally speaking, the desires we do have simply change their form, while in fact maintaining their original essence. Yesterday I wanted one kind of food, today I want another; yesterday I had a desire for a particular woman, today it is a different one... The object changes, but the essence of the desire itself remains the same. It is therefore almost impossible to capture the precise moment at which this impulse crosses into the channel of desire, quick as it is, and all desires await their allotment energy as they dwell within the mind. And they receive it according to how relevant or important they are to the person.

In so far as all the subtle bodies are bound to the physical body, their ability to function depends directly on the state of it. If, for example, a person is hungry, then because his physical capacities are exhausted and the body is tuned to survive, the impulses from the life force are truncated, and desires weaken.

A weak body simply cannot physically receive them. Something like same thing happens during illness and in old age—the weakened body is incapable of taking on powerful impulses from the energy of desires, as they may kill it.

Similar processes occur when a person has a large number of suppressed or unrealized desires. Desires push us into action, they help us to exert effort, and they objectively appear in the form of what is called the human will. When they are suppressed, a person overflows with this energy and cannot receive new energy in the same quantities as before. But I have described all the consequences of suppressing energy in terms of its impact on the body and on the psyche before.

Man's design is very complex, and this complexity stems not only from the biochemical and other processes coursing through his body, but mainly from the fact that man is an open, multilayered system. His openness, especially, is something we can see with our own eyes in the functions of the heart center. Through it we have contact with all of Existence and with Life itself.

## THE WILL: ONE'S OWN AND OTHERS'

**D**esires *create* our will—regardless whether it evolves in opposition to or as a consequence of them. However, there is one serious problem—one way or another they cause people to suffer. Furthermore, being by nature a life force, they bear the traces of the animal kingdom, maintaining our lower “I” and forming all kinds of base feelings, like hatred, avarice, jealousy and so on. Fear and desires are the basis of human unconsciousness, and therefore everyone who sets out on their mystic journey must work with them. When a person is full of desires, it is hard for him to cultivate his awareness, because all his attention is wholly absorbed within them. When working on awareness, unrealized desires eventually become a serious obstacle. But if a person does not attain a high enough level of awareness, his Heart will not open.

Working with desires means gradually closing long opened desires and refusing to take on new ones. Where, then, can the energy received once again from the life force find refuge? It will normally go into what has by then become one's principal desire. For Sufis this is traditionally fused with a Beloved or a passionate

desire for Truth. Other mystics formulate this in their own way, but the essence remains the same—by a certain point, only one desire should remain, so that the person can remain in the physical body and receive the energy that gives him the will to life. And then what?

And then the following will happen: the person should prepare himself to surrender his will and accept the Will of the Almighty. If he does not do this, then at the moment it is liberated from his last desire the body will pass on, and that will be all. It is very rare that liberation from the last desire coincides with Surrender. Normally, Surrender happens earlier on, but never before the person's Heart is open. An open Heart is a necessary precondition for true Surrender.

Where there is Truth there is always falsity. There is therefore such a thing as false surrender, when a person has imagined that they have already surrendered, and has begun to follow their own personal desires, justifying them according to the higher Will and imbuing them with a kind of holy zeal. A person with a developed awareness will never fall for such tricks of the mind.

Where God is not, there can be no Surrender either. Hence all the Buddhists have is the bodhisattvas' relinquishing of their last desire—to eradicate the suffering of all living creatures. And then Nirvana. And Buddhist mystics have to deify the Buddha to thereby make contact with the Higher Forces.

Once the Heart is opened, even if not fully, Surrender then becomes possible. The point is that when the Divine Presence has become a reality for a person, *there is then someone* to surrender to. Until that point, he may only surrender to his own fantasies. But the readiness to reject one's own will and to Surrender does not normally come straight away either. The opening of the Heart is a process which progresses over time and is not altogether unharmed for the person. The new perception that comes with this opening can come as quite a shock, and the new state takes

some getting used to. Afterwards it changes—in the course of cleansing the channel of connection, one's perception expands and transforms, but it may take a year or two for this to happen.

Surrender, in contrast to the open Heart, is a mystical act which may happen in a moment, here and now, with no extension in time. This shift occurs almost instantaneously, but accepting the Will does not mean that the individual desires that remain within a person are completely destroyed. Rejecting one's own will is one thing, but accepting the Will of God is something else. You may cast away your tiny, limited and ailing resources, deciding not to use them anymore, but this does not yet mean that you may immediately make use of resources of a far higher order than your own. The situation may be outlined something like this. Your desires proceed from the mind and are fed by a force from a higher level. By accepting the Will, you are making contact with the Force, which involves almost no participation by the mind. The impulses of the Will act directly upon the Heart, and all you have to do is follow it as far as your own powers allow, and then when your powers are finished, keep following it anyway.

Of course, the mind is needed either way as an instrument with to match the demands of the Will to the surrounding realia, but that is all. And when Surrender does not occur at the very last moment, and not as though falling into the abyss, but slightly earlier, and when desires remain very much alive, it is impossible to fully accept the Higher Will. Surrender has already taken place and you have surrendered yourself completely, but you have only been able to partially accept the Will. But whatever happens, you have already entered into a conscious interaction with the Force of God, and there is no way back, therefore you have to follow the Will as it is revealed, at least to the extent that you are able to do so. This is how the process of erasing your own will begins, which leads to full acceptance of and fusing with the Will of God.

Any mystical act, be it Surrender of the will or accepting your

pupillage, communicating spiritual knowledge or altering the Pattern, is always the act of a single moment. It happens quickly and is accomplished entirely within that moment. However the processes that are triggered in the course of this act may last for years and continue to affect a person over a substantial period of time. And herein lies a mystery—one of the many mysteries that mystics encounter on their path.

The opportunity to fully accept the Will comes about in the process of a several acts of purification undertaken by the mystic, and for each one this process is individual and follows its own course. There is only one general principle—every new ordeal increases the *acceptance* (in a general sense, as an inner quality) of the mystic. The more precisely the mystic follows the Will that has been revealed to him, the quicker his progress becomes. Following is of itself the greatest school of learning, and therefore by following the Will, the mystic continues to grow and gain knowledge of Truth.

To begin with, a high level of alertness is demanded of the mystic, in order to distinguish the manifestation of the Will from his own desires, but it is not normally possible to reach this level with low awareness. He continues to work on his desires, giving priority to those actions that are dictated by the Will. Experience shows that the Will normally leads a person to the point where he is able to obtain a resolution to his problems and eliminate his remaining attachments. The task of acceptance is thereby made easier, though it comes at the cost of substantial efforts, as accelerating the path always means increasing internal and external tension and the suffering that comes with it. Eliminating one's illusions and attachments is always painful, but without it, acceptance and complete Surrender cannot happen. Following the Will demands unconditional trust and an ability to perform extraordinary feats. In this pursuit, mystics also develop qualities that make them almost supermen in the eyes of laypeople.

The impulses of the Will come through the heart center, just like the impulses that later become desires. But in contrast to them, the impulses of the Will come pre-formed and require no additional shaping by the mind. One has to understand and decipher them, but this does not require any real effort from someone who has already got to the point of Surrender and is ready to follow, because it is not uncommon for the meaning of the demands of the Will to be revealed at this point.

To a greater or lesser extent, desires are always egoistic: even if a person wants to eradicate the suffering of all living creatures, he does this primarily for himself, as he cannot bear to live with the thought of the suffering of those around him. It is he that needs the eradication and not them; therefore all such schemes collapse in on themselves or else they end in violence. Furthermore, the person who possesses this desire suffers no less than the rest, as he is constantly confronted by the incomprehension and indifference of those he wants to help. Following the Will, the mystic loses any kind of egoistic motivation. His main concern becomes the *precision* with which he follows, because everything in the world can be distorted, and to precisely fulfill *God's desire* is not always easy. Indeed, we may tentatively think of the Will as God's desires, although this would be to greatly simplify the situation. However it helps us to understand why the mystic can exist without his own personal desires, restricting himself only to fulfilling his own personal needs. We also come to understand why the mystic may experience negative emotions in following the Will—after all, should someone stand in the way of fulfilling God's desires, the wrath of God is that much greater than the wrath of an ordinary human being. But let us just say it does not happen very often.

Following precisely will lead a person to full Surrender, and to a blameless life. And yet, generally speaking, not one that is consistent with the notions of many believers on how a true holy person should live. Nevertheless, by eliminating his own desires,

the mystic becomes a pure *conductor of the Will* to our plane of Being. As I have already pointed out, this does not happen straight away, but inevitably it does happen, through a series of transformations, which we shall discuss a little later on.

## MAN UNVEILED

If you get rid of all the more trivial qualities and aspects of so-called normal people, and pick out what is left, then a person would appear to have two basic abilities that are of value to God, and these are the abilities to transform energy, and then to conduct it to the different Levels of Being. Man is a *transformer and conductor* of the energies of every different level, and that is the entirety of his role in the world order of Being.

Being an open, multilayered system, man is constantly giving off and receiving energy. This energy is not uniform—every human Level of Being has a corresponding energy with a different frequency of vibration. For example, the energy that is given off by the physical body is predominantly warm; it is the crudest and most tangible. The energy of emotions is subtler, though it is also characterized by a low frequency vibration. As such, every one of us can easily see the difference between the energies of anger and sorrow—they differ both in their manifestation, and in their frequency of vibration. Man's senses, from the point of view of energy, are also quite crude, because the energy of desire, though it appears as a life force, and at the same time a force in and of

itself, being a part of the Downward Stream of Creation, does not have a very high frequency vibration.

This is the Truth: man is woven into a system of energy connections, outside of which he cannot exist. Whether that is a single person or all humanity combined—we cannot escape this system of connections, because we are a part of it, part of these mutually supporting, mutually nourishing elements of Creation. It is not only man who cannot exist outside of this system, but all living things.

Physics was formed and founded on the premise that the entire Universe is held together by a gravitational connection, which exerts influence over the orbit and rotation of the planets and, essentially, over everything. Following the rule of simplification, astrologers came up with a range of laws based on this connection, with varying degrees of severity and began predicting people's fates, but anyone who knows will tell you how mechanical, blind and arbitrary this system of "knowledge" really is.

It is clear that the warm energy generated by the physical body remains here on the physical plane. All the remaining energy is involved in one way or another in what you might call the universal processes. The way a transformer works is that it receives energy in one form and returns it in another. And this is what people are constantly doing, without knowing it. Gurdjieff said that humanity feeds and supports the Moon with its vibrations. This is yet another vivid example of an obvious simplification and a simplified presentation of Truth. In fact, as ever, it is all a little more complex.

If we break away from the physical plane of Reality, we discover hundreds of other planes, many of which are directly or indirectly concerned with human existence and interact with it. People receive energy from these planes and return that energy to those planes in a different form. This give-and-take is carried out through special channels, which in Russian esotericism we

normally refer to as egregors. Many things have been written about egregors that do not have a lot to do with the reality. Some authors make give egregors a soul, and teach readers how they need to communicate with them, for example, to get more money. The problem is that it is impossible to communicate with egregors, because their consciousness is close to that of, for instance, a slug, and they do not have a mind at all. Egregors are subject to the laws of interaction between the different levels of reality and are connecting channels along which energy flows back and forth. There is no point in currying favor with one egregor or another, as it will be unable to perceive *any* of your actions, except those which deliver a particular kind of energy to its channel. When you give off this energy to the channel of the corresponding egregor, you will receive a response in the form of making progress in whatever you are doing. The egregor itself has nothing to do with this, because the response comes from whatever level of Reality you happen to be connected to, and which you essentially know nothing about. The egregor is merely a conductor, nothing more.

It has to be said that a lot also gets written about specific egregors—especially pecuniary—and this also drastically simplifies and distorts things. The thing is, there are a great many egregors connected to humankind. Most of them have not been given names, because talking about them is no way to make money. But every Sufi order has its own egregor, and one will also appear sooner or later in every stable social group involved in a particular kind of activity and vibrating energy into it. The emergence of an egregor is necessarily accompanied by the appearance of a specific symbol (cross, crescent moon, sword etc.) Creating symbols always comes before the emergence of an egregor, because until the activity is fixed in a particular form on the mental plane, the egregor will not emerge. Any group of people that is actively vibrating energy appears at first on the mental plane, but the

mental plane requires symbols, or a brand, and only then does the opportunity arise for that group to acquire its own egregor.

Having your own egregor is like having your own separate high-speed internet connection—it gives you access to an entirely different order of growth. In spiritual work this is very important because it is through the egregor that you gain the possibility of transitioning into the field of mystical work.

In principle this is true of all forms of human activity, but it is in spiritual work that this rule possesses an especially important meaning, as the transition from spiritual to mystical work is a direct illustration of the well-known law of dialectics on the transition from a quantity into a quality. The quality of mystical work is higher by several orders of magnitude and the possibilities it brings are immeasurably greater.

Of course, communicating with God or gods is also facilitated by egregors, each of which conducts energy of a defined “hue” and quality. It is not entirely understood where the energy given off by people goes, for example when they are performing prayers; but we can never obtain this knowledge directly, only intuitively, and only obliquely. There is a knowledge that can never be *absorbed* or perceived by man, due to the limitations of its form of existence and being. Therefore, those who seek Truth gradually leave the confines of what is human, though this is also not an endless process, but one that is limited by the framework and the laws according to which one may live within the body.

Because desires are the main source of so many feelings and emotions, ensuring a perpetual vibration of energy, clearly when a person refuses his desires, he is refusing to vibrate, and he must turn his back on the system—in other words, he must die and move on to another quality of being. Accepting the Will helps shift the process of vibration onto a different course and a different quality.

There is always some opposition to this vibration from people

whose egos are seeking compensation in independence from everyone else. They feel that having people give something away some other place is degrading to the whole of humanity. Their outrage is understandable. But just imagine for a moment we started getting outraged by the fact that the Earth revolves around the Sun, and that we were opposed to the fact that it was due to radiation from the Sun that life on Earth was possible. We wouldn't even think of that, because the Sun is obviously useful, and its light is simply necessary for the continuation of life on Earth. Almost the same could be said about the involvement of egregors in energy exchange. Both the Sun and the egregors are subject to the laws of this world, and we have no other choice. The conditions within which Creation occurs are what they are, and there is no way of getting around them. You can find out what those conditions are and learn to work with the laws as we know them—which is what both scientists and mystics do—and there is no other path for anyone who wants to understand the world in which they are living.

Imagine there is no God. There is no force directing the movement of this world, and our civilization is the peripheral effect of certain unnamed processes of evolution, where all these processes, contrary to common sense and the principle of energy conservation, move in an upward spiral. Then our very existence, with all its protuberances, with all its triumphs over our internal and external nature becomes absolutely meaningless. You cannot present evolution with a bill for time spent in vain. The survival of the fittest or the best adapted could never help humanity overcome the difficulties they are faced with. Prophets and geniuses were always the weakest and most vulnerable figures, suffering more than the rest. As such, whether or not he wants to, every person senses a connection that cannot be expressed in words. A connection to that which is bigger than him, which cannot be explained, and which connects him to everything, or gives him a

sense of the inexpressibility of his own being. Atheism is a diversion for the mind for intellectuals and a reaction of that mind to the pressures of theism... to the raising of a child as Russian Orthodox or Protestant. You can run from Truth your whole life, but you cannot escape it—a part of it awaits us just the other side of that barrier we call death. The Divine Presence can be experienced here and now—we have only to allow our own sensitivity to reveal itself. And then the answers to questions that have not been asked, and have not been formulated, will come of their own accord. And, as has been said many times before, the question of God is not a question of philosophy, it is a question of experience.

We need egregors. They connect the various different Levels of Being which otherwise would not come into contact with each other, and it is thanks to them, for example, that it is possible for God's grace to converge upon believers. Connection is a crucial word in the world's design, and there is no point denying its significance. The energy that is given off by people is a different matter and has a different weight and significance. And a saint is always valued more highly than a sinner because the frequency of energy he produces is many times purer and stronger than that which is produced by so-called sinners.

There is a clear and simple story behind this. People spend a great deal of energy more or less in vain, suffering the whole while over nothing. They experience all these different emotions and feelings in simply thinking about some event that may never happen. They are almost always *giving off energy* from their emotions and feelings. However, this energy is not of the highest quality; its vibrations are crude. People suffer, and in the sense that mutual support between the various levels of Reality is necessary, indeed they must suffer. They *must* give off what energy they can. But just imagine you have ten people at your command, who perform their work mechanically, but only under pressure, or you have one decent, diligent worker who understand the essence of

the task at hand. Ten people may well be able to do more work than one, but the quality of that work and the amount that is spent maintaining their motivation will ultimately devalue the result. Something like the same thing happens with energy—one person who is consciously vibrating energy transcends hundreds and thousands of people involved in a vibration unconsciously. For the ego, of course, this situation seems degrading. It fights for its own freedom and independence, while keeping the world going and working for the common good does not even come into it. In this, the ego is steeped in the illusion of separateness and craves power, and this is why, for it, servitude is only possible when protection and special privileges are promised in payment.

In ancient times, religious cults existed in which they held festivals where the inhabitants of the town had to weep and wail. In other words, to give off a particular quality of energy. They could be quite certain that over the next year they would have less cause to weep and wail than those who did not perform these practices. These cultures had the right attitude towards the inevitable. And this is another aspect of Truth—those who do not try to avoid suffering alleviate their own share of suffering. Those who willingly move towards conscious suffering alleviate not only their own suffering, but that of those around them.

Spiritual work always involves conscious suffering, and the seeker moves towards this for the sake of changing, and for the sake of opening up the possibility of another mode of being. By moving towards conscious suffering, the seeker spares himself the unconscious suffering in which people normally live. If you try to run from your own fear, that fear will become even greater. If you try to run from suffering, you extend the space in which you shall find it in ever newer forms. So, in terms of releasing energy with particular properties, conscious suffering is valued far more highly than unconscious suffering, and it ensures that certain invisible processes are carried out more completely. Therefore, one true

seeker may alleviate suffering around him, liberating people from constantly having to vibrate the energy of negative emotions. The external situation levels out for a while so that people have far fewer causes of discomfort and suffering.

Anyone who is working on himself *changes* his own opportunities for transformation. He moves on from conducting crude vibrations, ceasing, for example, to experience negative emotions, and by developing and opening up the energy centers—for instance the Heart—he becomes capable of radiating a far subtler energy. Desires come to us as a part of the Downward Stream of Creation. The Will of God manifests itself as a part of the Upward Stream, in which a person loses both desires and attachments to the world and its temptations. Shifting from the influence of the Downward Stream to that of the Upward Stream, man also shifts into the spectrum of the energies that it transforms. So what is called spiritual transformation has more to it than is commonly thought.

The ability to transform energy cannot be separated from the ability to *conduct* it. This point becomes instantly clear, as soon as you realize the complexity of man's design and the system of connections into which he is encoded. The physical body is the final point at which the energies of different bodies converge and manifest themselves. Moreover, there is nothing to take him from the physical plane to the higher planes (not counting the energy that egregors give off, but that also has to come from at least the level of the ethereal body). So, in becoming a mystic, a person gradually transforms into a conductor of energies of a higher order to the physical plane of Reality. This is yet another mystery—how grace comes not to man, but *through him*: such phenomena are widely known in all mystical traditions; in Sufi orders, the sheikhs are normally the ones who conduct the barakah.

Looking at the bigger picture, you could say that man is *almost always* conducting some sort of energy through himself—be it the energy of anger, fear, desire, or some higher feeling—and he

conducts it to the egregors, as well, in part, as to the surrounding physical space. The only difference is in the fact that you may conduct the energy of terror, or the energy of Consciousness; but for this type of conduction one requires an internal channel that is far purer than people have who do not work on themselves. With an open Heart, a person is capable of conducting energy from the Higher Levels of Being into the world, including energy that emanates directly from the Source of Everything. Thus a balance is achieved; and thus the energies vibrate on both sides. It is precisely for this reason that the presence of a holy person in a particular place will always enable a greater harmony than usual to be established there.

The Downward Stream of Creation is powerful, and the force of life in the physical plane is plain to see—a single battle for survival is all that it amounts to. The force of the Upward Stream is not so plain. The Downward Stream reduces Consciousness to matter, the Upward Stream returns it to the Source. The Downward Stream immerses people into an unconscious state, and when it becomes too unconscious, and passions and desires too strong, then people start to kill each other. At the point of an unnatural death, a specific kind of energy is released, stronger than a person is able to release in his normal state. And here is another paradox for you—when people slip into unconsciousness with the force of impact from the energies of the Downward Stream, they begin to destroy one another, the number of deaths increases, and death is a return, an entering into the Upward Stream. So the climax of the force in the Downward Stream leads, ultimately, to the strengthening of the Upward Stream and a balance is reached. Death, as an unavoidable aspect of being, and in particular its closeness, is disillusioning, and to a certain extent it may lead to the conscious awakening of even the most unconscious people. We have only to recall how the invention of the atomic bomb put an end the world wars,

disillusioning the crazed politicians and their no less crazed citizenry.

People working on their awareness and gradually entering the Upward Stream counterbalance the unconsciousness of those around them in their work, no less than death does. But there are not normally enough of them to radically alter the situation. Furthermore, the specific energy that is released at the point of an unnatural death by the person who has been killed, is always much needed, and therefore localized wars (or in our time, mass killings) will continue for as long as humanity continues to exist. This truth may shock someone who is prone to humanitarian ideals, but for the mystic it is simply self-evident, and moreover he has experience that enables him not to fear death. This experience with transition through the different stages of spiritual transfiguration, and through it different aspects of Truth are opened up.

## TRANSFIGURATION UNVEILED

There is such a thing as mystical work, but there is no such thing as mystical transformation—as far as people are concerned, this is always a spiritual process. Man is limited in his abilities, and he is unable to surpass himself. Whatever assistance he receives over and above this, any change that takes place within a person is a change in the *spirit*, revealing its potential, which is traditionally called spiritual. In the past, *spirit* also referred to properties and abilities that are unrelated to the physical plane of Reality, but which manifest themselves in the inner being of mystics.

Though a person's potential for growth is limited, it is still very great in comparison to a simple existence within the three lower bodies. Next to the infinite nature of Reality, this potential is very small, but everything is relative, and in comparison to the limitations of the physical plane, a person's spiritual potential is almost infinite. Spiritual potential compensates for the person's physical limitations—in terms of both the length and quality of that person's life.

Spiritual transformation is typically described as a death or a new birth. In ancient India, the enlightened were known as twice-

born (the acquisition of this name later became a common ritual). This implies that a person dies in the physical world in order to be born in the spiritual world. Birth in the spirit and letting go of one's desires and attachments—or, more precisely, dying in every earthly sense—is, according to the descriptions, the main essence of the process of transfiguration. And of course, every seeker has the impression that death and new birth happen once, and then afterwards the transfigured person remains in a stable and unchanging state for the rest of their life. Stability is one of the most alluring things to the human mind, and yet it totally contradicts the laws by which the world exists. The world's stability is always dynamic, the world is always in motion—one thing is born as another thing dies and fades away. It should be understood that this law extends to everything—and in this instance the enlightened are no exception. In fact, owing to the strength of their sensitivity, enlightened mystics will change slightly before fundamental movements in the world's development or the other people in it. It is also possible for changes to come about through the mystics. It is possible that mystics may at a given moment become the hands of God. Familiarize yourself with the life stories of your favorite mystics—any of them—and you will see how their working methods and means of communicating messages change over time, and also the impact that their work has on the world... although this does not happen immediately, of course. The physical world moves and changes much more slowly than the spiritual world, which is to say, the Higher Levels of Reality. Even in comparison to the world of ideas—i.e. the world of the third body (the lower mind)—the physical world changes much more slowly. But it does change, and these changes are a part of the necessary condition of its existence.

It is important to bear in mind that destruction is the only thing that happens quickly. The transfiguration of both the world and of man is a slow process, whatever anyone might think. To the

mind, consumed with desire for an easy and simple way out, it seems like the important thing is to attain that very death in life, to undergo transfiguration and become the way an enlightened person is typically imagined—virtuous, all-knowing and in possession of great powers. Man seeks simple solutions—one single extraordinary effort that would lead him to a magical transformation. But magic only exists in fairy tales—in reality everything is a manifestation of the laws and forces that are visibly or invisibly present in the world.

It is possible that you have already picked up some idea from the preceding chapters of how complex the design of the external and internal world really is. It will then be that much clearer to you that the *transfiguration* of man is a long process that includes a series of necessary steps, without which it will either not be complete or will not come about at all. This is man's reality—in order to change, he must rebuild the whole system of energy currents within himself. Just as a country's abilities are limited by the size of its budget, so the possibilities of man's progress are limited by the amount of energy he is able to spend on his own development. Development, that is, and not some escape beyond the confines of the mind or other such simplistic schemes for enlightenment that many seekers now seem to entertain. Although, of course, development in and of itself implies an escape beyond the confines of the mind, since the mind is needed to settle things from the outside, but has no way to take care of the internal work, and an attachment to it always becomes an impediment to growth.

Transfiguration or enlightenment—call it what you will—cannot take place so long as a person's energy flows outward and so long as he remains a conductor and a hostage to his own feelings. If you look closely, every religion, even in its esoteric aspects intended for all believers, calls for people to stop expending energy on indulging their own desires. Do not kill, do not steal, do

not commit adultery, and so on, on superficial examination seem like good commandments, calling for people not to behave as cattle; almost every one of them is directed against his desires. This is the Truth: all religions that lead people to God enable their believers to transition from the Downward to the Upward Stream. In other words, all true religions are directed against life on Earth. Returning to the Source is impossible, as long as you are alive.

So-called modern esotericism attempts to justify man's desires, teaching him to change the world as he sees fit. The new teachings justify desires, calling on everyone to become magicians and with the right commitment to make their lives more complete and more gratifying. Esotericism is nowadays in thrall to the Downward Stream and tears man away from God, convincing seekers of unfortunate truth that every one of us is a god in his own right. Thus all meaning goes out the window and all energy dissipates; the force of the Downward Stream of Creation is preserved. And of course, what is now called esotericism is nothing of the sort. The collection of magical incantations and ways of maintaining all these different illusions has nothing whatsoever to do with either Truth, or hidden knowledge. Figuratively speaking, Satan has gained a victory, in directing seekers upon the easy path and leaving them in the current of the energies of the Downward Stream, in which this world also finds itself. By following his own desires, man can never escape the confines of this world and goes within, to where the doors open up to another level of his being. Animals are bound by their instincts, people are enslaved by their desires, and only by refusing to obey them is man given the chance to realize the inwardly suppressed powers of the Downward Stream of Creation.

The balance of the two Streams at the level of the physical world is secured by the laws according to which that world exists. The Downward Stream of Creation pervades all planes of Being; it creates them, in fact, and imbues them with life. Through this

Stream, Consciousness of God dissolves into matter and is lost in it. With the Upward Stream, Consciousness wants to somehow go backward, to the Source, while the physical matter that the active consciousness was connected to then loses its previous form, and in some sense returns to the source itself, which for it is a state of chaos. In the harmony of influences from the Upward and Downward Streams, which may manifest themselves only within the framework of the laws of that plane of Reality, there also forms what mystics call the law of three forces, where the active principle is normally the Downward Stream, the negative or passive the Upward Stream, and the laws of existence of the physical world represent a neutralizing force.

The main influence that the Downward Stream has on people is in the life force that takes the form of desires. All mystics work under the canopy of influences of the Upward Stream, and for this reason one of the principal stages of transfiguration becomes the transition from one set of influences to another. This transition is generally brought about through the practice of awareness, where the person starts using the power of their own concentration for the *disengagement* and separation of the energy of consciousness both from the world and from desires. Actually, the practice of awareness repeats the basic processes that occur in the Upward Stream of Creation—this is where the image of death comes from, through which the mystic must pass to liberate himself from the path of the world—the path of dependency and the ego, held captive to desires. The more aware the mystic becomes, the more separated he is from the world of desires and, by extension, the closer he is to the higher world, the celestial world. The practice of awareness is the key to transitioning to the influence of the Upward Stream of Creation and returning home.

There is not one genuine seeker that feels at home on this plane of Reality. In fact, it is by virtue of this sense that he is not where he should be that he becomes a seeker. The motivation for

this search is not always clear even to the seeker himself (let alone his family and friends), but at fundamentally it always lies in the feeling that this world is foreign to you, and even more so that you are foreign to it. This feeling occurs at least once in the life of every person, even the most unconscious, and in order to get rid of it people will build their own little worlds and try to make them as comfortable as they can for themselves. But however cozy the world he has created may be, it only partly helps, as man's troubles are not on the outside but within. No compensation can change anything in its entirety. Imagine you lived in a perfect country with a wonderful, mild climate, with good people and just laws, and then you ended up... let us say in Russia. Of course, you try to arrange your life so that you do not fall into total, irreversible depression, but no amount of compensation will bring back what you had before. The stories of a lost paradise did not emerge in a vacuum—they have a direct relationship to human reality. Even the most powerful people of this world occasionally sense that they are not where they should be, and not doing what they should be. And this is not some glitch of the mind—this a flash of insight into the true state of things.

The seeker searches for that lost connection, he searches for the kind of self-identification that would bring him satisfaction. The seeker attempts to figure out the meaning of his own existence here in a world he feels he does not belong to. It is for this reason alone that the true seeker is able to scorn this whole world and set out on the Path, by which he may return to the Source, not after an unconscious death, but fully conscious of the process of transfiguration.

As we know, there are two paths that lead to spiritual transformation. One is the path of awareness and meditation; the other is the path of prayer and worshipping God. In practice, every mystical tradition is a combination of the two. By itself, awareness can resolve all the seeker's problems and lead him to transfigura-

tion, but without prayer and dhikr—the modes of *interaction* with God—this path becomes much longer and more difficult. On the other hand, mystical practices that are not backed up with a sufficient level of self-awareness may lead to madness and the birth of new chimeras—a person can then no longer clearly distinguish between reality and the hallucinations of his own mind, now broken by the impact of a higher force. What is needed is balance, and this is why the journey is often compared to walking on a knife edge. I have written a lot already about the path of awareness; we will discuss some features of the path of communicating and interacting with God a little later on.

The process of transformation is multifaceted. The main substance of it is in changing the quality of energy that a person can take on and give off, but this change happens in different ways at the level of each of his bodies. The physical body, frankly, does not change very much—in the process of transformation it changes least of all, although you could not say that no change at all takes place. Sensitivity increases—but this relates to all the bodies, because a high level of awareness raises the level of perception of all the sensory organs, including the physical ones, to their highest. The rest—for example, the level of stamina, the appearance of powers and the ability to produce particular kinds of energy—has no direct relation to the physical body. It is nothing more than a conductor in that situation.

The ethereal body or the body of the emotions changes somewhat more intensely. Being liberated from suppressed emotional energy and having stopped spasmodically giving off anger and sorrow, it becomes capable of perceiving subtle energies like, for example, the energy of the Divine Presence and grace, which comes through the heart channel.

The body of the lower mind changes most of all and is the one you have to play around with longest of all. Our mind is designed in such a way that every impression leaves a mark upon it, and the

stronger the impression, the more profound will be the mark. For instance, a childhood psychological trauma will leave such profound traces on the mind that the rest of the person's life will be permanently linked to the reactions that came out as a result of that trauma. All our psychological and emotional reactions are the fruits of such marks or an indication that such a mark is being formed right now. All the mechanicalness of a person's behavior is connected to the reactions that have been fixed in the mind as a result of impressions received and the subsequent desire to either repeat them or otherwise avoid them. In the process of awareness and the penetration of light issuing from a person's Consciousness, all these impressions *melt* and the mind is cleansed and to some degree emptied. The power of the energy of Consciousness melts the mind as though it were wax, cleansing these marks, and the person simultaneously rids himself of all the neurotic reactions associated with them. The memory may retain recollections of the events, but they will not cause any internal reaction. This is how to gain freedom and it is how we rid ourselves of dependence, but this process is also multi-faceted. Many different things happen in parallel with growing awareness. The centers interlock with one another, and begin working more intensively, the activation of the fourth—mental—body takes place, through disengagement the abilities of spiritual vision are opened up, and of themselves such changes and the pressure of energies sometimes spills over so that the circumstances of one's external life also change, and sometimes quite drastically.

Hindus and Zen Buddhists, and everyone who echoes them, write about instantaneous transformation and the experience of enlightenment changing a person irreversibly. I cannot claim that this is entirely false, as all sorts of things happen on the mystic path, but instantaneous enlightenment without advance preparation would eject a person from their physical body, and that is all that would happen. Transfiguration is a gradual process, and every

significant change upon this path constitutes a minor death. I maintain that the seeker will pass through many deaths with varying degrees of depth and painfulness and each one will change and transfigure him. Every step towards transformation, every change in one's capacity for action and the transformation of energy is accompanied by a state in which the mystic—or some part of him—well and truly dies. Quite often it is accompanied by physical deterioration, although not always. It is individual and depends on the heritage and overall strength of the physical body. The most difficult thing—if not the most painful—is to go through your first death, because it is impossible to prepare yourself for that. However much I stress to pupils the need for endurance, however much I try somehow to prepare and strengthen their spirits, being borne away by that first death is always very painful. Given that this state may last anything from several hours to several days, of course, this test of a person's endurance and preparedness moves further. It is almost impossible not to get into self-pity and not let your fears run wild, appearing as they do at a time of incomprehension as to what is happening to you. The mind grows dim and, depending on what dies within and what kind of transformation takes place, it is filled with thoughts relating to this and a sense of despair. Physically, this is also accompanied by pain and a sensation of the energies filling you and flowing through your body—in my own case this has normally been an ice-cold sensation.

It must be said that many stages of transformation are initially preceded by extraordinary efforts in one's work on the self. The Heart, for example, will not open up without extraordinary efforts. However, we should not forget that passing through an inner death is itself a form of extraordinary effort, albeit one that is not performed willingly.

It is natural that when the latest period of transformation is over, the person experiences relief. Other than that, he gets the

feeling that he has *come back to life*. This is a fact, I do not exaggerate. And he realizes almost immediately that he has become something new. The details and the nuances of his new state are revealed to him over time, but the sensation of a *different self* comes almost instantaneously. The next deaths are more straightforward, if not easier. When you have experience and understanding of what happens, you may stay calm and endure it. It is tension and internal opposition that slows down and draws out the process of transformation. But at first there is no other around it.

I remember very well how at one time I wanted to find a step-by-step description of the process of transfiguration and a detailed exposition of the stages of the spiritual or mystic Path. For good or ill, this does not exist. What I am writing here is set out in plenty of detail, but there is no way to describe the process of transformation in any more detail, as it is a very individual, almost intimate process. It is something that happens only between you and God, through direct, purely mystical interaction. And all the mysteries, as well as the wonderful and terrible miracles that occur on the Path remain only between you. A master is a conductor who should help you come to this interaction, relying on the Will and its vision, but all the sometimes crazy beauty of the Path home happens between you and God only. Indeed it is indescribable in words.

Nevertheless, Sufis have a description of the stations on the Path, which at least may construct some idea of where it leads to. True, there is almost never any one idea that matches the reality, but there is nothing you can do about that. I say this: transfiguration is a series of processes that happen in alongside one another, where one set of energies and states is substituted for another that is higher. To begin with, the ego dies little by little, and at the same time awareness and spiritual vision grow, then desires taper off, the Heart opens and the possibility for Surrender surfaces... But be that as it may, all this happens essentially on one's own, and actu-

ally it is very individual, with its own peculiar characteristics in every distinct case. Therefore, the transfigured are not all alike, in fact their individuality forms and flourishes on that Path, and the singularity of experience gained through it allows them not to repeat the words of others, but to find their own. In this, we also see the beauty and limitlessness of Truth, wherein every person that has attained it may transmit it in his own unique way, though without repeating its great essence, but simplifying it so that other people may at least take something away from it.

## THE MENTAL BODY & THE MENTAL PLANE

**T**he mental body is the body of miracles, and the mental plane in which it exists is the favorite refuge of magicians and mediums. The mental or fourth body is in some systems called the higher mind, and given that it is also a prerequisite for interacting with the external reality, the name does not contradict the Truth. Of course, as with everything that is higher, the mental body is quite starkly different to the ordinary mind. For a start, it does not use words. The language of the mental body is a language of symbols, and it is symbols that are the principal form of existence on the mental plane. But form, as you understand it, plays a very important role in general, and on the mental plane in particular.

The fourth body is practically inactive in the average person, it exists in him like an embryo, like a potential that has yet to be realized. Sometimes it is activated due to extreme situations—like clinical death or being struck by lightning—and at that point we look to the latest medium or fortune teller. Breaches of this kind alter a person's perception, enabling him to use the abilities of the mental body and the center it is connected to, usually called the *third eye*. This is the Ajna chakra, or sixth center, which is directly

connected to the mental plane. The Heart is connected to the Creator, and the third eye to the plane of Creation, because what happens on the mental plane is made manifest in some shape or form in physical reality.

It is not for nothing that the mental body is called the higher mind—that which is thought within it normally then happens. There is an analogy with the mind of God, which can alter worlds with a single thought alone, but this is a further simplification. It is more that He alters them through his gaze.

It is particularly difficult to do justice to a description of the fourth body. We can really only talk about it obliquely, by enumerating the functions and abilities that it possesses. A similar approach is used in *dhikr*, where it is impossible to speak of Allah directly, but you can mention His qualities. It is like this: the fourth body possesses skills of telepathy, clairvoyance, foreknowledge of the future, and because of it, one may see other levels and dimensions of Reality. In addition, through this body one can perform certain actions on the mental plane which will have a direct impact on the physical world and alter it. In other words, all magic—both good and bad—is connected to the fourth body. Given the total opacity of the issue, to a lot of people it seems like magic is a collection of rituals which operate *by themselves*. This is a bit like a savage like Don Juan musing on a TV remote—true magic! An effect is produced upon a material object with no contact, instantaneously. The truth is this: no rituals will work if you have not at least partly activated the fourth body or if you are not connected to the relevant egregor. Power over matter which now has now given us science, has always been one of the principal aims of magic. And power over people, too, of course. And it is important to make one thing clear here: simply possessing a developed fourth body does not give a person any particular spirituality. This body is mortal, it changes, and like the other three lower bodies it can be trained and *energized*, but for all its abilities,

it cannot give to those who possess them any spiritual advantage. You have only to look at the mediums and spiritual healers to understand this. They remain in thrall to the power of the Downward Stream and follow their desires. Totally altruistic though these desires may appear to be, they all feed the ego and what Sufis call *nafs*. The concept of *nafs* goes well beyond ego—it includes almost all the requirements of man's animal nature, while ego concerns only the mind. And so, entering the fourth body in no way weakens the *nafs*, and even strengthens it (as it does the ego), because attaining one's desires them becomes easier. Nevertheless, any magical intervention is limited by the neutralizing effect of the laws of our world, and even God cannot ignore them, if He suddenly wants to intervene in our affairs. The world rests on them, and no one has the power to disturb the existing balance. There is a Pattern, it is the Plane of Creation, there are Streams of its manifestation, and even if some madman should suddenly manage to make a serious alteration by following his own desires, the first person his actions will cause harm to will be himself. God cannot keep track of all worlds, and there would no sense in that when they are all designed to always come back to some kind of harmony and balance.

It is possible, by acting through the mental body on the mental plane of our Reality, to influence events and situations on the physical plane. This is essentially what all magic is for. It is not for nothing that magical practices are forbidden in most religions, or at least the conditions under which magical methods may be used in work are strictly laid down. Magicians always go against the Will, wanting to change the world *for themselves*, and if every idiot starts realizing their own idiotic desires with the aid of magic the world will come crashing down. This is why the system of counter-balances is totally robust, and this is why no one has yet destroyed the world.

Nevertheless, it is via the mental plane that activity on the

physical plane is carried out, and it is those same forces, which we label as Higher, that carry them out. This is where the egregors are formed, and where all great changes begin that lead to the rise or fall of civilizations. Here, on this plane of Being, the Sufi tradition continues to exist and it becomes possible to communicate the Knowledge that lies in store for those who are ready to accept it. Although again, without the necessary experience, it is almost impossible to understand it. Our space and our time do not exist on the mental plane, though a certain space and a certain time do exist there. Via the mental plane you can affect any point on the physical plane; distance in kilometers makes no difference here. In the same way, our time also presents no obstacle on the mental plane. Yet as long as you remain within the confines of the physical body, you cannot escape the effects of time on our plane either way. Time indicates the speed of the world's destruction, while on the mental plane it works differently, and this is why anyone who manages to crystallize the fourth body lives within it on the mental plane for much longer than they do on the physical plane. But there are not many such people.

The mental plane can be activated (or awoken) quite easily, but to fully crystallize it requires special powers. There are exercises which accelerate this process, but they cannot do much without parallel practices in self-awareness. Charging the fourth body with energy without disengaging from desires and mechanical psycho-emotional reactions is practically impossible. After being crystallized on its own plane, the person's mental body takes on a form corresponding to the path that person has taken; in magicians it normally takes the form of predators—panthers and other such animals. The search for powers leaves its mark on their crystallization. No one on the mental plane retains their own personal image, because the physical body and crystallization in a body with different qualities are two different things. As I have already said, the emergence of each egregor is pre-empted by the appear-

ance of a symbol on the mental plane, and there are a number of such symbols, and egregors too, and we see the signs of them around us every day. Of course, the symbols do not only surface on the mental plane as a result of people's actions—it is much more common that they come from the Higher planes in the process of the carrying out the Will and manifestation of the Pattern.

With the development of the mental body, the sixth center becomes a door to the mental plane, and it is capable of both receiving information and emitting energy and causing an impact. The sixth center represents the mental plane on the physical plane, but the third eye itself cannot interact with the physical plane. The information it receives has to do with the other planes. And this is entirely logical, when we have been given two ordinary eyes to receive information from the physical world. But we see everything in a very selective way with them, due to the dependence of the mind and its projections; our perception of reality is always corrected by dreams, recollections, and news stories. This does not happen with the third eye, but when a person does not possess a sufficient level of awareness, quite often he will perceive his own dreams and projections of his personal desires as a true vision arising in the sixth center. People manage to completely hypnotize themselves and keep up that self-deception; only dogs have the same capacity to wait for that which will never come—and never could. But dogs just copy the behavior of the people they live with; the social instinct of dogs immerses them in that particular form of servitude which you will recognize only after living for a long time under the same roof as your immediate family.

Activating and developing the fourth body quite often leads a person to a difficult choice. This choice lies between Darkness and Light, the two forces representing both Streams of Creation and the abilities they possess. Some do not choose at all, and until the

moment when the fourth body is activated, this choice essentially does not exist. And I have seen a number of people choose Darkness as their leader. I cannot say that this choice is always taken consciously, but you could not call it entirely mechanical either. Normally, the dark side chooses those that fear it and want to placate it. And at the same time to gain powers which may be used to frighten others. This choice is frankly no better or worse than the others, only the person begins to vibrate energy through different channels, that is all. Those who choose Darkness remain within the Downward Stream and this choice shuts off the home-ward path to them. They are bound to life in all its manifestations, but the desires and the energies that they are left to conduct often drive them to madness—in the broadest sense of the word. Darkness gives them power but gradually destroys them, starting with their reason, and strips them of their grasp on reality. Darkness sustains a person's unconsciousness, intensifying his servitude in terms of desires.

Light destroys a person no less than Darkness. Such is the nature of these higher powers—they are not very helpful to a person, and anyone seeking self-preservation and procreation would be better off not getting involved in the mystic Path. But Light kills the mystic within the Upward Stream, which is generally entirely justified and even useful in terms of inner transformation. In any case, the mental body develops differently, depending on which side is chosen. And what we call destiny also changes quite drastically. It is important to remember in all this that people who have chosen Darkness may be perfectly pleasant, caring and even decent people from the perspective of ordinary morals.

And people who serve Light may, on the other hand, seem like the enemies of everything that lives. This is not about the criteria of commonly received values, but Darkness would see to it that everything in public culture and our ideas around this question would be entangled. By remaining within the Downward Stream,

man is doomed to suffer, and no force can change that. Transformation and the transition to the Upward Stream also comes about through suffering, albeit those that are consciously brought on, but ultimately they liberate a person, rather than immersing him within still greater dependency, or leading him to madness. And in fact, therein lies the difference in the choice between Darkness and Light. This choice, as I have already said, is not implemented by all mystics by any means, and more often than not, magicians and mediums refuse to do so. A mystic who is intent on reaching their limits will see no point in intermediate definitions like this. However, the transition itself from one Stream to the other inevitably morphs into an encounter with the manifestations of both these forces, and sometimes these manifestations are entirely sinister. In any case, anyone striving for the higher Truth or towards fusing with God, should leave both Darkness and Light behind—by becoming attached to either of these powers, he will lose the ability to move further along the mystic Path. Light may become an obstacle on the path to Truth; a very pleasant obstacle but an almost insurmountable one. Works written by people stuck within the Light and the illusions it generates continue to be published to this day and may be found on the shelves of all bookstores. Anyone going to the limit, to the ultimate, all-out experience, will leave both Light and Darkness behind wherever they can. And they will leave everything else even earlier.

It is important to remember that transfiguration is a non-linear process and there is no strict sequence in terms of the development of the fourth body and, for example, the opening of the Heart. That is to say, the Heart may be closed, but the mental body developed, and vice versa—the mental body may only just have been activated, while the Heart is already open and the person is close to Surrender. In other words, these processes work to a certain degree in parallel and independently. But then opening the third eye without first activating the fourth body is impossible,

and those seekers struggle in vain who think that they can turn themselves into clairvoyants by practicing magic, so that for whatever reason they can see people's auras and talk to the dead. Those who rush receive, for their pains, a selection of their own fantasies and occasional "hits", divinations of the future and past, and a heap of misses, when the mind substitutes an absence of any vision for fantasies. Basically, just watch any TV show on mediums and you will understand the whole thing. Or almost the whole thing.

The sixth center is a door into the mental plane and helps you gain a pretty clear understanding of Will. The fact is that Will is almost never revealed in words—it does not reach the lower mind, but rather the energy of an impulse of the Will coming to the Heart may—like a message—be examined with the third eye, and then the person will be able to see that much better and become conscious of all the nuances in an instruction to action. Because the sixth center is connected to the mental body, it is through this that any work takes place over a distance—be that the delivery of a barakah or the combined practice of a group over a distance. It is when that practice is being performed by everyone in the group that the activation and development of the fourth body begins. And practices of this kind have the most significance for advancing along the Path and for carrying out mystical Work.

## GRACE & THE MASTER'S ENERGY

Sufis—when they have no recourse to communicating mystical knowledge across time and space—prefer direct, concrete work with people wishing to change themselves or discover Truth. Training at a distance is practically impossible for a number of reasons. The first is that you cannot substitute the direct influence of a Master's energy for any books, even the best ones. The Master conducts grace and several other forms of energy which no one has even thought up names for, and because of this they are usually heaped together in a bundle that is also called barakah or grace. Grace is nourishment for the “soul”. It works on the whole body, and thus is sensed by all three of the lower bodies, bringing them peace, calm and a feeling of fulfilment. Grace pacifies and supports, and partly nourishes. It is a universal energy that can bring healing to the physical body, can create a breakthrough in your perception and give you various insights... that is essentially what grace is. It really does bestow grace upon people, and as such, at an obvious material level, quite often the wellbeing of those who have touched on the Work and in some way facilitated it grows almost immediately. Generally speaking, this is not true for those

directly involved in the Work, because this is not what they come for.

The way grace works is mysterious and hard to explain. On the physical plane, the way grace works may be compared with how a flower responds to that which feeds and waters it. The flower grows and begins to blossom in response to being cared for. Something like this reaction happens on the physical plane: the people in the place where work is produced—for example, where the group gathers for exercises—mysteriously gain material grace, which appears to them in various different forms. I have observed such things for as many years as I have been working with people. It happens quite often that when they are “on a roll” people get carried away by their good fortune and become self-important and conceited. In such cases, the flow of grace is broken and they return to their former, though not worse, material state. And I have also seen this many times. Grace can come both through a specific person who then becomes a conductor of it, and through the combined spiritual or mystical work of a group of people. As grace has nothing to do with the working of the energy centers, it is impossible to emit it according to one’s own desires. It comes as an answer, as a reward for one’s efforts. A group that works well will necessarily disperse a certain quality of grace around the area where they have gathered.

It is important to bear in mind that one of the limitations of grace, which brings good fortune in the material world, is that this almost never comes to the group participants themselves. The Sufi Path is founded on ascetic principles, and although there are exceptions to the rules, on the whole everything remains the same even now. If Protestants believe that God grants material wealth to those whom He grants His blessing, on the Sufi Path a person must internally (and sometimes also externally) reject everything apart from God. Therefore grace affects people on the Path differently in helping to realize their lofty aspirations.

Grace is an answer from God (or the Higher planes of Reality, which for us is the same thing) to Work performed well. It almost never given in advance, although I have come across cases where grace comes, for example, at the point where decisions have been taken that are connected to performing Work. In these moments it becomes a sign of approval, and often its arrival alone allows me to eliminate any doubts concerning the choice.

And then in terms of vibrating energy, grace also comes as an answer to the energy that people give off in the process of Work. In this context, grace serves as both a reward, and as an incentive, and as a resource that helps to improve the quality and increase the quantity of the energy emitted by those involved in Work. The effect of grace on the external world is miraculous and almost divine, the changes in those who feel it within them is sometimes not so obvious, but of course they are there.

When a person becomes a conductor of grace, it comes through the Heart, specifically through this channel of connection. That said, grace may accumulate over time in the heart center until the point that someone who really needs it comes along. This is how blessings are produced—as the heart center is directly connected to the palms, one of the communicative channels of the physical body, energy from grace can be transferred through them.

Furthermore, the Heart has its own vibration, which can also be transferred and ignites the Heart of those around if they are ready to receive what is being given to them. It is usually wasted on people off the street, but this kind of communication within a group substantially accelerates ignition of the heart center in all involved and gives new possibilities for Work with them.

The sixth center also has the ability to work not just inwardly but *outwardly*, exerting its influence not only through the mental plane but directly, emitting and transferring energy of a set frequency and with it affecting the senses and the states of those

around. The second center can do the same thing at its own level, but this is not directly relevant to our theme. There are two more energies that are transferred by a Master to his pupils—energy from the field of Consciousness and the energy of the seventh center, which is objectively superior to the rest. The field of Consciousness is the field of Presence in which pupils' awareness may be fostered much faster. I have written about this before, and for this reason I will only add that this field is permanent, and pupils may enter it when they deem it necessary, if they possess a strong connection with the Master. In the field of Consciousness, the ability to maintain concentration increases, and generally all practices concerning the development of awareness are performed more easily and effectively. The permanence of this field distinguishes it both from the phenomenon of grace, which is present impermanently, and from transfers, which happen via the energy centers.

The heaviest emissions are possessed by the seventh center or sahasrara chakra. Energy from the Heart is far gentler and more pleasant to the senses. But it is the energy of the seventh center that possesses the strongest awakening influence, and for this reason transfers via the seventh center are the strongest in terms of aiding the growth of awareness, and give a jolt to those are working toward this awareness. The field of Consciousness in this sense has a slow yet profound yin effect, while transfer via the seventh center is completely yang and is just like the lash of a whip. An open seventh center grants new possibilities for connection and interaction, it's true. But the fundamental work of Sufis is still connected with the Heart, owing to its special importance and the necessity of it in carrying out Work. An open seventh center without an open Heart (or in place of it) makes for individual mystics that are incapable of either conveying messages or of helping anyone to get to the same position and inner state. The Heart in this sense is far higher and more useful for people on the

whole, because a mystic who works through the heart center will never lose their connection with people and is capable of bringing them good fortune at least in the form of grace. Those who make it to the seventh center eventually lose that connection and cease to be interested in people, preferring to remain within their own ineffable inner existence.

## THE STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES OF GROUP WORK

**T**raining people on the Path can be done in different ways. Normally it takes the following forms: performing spiritual practices, for example, different kinds of meditations by oneself; seeking contact with God and acquiring mystical experience and knowledge by oneself, and the same thing—a spiritual and mystical quest, which is carried out together with a group of seekers whose aims are close to one's own. As a rule, the group will have a leader, and this may be a true Master, or a spiritual trainer, who teaches what we might call the basics of meditation. People working alone may also have a teacher—whether a specific living person, or some higher entity or “internal master.” How effective such training is may be judged by those who train this way; the path of the individual does not only exist because they are unable to find like-minded people, but principally because there are people who do not believe it is possible to work in some group full of idiots.

The purpose of any training is for a person to gain their own personal experience and, in the case of training on the Path, their own personal opportunity for spiritual vision and higher perception. This is the reason that the practices are so important, for it is

they that give the seeker the necessary experience and lead his being to the change he craves. In this sense, book knowledge is always *second-rate* and normally imbues the seeker with new ideas, engendering new illusions. Only through experience can you attain true knowledge and understanding at a higher level than before. At the same time, experience can also be deceptive—for example, when a person considers thinking about awareness to be awareness itself, or control over thought to be the silence of the mind. It is possible to take self-induced hallucinations to be a transcendental experience, to build the remaining practices on this and cultivate your own understanding of the nature of Reality. Therefore, every seeker should develop a critical relationship to his own perception, which is quite hard for an individualist to do. Everyone begins to move toward Truth from the darkness of his own ego and to rely on his judgement and perception, colored as they are with his own desires, is quite unreasonable. But I already written a lot about the difficulties and pitfalls that lie in wait for the seeker on the Path. Here, I would like to look in more detail at group work. In a group within a Sufi sect that carries out live work and recognizes the aforementioned laws of human and general Being.

There are common and very obvious advantages to working in a group as compared to performing the practices alone. This would include, for example, the possibility of being deceived by experience, the possibility of acknowledging one's own relationship to others and of seeing the manifestations of one's own ego, and so on. But there is another far more important aspect that is only revealed in group work. This, as ever, is the energy side of the practice.

When you have a lot of people meditating in the same room, this is still not group work, each one of them is self-contained, and basically separate from the rest. Group work means performing practices *together*, where the efforts and the actions of all its

members become *synchronized*. We may, for example, perform dhikr, read mantras, prayers, some movement practices and others in this way. With this sort of approach, all members of the group *vibrate* energy in unison and something like a group energy which, although it takes shape from what is brought into the circle of all the members, has its own vibration that is distinct from their individual vibrations. The energy of the group is many times higher than the energy of each member of the circle, and as a result the egregors through which this interaction takes place respond in kind—energy which comes from the Higher planes also takes on a different level of vibration, and thereby opens up a different level of possibilities to all those involved in the Work. And if a Master is involved in the practice, the energy of the group takes on a “hue” that would be impossible for the pupils to attain either together or on their own.

It bears repeating—if someone feels he can exist outside any kind of energy processes, he is living in an illusion regarding his own limitations. The whole world is an interchange of energies and the consequences of their interactions, and human activity, along with all human life, is no exception to this rule.

The main distinction between group work and all other kinds of work is that in group work an energy impulse can be produced which cannot be produced under any other circumstances. Only a group that works effectively is capable, through the energy that it emits, of raising the bar so high that practices become available to them that are beyond comparison to what has come before—in other words, to arrive at the possibility of performing mystical practices at the highest level. There is a certain prevailing notion these days that great mystical work and the miracles associated with it, remains in the distant past, but that is not the case. It is just that now the correct approach to the practices is all but lost, and either there is not the required intensity in them, or there is the intensity but there is no vision for what to do with them. There are

groups of people who perform dhikr very intensively, and yet the state that they enter into through their efforts is considered the endpoint of the practice, bringing all those participating in it euphoria and gratification. This work is essentially no different to any ordinary human activity, where intensity is also just poured away. Dhikr that is performed by entering into an altered state, however intense it may be, will not bear visible mystic fruits; and of course, it will not lead to the heights of the mystic Path. Without a connection in the Heart and without following the Will, most group practices are transformed over time into nothing more than a means for self-gratification.

A single impulse produced by a group is worth very little. If the group works every day, the succession of messages it sends out will receive a response from above in the form of a response impulse, on whose wave members of the group can significantly accelerate their progress on the Path. And this is the whole essence of mystical work—to summon that invisible wave, and with its help acquire and realize new possibilities on the Path. The response may also come in the form of grace, but this is also worth very little. Constant, persistent, coordinated work will mean that you get a corresponding answer, one that opens up possibilities you could not even have dreamed of before. Here the relationship between “give and take” is completely equal, in the sense that by giving off some sort of energy in performing practices, and taking a certain experience, as well as changing one’s inner state, any member of a group takes even more new abilities, which are revealed not to him personally, but to the group as a whole, and which he could not have realized outside of the group. Furthermore, it often happens that as it is revealed a mystic ability directly answers the needs or requirements of all members of the group, which makes this kind of work even more attractive and desirable.

Of course an ability is not simply knowledge about how to do some practice and receive some other result, not at all. An ability is

always reinforced by an energy impulse of a higher order, which is used up during group practices and elevates them to a new level, bringing new and previously inaccessible results. Help received from the Higher planes of Reality or, if you like, from God, is a necessary condition for carrying out mystical practices. Hence also the necessity of interacting with God, meaning the necessity of creating an *image* of Him. This issue is addressed differently in different religions, but mystics always arrive at the necessity of this kind of interaction, as without it mysticism simply cannot exist. Because of a simplified and partially false image of God, mystics in all ages have gained the ability to initiate contact with that Force that cannot be confined within the realms of our logic and cannot be described by our language. Through a *relationship*, mystics moved towards a *connection*, through the practice they moved to feeling and the experience of a direct perception of what exists in Reality.

Such is the power of work in groups, and you cannot overestimate the abilities which are made available through participation in that work. But it would be a mistake to believe that it is all just limited to group work. Practicing in groups is one thing, while individual, to a certain extent independent work, is another. Together they complement and support one another.

Mystic work by no means cancels out efforts towards self-awareness, because without them, moving to the influence of the Upward Stream while at the same time remaining in the body, is practically impossible. Without a certain level of awareness, interaction with the energies of the Higher planes may lead to a situation where the person may be carried away by uncontrolled expressions of suppressed energies and desires or something of this kind. On the other hand, without the mystical element of Work, the seeker may languish in one place for quite a long time, constantly aware of the same thing and not knowing how to let out the suppressed energy of emotions or desires. In any case, both

individual and group work lead the seeker to the same aim, which may come together in different ways, but always means the same thing: realizing one's spiritual potential, fulfilling one's destiny, exceeding the bounds of the ordinary.

The strength of the group is in its unity, its weakness in fragmentation. Many seekers feel like strangers in this world; in fact this is what motivates their quest to escape beyond its limits. Quite often they bring this feeling into the work, projecting their own resentment of themselves and those around them onto the other members of the group. There are also other reasons why one member might remain estranged and distanced from the rest of the group, and sometimes this becomes an obstacle to the effective activity of the group. The Work itself ultimately selects those who are suitable for the group.

Along with individual motivation, which is what brings people to the Work, there are certain conditions that enable the group to function successfully. Strangely enough, the first of these is faith. And this does not mean supreme faith in God (although this absolutely helps, at least to begin with), but faith that higher states of being exist for man, and they can be reached with the aid of specific practices. This is the faith that the Path exists that leads to Truth and the experience of oneness with God. If he does not have this faith, or not enough of it, a person cannot work in a group. His doubts will sooner or later lead him to a search for something he can *believe*. It is very hard to begin the work without faith, and going on with it is not an option. Experience comes later, and as you gain personal experience and the conviction that the proposed practices and the Path are true, the necessity of faith goes away of its own accord.

There is one other condition that really helps you to achieve success in group work. This is a *willingness to follow*.

Willingness to follow means a kind of acceptance—the acceptance of what you are given; without the willingness to follow, you

cannot get to Surrender of the will. You have to start working on acceptance even as a pupil, and the fuller it becomes, the greater the possibilities that will open up to the pupil. This is one of the paradoxes of the Path—the smaller you become, the greater the presence of God and the greater the possibilities that open up through His presence due to His essential omnipotence. But for the ego, both acceptance and surrender are considered insurmountable hardships and seem like traps, because they somehow deprive him of control over his own life. The ego resists, and this resistance can sometimes take on the subtlest forms. The ego wants to control everything itself and is not willing to be controlled. There are of course people with a victim mentality, willing to torture themselves for any reason and willing, while suffering, to follow anyone who wants them, but this is not what we are talking about here. Willingness to follow the commands of a Master enables you to create an enormous field of possibilities, from which he can choose the most appropriate at any given moment. Acceptance is the key to great wonders and mysteries.

And of course, acceptance is very much necessary when it comes to companions in Work. The ego is used to seeing all the shortcomings of others—this is how it compensates for the sense of its own inadequacy. But if we look at this issue from another angle, we see that if it were not for these people, whoever they are, one could find oneself completely alone in one's quest. And I have always felt grateful to God for not being left alone on this complex Path in its most difficult moments. With difficult work you are grateful to anyone who can at least share a little of your burden with you. It is only the blindness that belongs to the ego, and the pride that is hard on its heels, that gets in the way of people realizing this simple and obvious fact.

People sometimes feel that a well-chosen group of people will have a decisive influence on the success of its work. This is partly true, and partly it is not. Certainly there are people who are inca-

pable of group work, and there are people who are incapable of work at all. They have their path, and only God may judge them. But such people, generally speaking, will leave the group very quickly, just as they come into it suddenly. The rest are *fully capable* of effective work to the benefit of themselves, God and the group. If, of course, they manage to overcome resistance from their own ego.

Group work can become a great school to its members, and it may turn into a total waste of time, but even in that situation, the true seeker will gain invaluable experience. Many factors impact upon the development of the work, but they can all be overcome, if the members of the Sufi circle truly want it. There are many aspects to group work which lie in both the field of ordinary human psychology and in the field of mysticism. Every facet of this work brings a certain experience, and as we know, there can be no higher attainment in human life than experience.

## DHIKR UNVEILED

**O**f all the practices designed to help man make contact with God, dhikr occupies a special place. Sufis call dhikr “the pillar on which the whole of the mystic Path rests.” A correctly performed dhikr involves concentration, contemplation and awareness. In this way it is immediately made up of three practices, and hence the effect created by them is also multifaceted and intense.

Dhikr (for anyone who does not know) is the practice of remembrance of God. The classics of Sufism, founded as they are on the legitimacy of this practice, provide quotations from the Quran, which talks about the necessity of always remembering your God wherever you are, but I shall not waste time on this, because it only takes a minute to find these online. In any case, dhikr is one of the main mystical practices used by Sufis. From the outside, it seems technically simple enough to perform—the seeker repeats either one of the Names of God or a passage from the Quran aloud or to himself. The difference between silent dhikr and loud dhikr depends on this. What part of this is mystical is not entirely clear, at least, until the point when you get some exposure to this practice.

These are its three components: first, concentrating on the Name, then contemplating all the levels of meaning of the name, and finally sustaining a permanent level of self-awareness, so that you do not “swim” beyond the mind and sink into mechanical unconscious babble. Concentrating on the Name is followed by repetition, and both the body and the mind are involved in the practice at this point. Both of them enter into the rhythm of the repetition, which to begin with demands a certain effort, and then the action continues under its own momentum and demands far less application of force. Contemplation of the meanings of the Name happens in sequence—the seeker should not think about them and should not try to meditate upon a specific theme. He just looks at the Name, holds it in his own field of concentration, and that is all. The body and the mind are occupied with the repetition, attention is directed towards the Name, and by itself this examination begins the process of revealing all the possible meanings contained in this Name. To begin with, attention is directed at the qualities of the Name pertaining directly to God, and seeing their manifestations, the mind automatically shapes them into particular verbal formulae. By itself looking at meaning leads to verbalization of meanings, but this is not ordinary thinking, rather it is a process of contemplation, a process that is far more purposeful than a succession of alternating thoughts. *Look, don't think*—this is what the seeker is taught in the practices of self-awareness and in performing *muraqabah*—the Sufi meditation technique. That is to say, performing dhikr in the way that I am describing requires skills in awareness of the self and preliminary work in mastering the skills of observation and looking.

After exploring the meanings of the Name relating directly to God, the seeker turns his attention to how the quality of a particular name manifests itself in human life and in the world generally. By means of this kind of contemplation he gets to the very essence of the meanings of each Name he works with, and his

level of understanding grows. Contemplation is one of the best practices, as it brings a person to an understanding of the essence of things; performing the dhikr as I have described facilitates the development and consolidation of the skill of contemplation in the practitioner. Both repetition and introspection on the meaning of the Name requires you to maintain a state of vigilance so that performing the practice does not become mechanical. An effort of awareness is therefore necessarily present in this kind of work. A spiritual effect arises from all the above-mentioned efforts, which come up in the practice of dhikr, but in order to understand how the mystical effect happens, one has to examine certain aspects of Reality we have not yet talked about.

How does interaction with God work if, as I have already pointed out, he is infinitely far away from us, indeed on different planes of Being altogether? This is the most important question for anyone who wants to get to the essence of Truth and one can only receive a concrete answer to it through the path of personal experience—through an in-depth refining of one's perception. In as much as directly describing the situation around the possibilities of interaction may serve to further confuse things, I am forced use an analogy. The simplest way to illustrate this story is with the example of sunlight. There is a source of light—the star we call the Sun. It is at a great distance from the Earth, but as its light reaches the earth's atmosphere it is cleansed of various harmful rays and becomes a source of nutrition to all living things. Being under the Sun's rays, we are exposed to its effects, whether we like it or not. When we lie down to sunbathe on the beach, we consciously expose ourselves to the effect of the energy from sunlight and to an extent we are interacting with the Sun itself. And yet direct contact with the Sun is impossible for us, because attempting to get close to it would end in our complete dissolution and death. And this is something like what happens between us and God.

In other words, the Source, or if you like, the Absolute, is

infinitely far away from our physical plane of Reality. At the same time, His Presence pervades all levels of human existence, and is palpably present on the physical plane. The Hindus talked about Consciousness, which all matter and all living things are filled with; Sufis talk about Presence. Essentially, all this is an attempt to at least somehow express the inexpressible and find the words that might give those trying to understand ideas to work with which, while distorted, are not altogether false. And it is the energy from Presence that we are interacting with. It belongs neither to the Downward nor the Upward Stream, rather, it incorporates them both within itself. It is difficult to understand, but Presence pervades everything, and wherever a person might be—in the mountains or the lowlands, in Tibet or Moscow—the quality of the energy of Presence does not change. The *energies of places* may change—it's true; and it is easier to work on yourself in certain specific places than it is in others, but this has nothing to do with the strength of Presence, which is the same everywhere, like a mathematical constant. That said, I would not contend that Presence and Consciousness are the same thing. I have written a lot about consciousness and have always maintained that matter contains within it a portion of Divine Consciousness, which is diluted within that matter. But Presence becomes a completely active force when man begins to interact with it. And if I were to compare the energy of Presence with something else, then it could perhaps only be attention. Presence, to a certain extent, is *God's attention*. Though this claim is of course also a simplification of the real situation.

What happens during dhikr? Here I will have to go back to the sunlight analogy again. When a beam of light passes through a prism, the subsequent dispersion is broken down into the colors of the rainbow, which it would not be possible to see without that prism. And although they would be impossible to see, that does not mean that before it passed through the prism they were not

already in that ray of sunlight. The conditions had simply come about in which the spectrum of the light's energy could *manifest itself*. It is a similar process that takes place when reading dhikr, only the role of that ray of sunlight is played by the energy of Presence, while that of the prism is played by the mind of the seeker, combined with his attention.

The mind, as we know, channels a person's attention, directing it outward or inward depending on his comprehension of the task ahead of him. When a seeker begins to concentrate on the Name of God, by means of repetition and concentration, as well as directing attention toward the meaning of the Name there is a *discharge* of a corresponding quality of energy from the energy spectrum of Presence. And of course the person becomes its conductor, precisely to the degree that he is able. This capacity depends on how full he is with the suppressed energy of desires and emotions, and also on the adequacy of his efforts in performing dhikr. Anyhow, the impact of the energy of Presence is felt by everyone with a serious approach to repeating the Name.

And there is another point here that many Sufi groups operating in Russia lose sight of. In order for the mind to perform the function of a prism, the Name must be uttered in its own native language. Then both contemplation and conducting of the energy of Presence are possible. If the Name is repeated in Arabic, based on some notion of its innate holiness, the Name is turned into a mantra, which means little if anything at all to the mind, and for this reason the anticipated effect does not happen either.

As in the case of the rainbow, the energy spectrum of Presence is divided according to the frequency of vibration, crudely speaking. Different Names bring completely different sensations during the practice and produce different effects through prolonged repetition. Some Names have more focused effects, some very broad. A well-chosen Name for the work may quickly advance the seeker along the path to inner transformation.

The classics of Sufism distinguished dhikr mainly according to how and where they are to be performed. This is why they had loud and silent dhikr, as well as dhikr spoken with the lips (and mind), as a counterbalance to which came dhikr created in the Heart. It was considered that if the seeker managed to transfer his understanding of God from the mind to the Heart, then this would speed up the transformation and was generally a sign of serious progress along the Path. And this practice really did help to open the Heart, it's true. Yet in the open Heart there was also the sense of a connection, and the possibility of Surrender—generally, all that the mystic needs to achieve his aims.

In the practice of dhikr I am describing, there is a distinction in the internal stages that are not connected to the forms of repetition, but reflect the impact of the Name's energy onto the seeker. There are four of these stages, but only those who work with the same Name for a long enough period of time can clearly discern them. In the first stage, which lasts around two weeks, dhikr has a clear, tangible impact, primarily on the mind of the practitioner. Here there is the effect from the contemplation of meanings, the novelty of the practice itself, the transition from habitual sensations to the sensations that arise after interaction with the energy of Presence—a little of everything. The seeker clearly feels the impact of dhikr and it imbues him with the spirit. However, after some time all these sensations begin to deaden and afterwards seem to totally disappear. This is how the effect of *habituation* manifests itself, which exists in almost all the practices. The initial impact, which seemed to be very strong, changes some of the energy structures in the seeker, but these changes are superficial. Habituation is a consequence of the fact that fine-tuning the mind and body through performing the practice has already happened. Therefore, after these initial changes a period begins where the next step towards transformation is to build up the effects of far greater efforts than in the beginning. This is how the second stage

begins, where nothing seems to happen. Of course, there are brief after-effects in the body—as after any practice—which express themselves through a change in the body’s state, but this is not all that awaits the practitioner. The stage where nothing seems to happen can last a long time, and its duration is a personal thing. As I have already remarked, the length of this stage depends directly on how much suppressed energy the person has within himself and the quality of his efforts. If the seeker has no problems with either suppressed feelings or with his efforts, then the second stage will come quickly. In as much as the efficacy of contemplating the meanings is also exhausted in the first weeks of the practice, at the second stage I normally recommend that some attention be directed to the heart center, at the same time as repeating the Name.

The third stage is characterized by the appearance of the qualities identified by the Name within the practitioner themselves. One could say that it develops or *crystallizes* in the three lower bodies, altering their original state in terms of sensations, reactions and the frequency of vibrations. The properties of the Name become properties of the seeker, as a result of which he attains a new level of being. This is the main spiritual outcome of dhikr. The length of the third stage is also personal, but generally speaking, on reaching it, the seeker will stop worrying about the outcome and about chasing the speed of their own progression. The fourth stage holds the main mystical outcome of dhikr: as he begins to utter the Name, the seeker immediately *enters into God’s Presence*, and senses it at all levels of his being. This Presence is imbued with the quality of the Name that is uttered, but it is at the same time absolutely whole. There are no further stages after that, there is only existing in the Presence, which quickly becomes possible even without practicing dhikr.

Over the centuries that Sufism has existed, performing dhikr has taken various sometimes quite curious forms. There are

groups that use dhikr as a means of entering altered states and almost turn it into a shamanistic ritual. There are groups that read passages from the Quran, using them like mantras, and expect some kind of magical result from the practice. The world is diverse in its manifestations and its ability to distort any Path, however straight it might have been at first. Nevertheless, correctly performed, dhikr was and remains one of the most powerful mystical practices ever discovered by people; thus it was before and so it continues now.

## HOPE & LOVE

All people are different—this banal expression, which has become a commonplace of humanist discourse, is directly related to the diversity of ways in which we have interacted with God in all ages of human existence. Not only that, every ethnic group has its own peculiar characteristics, its own idiosyncratic features, which are expressed in a particular state of mind, a temperament, and other distinctive characteristics that are vividly on show at the level of the three lower bodies. Since the holocaust and the horrors of the Second World War, people do not like to talk about ethnic differences, and globalization has seemingly taken this issue off the agenda. Nevertheless, anyone who wants to understand the truth of why all the religions that have sprung up on the Earth are so dissimilar cannot avoid thinking about ethnicity and other issues relating to cultural and historical peculiarities in the development of a given ethnic group. A vast number of books have been written and a multitude of theories invented on this subject, and I do not intend to start dissecting these here. I have no intention of putting forward a new theory, either. Only in order to understand what is discussed later on, you must keep in mind the *dissimilarity* between different groups of people.

All religions and mystical doctrines are come into being *alive*, inasmuch as there is a living bearer of Truth and conductor of Will, through which they also come. They then become ossified and construct their own truths and a way of describing the world in absolute terms, establishing their own collection of dogmas. This is how we come to the *fixation* of knowledge, set by specific people in specific circumstances, and it is stretched out into Eternity—when some expression of Truth is confirmed as sacrosanct and absolute, even if it is not an expression of Truth but just some pronouncement by its founder on some existential question. This fixation liberates followers from the necessity of seeking the Truth for themselves and gives them the opportunity to blindly follow set rules that come “from above”. This form of knowledge, fixated once and for all, acquires “holy” status; and bringing new knowledge means going against the opinion of all decent, honest people, even if it is much better suited to that moment in time.

All that I have described above does not present a problem for the followers, as the mind loves certainty and stability, and it has a thing for ready answers that require no effort to get hold of. They simply follow their little-understood rituals and feel a contentment from making contact with something “higher”. But for the seeker, especially in the early days, all these petrified notions of Truth can sometimes be very serious barriers. Especially now that we have access the teachings of all ages, which seem to all get lumped in together. Spiritual texts maintain the absolute authenticity of the paths that they present us with, while spiritual teachers make a big deal of ideas that have been around for thousands of years. Thus modern Europeans have begun learning practices that were created in another time for completely different people. It is hard to believe that any sense could come of this, but the humanistic notion of equality and brotherhood among all people, which does not in fact exist, enables them to believe that all practices possess a universality, and are therefore

well suited to anyone that wants them. This is a widespread fallacy, thanks to which we have seen a sharp fall in the realm of spiritual work. *Literally transferring* practices from the past to the present in most cases brings more harm than good. Even more so when the practice is from a completely different culture, which you really neither know nor understand, and nor can you understand it. So spending a long time repeating practices that you believe may benefit you in some mysterious way may in fact completely reduce your sensitivity and potentially make any sort of growth impossible. And yet, at the level of the mind there will be this conviction that growth is happening and something seems to be changing. One sees far more of these cases now than one would like to. A follower will find peace when they take this relative form of communicating Truth for its absolute form; in this situation, the seeker will fall into a trap not everyone has it in them to get out of.

It is important to remember that *every* human being is able to make contact with the Divine Presence. More precisely, every human being initially exists within that contact, but can choose whether to interact with Him or not. Atheists refuse to interact with God, but find their own ways of interacting with the Presence, which can be quite amusing. Those who look to Cosmic Reason, to Destiny, to Providence, to angels and other superior beings, are all trying to get to an interaction with the Presence. Not all succeed first time, but with a little perseverance something will always happen. A one-off prayer is a stab in the dark, but regular prayers will elicit an answer from the Presence and plug the person who is praying in to the corresponding egregor. Interaction with the Presence always ends with being plugged in to an egregor, but dwelling in the Presence, oddly enough, does not indicate that any special energy is being emitted. The Sufi meditation of *muraqabah*, or the Buddhist *zazen*, along with all other practices like them, bring the emission of energy within the egregors' chan-

nels down to a minimum. Transformation requires energy, and the practices of awareness help to accumulate it. But being in the Presence and actively interacting with it are totally different practices.

The transition from the Downward to the Upward Stream means changing everything—habits, relationships and the relationship to the self and to the world, changing the quality of the energy that is emitted... There is a lot that must be changed in order to attain spiritual realization. And the energy that is required for this transition accumulates in the practices of awareness.

Transitioning to the influence of energy from the Upward Stream of Creation has the same meaning in all religions and mystical teachings—returning home, to God, and acquiring that once lost paradise. Every teaching underpins the necessity or inevitability of this return in its own way. This is where those characteristics come into play which lend people what we call their ethnicity. As a result of the differences in the external and internal circumstances of their daily lives, people invent different ways of interacting with God, or more precisely, with His Presence. Hence all the present variety in the means of this interaction, and hence the number of petrified truths, which for the most part are of no practical benefit to the seeker. Every fixed exposition of Truth generates its own form of mystical work, which is also distinct from others and adapted to the place, time and people that participate in it. For example, if there were no prohibition in Islam against images of God, as also existed in the Russian Orthodox Church up until the seventeenth century, then perhaps dhikr would never have been created, because icons may make direct reference to a tangible image of God, but the invisible God may only be felt and known through the manifestations of His qualities as they are revealed in Reality. The practice of recalling the qualities and manifestations of God that we now know as dhikr came about due to the impossibility of direct visual contact. Other prac-

tices came about due to similar limitations—or possibilities. They gave people a defined experience that would be interpreted according to the prevailing conditions of the time and the overall level of knowledge. This is how the teachings and principles, postulates and dogmas in which people were required to believe all emerged. And that would be great, if any of this were based on real experience, and not the contrivances of people full of their own bright ideas. Following them is dangerous, because when you take a system of knowledge and practices that is designed for another time and other people, you fall into a trap that has nothing to do with your own actual situation or what these practices really work for. No one cares about this now, though; they just believe if Hindus eat yogurt, and I eat yogurt then there is no difference between us. But along with yogurt, Hindus also eat certain foods we cannot even digest, and likewise their practices may give us indigestion, too. It should be said that I am in no way criticizing the practices developed in Hinduism in the process of its development, and I am only taking them as an example as they now seem to be being taught wherever they can be. It is the clearest example I can think of.

To the followers it is all the same—for them the main thing is to find a belief system that suits them. They think this enormous choice of systems is for the best. The opportunity to choose—illusory or not—will always warm the heart. For the seeker, this enormous confusion of ideas and methods of attaining Truth is anything but a simple attempt at stability. Followers look for the answers they like; they look for a state of inner compensation. Balance and order are the ideals of any follower. The seeker looks not for answers but experience which gives him personal knowledge of the question; he looks for an escape beyond the bounds of the ordinary. Followers are perfectly happy within the Downward Stream; for seekers it is cramped and uncomfortable there.

And the question always arises: why are some people only

capable of following blindly, conditioned by ideas that have been impressed upon them, while others can rise above their own conditioning and move beyond the bounds of this world? As ever, there are many answers, but they are all a bit one-sided. And here it is important to remember that *all people* follow ideas, whatever they might be. Ideas are fuel for the mind. They give it the motivation to act and they rationalize the necessity of a given action. This is the Truth: followers and seekers start out from the same ideas but they arrive at completely different results.

There are a number of explanations as to why man *must* sooner or later turn to God. Most of them are built on fear—one of the most effective motivators. Sin, bad karma, final judgement and the all-seeing eye of God force people to contemplate the life that may exist on the other side of death. The desire to get to heaven or the fear of hell motivate followers to this day to go on vibrating energy into the channels of the necessary egregors. There is nothing wrong with this, after all the whole world rests on mutual support. In other words *all* human motivation comes from the ideas they have invented at some juncture in their life. This is why many of them get uneasy when they find out that God, as they previously conceived of Him, does not exist. And here another question arises: if it makes no difference to God whether or not we pursue Him, is it worth putting so much effort into working on oneself and making these great internal and external sacrifices to enter the Upward Stream of Creation? There are a few answers to this question.

The first goes like this: if your ego is wounded by the fact that God does not waste time watching over you, this does not mean that He is indifferent to you. The second answer assumes a certain maturity in the questioner: pursuing something higher will of itself raise a person above their own circumstances, which can sometimes be absolutely horrific. In fact, it was this that the religions and mystical movements clung to in the darkest ages of

human history. The other answers cannot help unconscious people who believe that God is not very just towards them and that they deserve more than what they have. The language of desire immediately takes us back to our habitual explanations, like the laws of karma or the wrong attitude towards the reality around you. They say, if you desire correctly, positively and with specific intention, everything will be okay. This is also a way of motivating unconscious people and it costs very little.

This is the Truth: you can paint a person as many pictures as you like of the allures of heaven or the allures of spiritual realization, but if he has no thirst within him for the Beyond, your time will be spent in vain. You can talk all you like about people's attraction to Truth, but in reality what everyone wants is not Truth but contentment. Therefore it is practically impossible to come across a direct exposition of Truth (insofar as such a thing can be done at all), instead lofty motivation comes in many forms—divine love, blessings and other good things. This is where the work of many genuinely accomplished people ends—when it suits them to talk about what people want to hear, and not about what they actually need. But do they need it?

And this is another aspect of the same Truth: no one can be brought to God through discussions about how God is waiting for you, loves you, wants to see you and suffers because you are not living right. Such discussions may deliver a person into the light, persuading him to cripple himself and others to get to heaven, but not direct him on the search for Truth. *Ideas generate followers*. The seeker is motivated by the opposite—he begins his search out of necessity. And this necessity is vitally important to him—unless he satisfies it, he can never feel realized in this world and in this life.

Self-awareness is what people are looking for in this life. It can take the most diverse forms, but all that man is looking for is the realization of the self. There is external realization, though one

way or another it is always connected with internal realization. Those who achieve success in the external world become sure of themselves and have a certain sense of fulfilment; the fulfilment that comes with the realization of one's potential, if only a part of it. And this is how things work out: due to the force of desires, most people look for realization outside, in the world, among people. Some realize themselves in their work, by building a career, some try to do this through feelings, for example through love, regardless for whom or for what, some move towards creativity and write poetry. Any creation is linked to the act of Creation, and for this reason brings fulfilment, as in someone who senses God in the process of making worlds and creating life. In creating we become like the Creator, and this means we get a short-lived, substitute experience of true realization. This is why creative people are so hysterical and vulnerable—at the moment of inspiration they feel that they are equal to God, but after that they descend to the level of ordinary men, and this experience is like a repetition of Adam's expulsion from paradise. You can put out as many spiritual and mystical texts as you like containing pure truth, but any response to them will only ever be found in the heart of the seeker. Here I should point out again that all people are different. But this time I do not mean this in terms of a person's ethnicity, but his essence. There are people who are *not of this world*, and although in the everyday context we use this to talk about the town crazy, it also has another, more spiritual meaning. There are people who go to God and to the Upward Stream for the simple reason that they cannot exist within the Downward Stream, because originally, practically from birth they have a need for realization by returning to God. I understand perfectly well that I am now describing a new theory of *divine election*, but all my experience working with people and observing where people go confirms this conclusion. A seeker is born that way, while a

follower is something you become. And it is hard to change anything in this arrangement.

This is the Truth: there must always be a certain number of people on the earth working in the Upward Stream. And they search for God not because he gives them blessings in exchange for this, but because in this world there is nothing that can bring them real contentment. Their realization originally belongs to the Upward Stream, although they sometimes have to live half their life or even more to understand this. The balance of the Streams has to be supported not only by those who live according to their own desires, but also those who live in service to and following the Will. This Path is not for everyone, and those who think that all people must eventually be able to become seekers are mistaken. All people may only become followers, which, essentially, they already are.

The rule of balance is simple—if energies from the Downward Path begin to take over, strengthening people's desires and unconsciousness, then this will end with murders, automatically strengthening energy from the Upward Stream. With them comes disillusionment and the escape from unconsciousness, because death, even the death of a stranger, serves to remind us what all the earthly desires in this world rest upon. There is another side, too—if all people were suddenly made seekers, no one would have children or bake bread, and life on Earth, meaning the corresponding branches of Creation too, would end. Any imbalance that would threaten to cause the destruction of life is compensated for within the Streams, though sometimes the way this happens is very crude. Therefore, people working in the Upward Stream are needed to maintain this balance, but there cannot be too many of them, because it does not take much of the energy of awareness to keep this world going. It sounds and looks quite cynical, but I have written several times already about the fact that Truth is not like a girl everyone ought to like. There are facts, and they are these.

Osho once said that if two hundred enlightened people were present on Earth at the same time, the whole world would change. You cannot argue with this, though this has never happened in all human history, and it looks like it never will. If only the end of the world does not take the form of universal enlightenment with all people simultaneously leaving their physical bodies. But this is also hard to believe; an interruption in the flow of energy from the Downward Stream would most likely lead to degeneration, that is all. Nature (and God) always chooses the most economical path.

People set out on their quest not because the idea of God the Father or God the Son somehow profoundly influences the mind of the seeker, although that might also be the case. The seeker is looking for a resolution to his discontent, and there is not enough water on this earth to slake the kind of thirst he has. Of course, you may increase your inner necessity, and this is written about repeatedly in the Sufi classics, but it is also possible to open it, if you suddenly recognize the simple fact that the drudgery of this world, in which you are constantly looking to find your place, but just cannot, is simply not for you. Real seekers always get to the essence of things and come to a personal realization, whatever it takes to do so. To those for whom this world is overcrowded, it costs almost nothing.

If the people of the Upward Stream have a need nothing can satisfy, which will sooner or later trickle over into a spiritual thirst, then in the Downward Stream, within the balance, there is *hope*, which is a way of holding people back, and enabling them to vibrate energy into the relevant channels. Hope is one of the principal factors that keeps people in the Downward Stream. Almost all seekers encounter manifestations of hope who hope to find something in the external world no matter what. Surveying his surroundings, the seeker feels there must be something wrong with him, given that everyone around him is pursuing something, and he alone does not know what he wants. And within there lives

the hope that maybe you will succeed in learning the mystery of those people who know how to find the meaning of existence in this rather strange world, and to become one of them, to finally throw off that feeling of profound melancholy that envelopes you every day.

Hope is the irrational certainty that everything is going to be okay, and everything will somehow come together. It keeps people afloat at the most difficult moments in their lives, and it therefore cannot be spoken about in a purely negative sense. Moreover, hope has at its foundation the intuitive knowledge that everything—especially after death—will be okay. Death is also in some sense a return home. One of the first transcendental experiences that ever happened to me was the experience that all people who ever existed on Earth gain peace and grace, and complete contentment in this way, that no one is left wronged. So the irrationality of hope has its roots in the knowledge that we are all *not from here*, and there is a Force that protects us. At the same time, hoping for the better can sometimes be the main obstacle to a seeker, because it ties him to the world. “All is not lost,” hope whispers to him. “There are many pleasures and joys you have not tried and it is in them, of course, that you shall discover what you have long been looking for.” Hope becomes a deterrent on the Path and weakens the seeker. Some might hope that everything happens by itself and that not much effort is needed, some hope they manage to hold onto their own attachments and nothing will be sacrificed... Hope takes many different forms. The communists called religion the opium of the people—referring to the anesthetic properties of opium; hope is the common drug of all people.

By forgetting about hoping for something better, something easier and simpler, a person becomes capable of following the Path to the end. There is no other way.

There is one other motivating factor, which is often employed by those who are not lazy, and which also becomes an obstacle on

the Path of the seeker. This motivating factor is love, and it sometimes affects the mind of the seeker far more seriously than hope. When you start to look at love, you see quite quickly how they only start talking about divine love when God has already been presented as a terrifying monster, punishing everyone—sometimes for something they have done, other times just because. What did Jesus speak against? He spoke against the Old Testament, which contained the commandment: “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” “Love your enemy as yourself,” Jesus taught, and it is on this that the New Testament is essentially founded. Osho, who spoke even more about love than he did about meditation, came out against the strict tendencies of suppression promoted in the different religions; here, love serves as a defense for God, who has already become the source of a new, metaphysical horror, with His final judgement and surveillance of all people. Why do Sufis have so much to say about love? Could it be because the Quran is so full of motivational passages, and often comes back to the fear of Allah that every person should have? Love compensates for fear and for this reason in all religions where a lot is made of fear as a motivating influence, there are also mystics who provide a more positive motivating influence, in the form of love—the love of human beings for God, and the love of God for human beings. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the Creator should love His creation, although all the great geniuses seem to say the opposite; however you look at it, God must possess an identity in order for him to love us and to enter into a relationship with us. We have already explained that this is difficult for God, and so the stories about love are also a great simplification of what really exists in Reality. I have already written quite a lot about how this feeling is entangled with desire, and mainly sexual desire at that. I have written about how the essence of love is total acceptance of the person you love, and the fuller that acceptance is, the higher is the love, and that means, if

we are going to be more precise, that we are actually talking not about divine love, but about divine acceptance. Acceptance of self, acceptance of God and His Creation—this is the secondary effect of working on the self and the result of progressing on the Path. Acceptance brings peace and the ability to exist in what is here and now, without the desire to constantly change and improve. Acceptance is passive, and is perceived poorly by people of the mind, who like action. But people like the feeling of love, because it allows them to enter into unusual states, which can be justified by the presence of a

“higher” feeling—love. So everyone finds their own thing and gains this notion of the Ultimate via crude and not strictly accurate examples.

Acceptance is higher than love, but to the conditioned mind, wanting to be loved (in fact, to be accepted), it is quite hard to understand and to accept this. Therefore love makes its way from sermon to sermon, from book to book and remains a perfect motivating influence for followers, while wrong-footing seekers. The seeker may start looking for manifestations of this love, and there he may fall into a trap, seeing that there is no one to love him. Many hearts are broken through misplaced expectations. And yet it cannot be said that God is indifferent to us, given that “no one leaves here wronged”. But it is very difficult to call the feeling that reveals itself to mystics love. It is more complex and has nothing to do with that erotically charged kind of love. And yet, though cannot be expressed in words, it does exist. And just as loving is better than talking about love, experiencing the inexpressible is far better than trying to think about it, coming up with pretty pictures that in the end bear no relation to Reality.

## NECESSITY

**T**hanks to Rumi's famous expression about how increasing necessity enables the awakening of new organs of perception, many seekers get seriously bewildered at the idea of increasing their own personal necessity, when sometimes they are very hazy, about what this means.

Necessity is that which a person really needs, without satisfying which he either cannot go on living or his life will at least be highly flawed. A synonym for necessity is need, while requirement has a completely different meaning. A synonym for requirement would be more like dependency—on relationships, gratification and other such “foods” for the body, mind and senses. You cannot put an equals sign between requirement and necessity, because a necessity is something that is vitally important, while a requirement for something or other in most cases *only seems* vitally important.

Requirement is closely tied to desire, while need is tied to necessity, with that, without which, continued existence is all but impossible. And yet, people quite often end up prioritizing the fulfilment of their own desires, to the detriment of their most pressing needs, and then they are surprised when their life turns

into a nightmare. So by accumulating money people deny themselves their greatest necessity, by destroying their own health. But these, as we say, are the obvious facts. Let us attempt to examine the concept of necessity as it applies to the mystic Path.

As I have already written, some people are born with the sense that they are strangers in this world. They experience such intense discomfort living in it that the necessity of finding something different, some other mode of existence, soon leads them to the quest. People of this kind make the truest seekers, but they will have had their share of hardships by the time they find the Path. Necessity with such seekers is as real as it comes, but even so it is not recognized as such straight away. At first, they feel that they can adapt to the world and end their suffering, so they live in hope, believing that they themselves are flawed, and this is the only reason they cannot live in the world. Almost every seeker of this kind goes through a stage like this, looking for ways of reforming themselves. Then they become convinced that it is possible to change themselves, only just as before, there is nothing about the world that they find particularly attractive—rather it seems a very strange and unhealthy place to them, and that which does seem attractive, time after time, brings suffering. And the more they are convinced of this, the clearer becomes the necessity to look for a means of escaping beyond the limits of this world. And this is not running away, but a quest for fulfilment, which cannot be understood by those who do not have and never have had a similar necessity. In forming the aims of his quest he becomes conscious of a necessity, for the clearer and more precisely formulated the aim, the more the necessity that can satisfy efforts to achieve it. Although this expression is not quite accurate—necessity does not satisfy efforts, but the person who knows their own necessity fully invests in those efforts as much as he can.

Thus, attempting to formulate the aims of the search leads to

an awareness of one's true necessities, and awareness of necessity helps one to clarify one's aim and move towards it. This is the role of necessity in spiritual work. But there is another side to the story, and that is mystical work.

In mystical work, in interacting with the Ultimate, necessity sometimes becomes all but the most decisive factor. I would formulate this as a rule: upon the Path, God always responds to true necessity. Moreover, I am inclined to think that the same thing happens in normal life, too, however due to desires, vanity and their "dormant" state, people do not notice it unless help is revealed in a very obvious way. In mystical work, an emerging opportunity always *corresponds* to a present necessity.

And this is one factor we cannot ignore. For example, a prayer and the answer to it. The practice of praying is directed straight towards interacting with God—with His Presence—and being sincerely and resolutely fulfilled, always bears fruit. But again, corresponding to the present necessity of the person praying. And here the question always arises as to what the person is praying for. For what is really necessary to him, for what seems to him to be necessary, or for what he does not really need, but really wants? The answer to this question contains the mystery of why some prayers are heard and others are not. For those who have not engaged in the practice of self-awareness, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate the motives behind their own prayers in this way. And nevertheless, the possibility of receiving an answer to a prayer always also corresponds to the level of necessity in the person who makes it. And of course, the higher the necessity of the thing being prayed for, the greater the possibility for its being satisfied with an answer to the prayer.

Seekers often make the same mistake—they ask about the limit, ignoring their own necessity, which, if it is not satisfied at that moment, further progress is simply not possible. Of course, if your most pressing necessity is to gain knowledge of the Truth and

to experience oneness with Him, then there are no issues at all. But, generally speaking, this happens very rarely in reality. The path to where the necessity of God becomes the most pressing necessity for a person comes in satisfying and letting go of many more minor necessities. It is not every seeker that can define their most pressing necessity at a given moment, and that is why they follow a dream—in other words, they follow their lofty desires. For some reason, many feel that to ask God for anything less than enlightenment is shameful.

It is for this reason that any mystical work requires a guide—someone who can see what the pupil's most pressing necessity is right now, and what he should be focusing his attention on above all else. In both one-on-one and group work, the Master helps the seeker to put their efforts on the right track, to reveal their most pressing necessity and get to utilize the opportunities presented by its satisfaction. In group work, another feature of the “law of necessity” is revealed: if the most pressing necessity is different for everyone in the group, then no meaningful mystical work can happen, because the invisible wave that brings new opportunity, comes to all of them alone. Therefore, mystical work does not emerge in all groups by any means. Bringing the necessities of all the group's members into some sort of harmony can sometimes take quite a long time.

And so, some are born with to some extent a higher necessity, which is later revealed within themselves, simply by obviating the aims and motivations that are bound to society. There are many such people, though they represent a tiny proportion of the total number of people living on the Earth. You could say they are *summoned*, but that does not mean that they are *elected*, and that they will definitely set out upon the Path. That does not happen to everyone by any means. Suffice it to say that some of them end their lives in suicide, while others get into drug and alcohol dependence. Nevertheless, people also come to the Path by

different means—through desire, through exposure to the effects of the Light, propagated in the form of ideas, contained within the pupils of the spirit. Pupils are different, and the ideas that they propagate certainly do not always lead a person to the Upward Stream, but what we are interested in is those true, deeply perceived ideas that lead a person to seek the Path.

Ideas influence us at the level of the mind, clearly. If a person believes in an idea (and any pupil will first describe the situation with people in general, and then outlines their spiritual problem and suggests ways of solving it), then he will *want* to pursue it. This is how the *desire* comes about which starts pushing a person to put greater effort into his attempts to approach certain results, and to become someone befitting the demands of the teaching. At this point the person may become a follower, and may go further into the search, wanting to find out about other perspectives on the spiritual questions. He is then transformed into a seeker. Nevertheless, desire is desire. It lives according to its own rules—now intensifying, now fading out. It draws into the light one moment positive, another moment negative emotions and, over all, leads to suffering, exacerbating the sufferings that are already there. And the seeker's first vital necessity is normally an escape from suffering. But that is too trivial and can sometimes be satisfied in the simplest ways. One cannot talk of the necessity of God at such moments—there is none.

And necessity is partially shielded by desires, but one desire always has to compete with other desires. Therefore if a seeker has not been able to develop a necessity for the Ultimate within himself, then his efforts will be inconsequential, and other desires will begin to periodically take up all the available energy as they are brought to life. Furthermore, in this situation there is no point talking of any mystical aid that matches the necessity of the seeker.

Because can you increase your own personal necessity? It may

seem strange, but necessity is increased through the practice of awareness. That said, this is true of both situations, both where there is an innate affinity for the *other*, and where everything starts with desires, awareness becomes the key. In the first, acknowledging and accepting one's nature helps to do away with the idea of one's own "abnormality" and from that moment to begin seriously dealing with one's necessity for something Higher. The second has a chance of helping to raise one's own necessity, and the practice of awareness plays an all but central role in this.

To want to pursue an idea, one has to believe in it. By performing the recommended practices, one may gain an experience that will bring not blind faith but completely distinct knowledge. Knowledge either confirms or refutes the idea that everything started from, either strengthening the seeker or pushing him to continue his search in a different place. Personal experience is the best confirmation of the accuracy of a spiritual teaching, and as a result it serves as a basis for developing the necessity of God.

In practicing awareness, a person works with their desires, doing away with some of them altogether, and significantly weakening others. So a desire for spiritual transformation may become the main thing that seriously alters a person's internal situation. At some point one's vital necessity may be to resolve that desire, and in that case you might say of the seeker that lady luck has smiled on him. Then possibilities open up to the seeker for realizing their desires and it is important not to lose that moment. Also, working with one's desires leads one to an understanding of their meaninglessness, and this changes a person's attitude to the world. In losing the illusion, the seeker lets go of his worldly ties, and gradually comes to realize the necessity of something other, something not illusory, not transient, but absolute and eternal. So the person's necessity grows beyond the bounds of this world.

Necessity makes the world go round. The Spiritual Path is not

exclusive. When a pupil really needs a Master, he will come. This also works the other way around. Reality rests on interconnections, and necessity is capable of bringing many of them to actuality. And to those who have the necessity for God, He will open up in all his infinite greatness. Although, in order to receive this revelation, one must have the organs of perception of a higher level of development, compared to what people have in their ordinary state. But where there is necessity, possibility will also appear. The possibility of moving beyond the bounds of the ordinary, having touched the highest Truth and fully satisfied one's own pressing and, in the spiritual sense, only necessity.

## ON THE QUESTION OF FATE & DESTINY

Every seeker eventually arrives at the question of his own destiny, a question, which almost everybody formulates in the same way: “Why am I here?” Self-awareness and the process of internal awakening force a person to seriously ask themselves this question, because realization demands an aim, and in the external world an aim is always connected either to fate or to a destiny that must be fulfilled—this, anyhow, is how it is with mystics. They are always interested in how predetermined the process of Creation is itself and whether the fate of every individual human being is predetermined, or if there is still some freedom of the human will.

Atheists never have to face this question: for them, everything—including the origins of life on Earth—is a collection of accidents, in which we may nonetheless discover certain governing principles in the form of physical, chemical, biological and even societal laws. Atheists have no doubt as to their own free will. In all religions that have formulated their own morality and codes of recommended behavior, and that have a concept of sin, free will and free choice are automatically implied. On the other hand, there are mystical teachings and schools of philosophy that maintain that everything was predetermined from the start, from the

very first impulse that began Creation. That the big bang set in motion the start of the visible universe, and the moment it happened, the foundational laws were formed, by which that universe continues to exist, *all* the development in Creation was predetermined from the moment it began. Generally, there have always existed two extreme points of view on the question of predetermination—total freedom of choice or total predictability and the impossibility of changing anything at all. The theory of free choice has always appealed to the human ego—because of it, the ego has been able to consider itself far more important. It is unsurprising that with science's successes in knowledge of the physical world, the ego, too, has grown, and this is why atheism's time has now come, giving the world its bloodiest wars, with the largest number of victims. Science has helped this, too.

With free will, everything makes sense—there is no plan for Creation, nothing is predictable, there are only people's behavioral characteristics, borne hither and thither on the wind. With total predetermination, too, everything makes a kind of sense, although this notion does not sit well with the ordinary human mind. What does it mean to say that everything was predetermined from the start? Does it mean that we live with the illusion of choice, without actually having it, and that all our suffering is little more than the tears of a puppet in a shadow play? Free will makes man the master of his own destiny, while the theory of predetermination transforms him into its slave. Of course, people prefer to have the feeling of freedom, and this is why there are more religions in which people have choice—whether to sin or not—than those where the question of freedom is either bypassed with silence or completely denied. And yet there were saints who stated directly that everything in our lives is predetermined. This was what Ramana Maharshi said, for example.

For a long time, I myself was also inclined towards the notion that everything was predetermined. Of course, I was no saint, but

on the other hand I had had some experience in predicting the future. What it was, after around a couple of years after I began regularly performing the spiritual practices, I came to have a permanent *presentiment* of my own future, primarily concerning work on the self. I lived with this *presentiment* for many years; on top of that, there were other predictions relating to the future in general, as well as the futures of people I knew. And if you can predict the future—that must mean it is predetermined. So, in any case, at the time it seemed to me that none of my presentiments was deceiving me.

However, after I accepted the Will and began following it, my notions of the capacities of human choice suffered a serious blow. Then, for the first time, I encountered the Pattern, which has always been known about in the tradition of Naqshbandi. Known about in a certain sense, anyway, although all the available commentaries were extremely turbid, and talked about how, as they say, the Sufis intertwine their Pattern within the hearts of people. This explanation—and many others like it—is absolute drivel, albeit it poetic, meaningful drivel. There is a Reality and the Pattern is a part of it, but to figure this out requires a sufficient level of perception, which not everyone possesses. In his book, *Journeys with a Sufi Master*, H.B.M. Dervish talks about how Patterns are connected to the plane of Creation and how the plane of Creation is a *naqsh* —that essentially it is the Pattern. I will go into this in more detail in the following chapter, but for now we are talking about something different. In following the Will I came across a phenomenon that destroyed my complacent conviction in the predetermination of the future. It turns out that the Pattern can change, and that in the plane of Creation, different alternatives are predetermined, according to which events may develop differently, regardless whether they are internal or external, as both of these are closely connected.

In following the Will I discovered that my predictions and

visions of the future were no longer effective. I saw the direction I should be moving in and what I had to do, but after beginning to act, everything suddenly seemed to have changed and the whole thing was no longer relevant. To begin with, I attributed these pivots in the situation to the imperfection of my own perception.

That is, I decided that I had been mistaken, but over time this began to seem forced, and with the best will in the world I could not accept it. At that point the *changeability* of the Pattern was revealed to me, and how our future has several *alternative paths*. Idries Shah talks about this directly in *Journeys with a Sufi Master*, but reading a book is one thing—coming face to face with alterations in the image of the future in waking life and gaining this experience is quite another.

At this point it was incumbent upon me to reassess my attitude towards fate and the predetermination of human life. It emerged that Truth was to be found not somewhere nearby, but right in the middle—between assertions on freedom of the human will, and the fatalism of absolute predeterminism. It sounds a little strange, but it is true. To be exact, it's like this: at one moment, a person has free choice, while at another he has none.

Imagine you are a warrior in a Russian epic; you stand at a crossroads. There is a fork in front of you with three roads leading off it, each in its own direction. At the point when you have yet to make your choice, you still have that choice. As soon as you begin travelling along one of those roads, you are setting out upon the path that was predetermined, because the road has been paved up to a fixed point and there is no way to turn off it, at least not until a new fork or crossroads appears. While you are travelling along the road, your path is predetermined by it, and only at a new fork will you once again get free choice. The same thing happens in human life—at certain moments we have choice, and then for a time we reap the consequences and are unable to change anything. The short period in which we have the ability to make a choice gives

way to a far longer period where there is no choice. And it is not important whether you make the decision yourself or it is made for you (if, for example, you are completely unable to decide anything), but the moment when choice is possible is always short, while the path that begins after it has been made is much longer.

In other words, predetermination is clear and present in our lives, but it is discrete, which is to say, intermittent, and at every disjuncture we may alter the course of our fate. Or otherwise alter the circumstances of our life. Immediately after birth, a person has no choice at all, and cannot have any, because all the circumstances in which he grows up are preconditioned by the choices that have been made by his parents up to that time. His first serious choice comes when he leaves school, and he is then predetermined for the next several years of his life. Then other situations also emerge that demand a choice, and everyone makes their next decision based on their understanding of the situation, their current desires and their circumstances. It feels as though upbringing and the desires one acquires beforehand decide everything, but no, you cannot go along with this unequivocally.

Choice is really quite complex. Imagine that any decision you make will directly affect the lives or the fates of your loved ones. This is often the case, and at such times, for those who are in any way associated with you and depend on you, you become an instrument of fate—blind and merciless; or the opposite—loving and sympathetic. Our lives are permeated with connections like these, and sometimes choice turns into a real torture—when you need to either take your own path or take care of loved ones and put off resolving your own problems for an indefinite period of time. All seekers encounter choices like this, and taking that decision is never easy. Sometimes, by following notions of correct behavior, you can blow *all your chances*, ending up in the same rut that over time all so-called normal people end up in.

The story goes like this: people who do no work on themselves

eventually begin to repeat the same choices they have made before. To grossly oversimplify, you could say that they are eating the same food, smoking the same brand of cigarettes, rereading the same books and vibrating into the same egregors they have chosen once and for all. There are many causes coming together here, among them fear and conditioning occupy prime positions. This is how people begin walking around in circles where everything is predictable, though as a result to some extent it is safe, too. Striving for stability and security binds people into the very same branch of one's personal Pattern more than the heaviest chains.

Observing the Patterns of different people shows how purposeful work on oneself can lead to serious alterations in what is commonly referred to as fate, while without that, a person will end up sooner or later repeating the same old circle. This is a self-evident fact we may observe in most people we know of a certain age. People setting out on the Path, on the other hand, change their lives so much that their personal Pattern does not exactly alter, but moves on to a different Level of Being and even *finds its replacement*. This is one of the mystical secrets that are hard to explain, but it happens. As I shall be writing in more detail on Patterns in the following chapter, I shall not pause on this issue now.

Here is what I have observed: when I was a seeker starting out, but could already predict my own future, I normally knew how things would turn out for me in the coming two-three months. My *presentiment* of things to come did not continue over the long term. There were sometimes flashes in the style of the visions of Baba Vanga, of the distant future, but they meant very little to me. Foreseeing the future helped me keep my head above water—because working on the self did not come easily to me. It never let me down—and if any unpleasantness started, at least I had managed to prepare myself for it internally, to take courage and have patience. For a neurotic, which is what I was then, the ability to

prepare myself and accept what was to come was a great help in my inner work.

At the same time, knowing my future a couple of months ahead meant I could see a parting in the Path that was already predetermined by my last choice. And the fact that I could not see the future beyond two or three months totally stacked up with what I was able to change in my personal Pattern, which could be changed through the efforts I put into working on the self. This is the Truth: the personal Pattern changes in those who change themselves; those who walk upon the Path and dedicate their lives to Work. The Pattern changes at the point when a person transitions from the Downward to the Upward Stream—and how could he remain the same in that situation? Alterations also come with age—under the burden of years lived and experience gained, whatever that might be—but this change is originally enshrined in the laws of human existence, and it is laid down within the Pattern of every person—however senselessly and unconsciously a person has lived their life. On top of that, alterations come to all who try to change something in themselves—to learn something that will change his behavior, and later his life as a whole. In those who stagnate and gradually petrify, the Pattern cannot be changed, and their life flows on upon that well-trodden path. There is another side to this story. When I began following the Will, my future was no longer predictable. It seemed as though I could feel and see it all the more clearly, but in the end everything would turn out differently. The more actively I worked with people, circumstances and Patterns of a higher order, the more often my personal Pattern would change, and more recently the predictability of my future has been reduced almost to nothing. And this is another one of those paradoxes that abound on the mystic Path. Therefore, people who see in Surrender of the Will to God a perverse kind of slavery should not worry. Real slavery is when any person with an even slightly developed mental body can

predict your whole life, even indicating the exact date of your death.

The plane of Creation, also called the Pattern, carries with it a certain kind of predetermination in what people call their fate. However, this fate has alternative paths of development and even the possibility of escaping the limits of every alternative, to a Pattern on a different level. If we take a very close look at the concept of fate—almost through a microscope—we will discover something or other about every person, as well as our own personal fate. It will not be very great, rather the opposite, and the fates of millions and billions of people in all different corners of the world will differ very little in their essence. But if we look at the concept of fate from a slightly higher perspective, then most people simply *have no fate*. It is so common and impersonal that only a great writer like Lev Tolstoy could manage to make something captivating and bedazzling out of it. Everything is far simpler, cruder and more primitive in reality as we know it. People live, for the most part, to vibrate energy and constantly keep moving. Moving is provided by the energy of desires, and vibrations by the emotions and feelings that come with them. And the individual nuances of how this leads to suffering are in their essence almost indistinguishable. Therefore, you could say that many people have a common fate, and that this is what we speak of when people come together to overcome a common disaster, like the one that brought us World War II. Or later on perestroika.

There are those people who somehow influence the fate of the whole world, like the President of the USA, or even the president of Russia. But in fact they are merely unconscious conductors of forces from the Downward Stream, and the fact that their individual Pattern should coincide with the plane of Creation concerning the country that they are somehow the leader of, does not grant them a special fate—their lives simply take place in public view, and the consequences of their decisions concern not

only themselves but other people too. It is all a dream, as mystics have spoken of throughout time. No one would remember Pontius Pilate, were it not for Jesus Christ.

Of course, people exist with a clearly defined individual fate, somewhat distinct from the “common” fate of those around them. I have taken great pleasure on several occasions in seeing such people and I must say that there are very few of them among us. Why some share a “common” fate, while others have their own individual fate is the subject for a separate study, and I have no desire to debate that subject in this book. I am interested in the fate of the seeker, and it is this that I intend to examine in further detail.

Sooner or later, every seeker will ask themselves a question concerning their own fate and their destiny. The question of fate is tied to the desire to achieve one’s own aims and always comes down to “do I have it in me or not?” and “is my higher realization predetermined or am I wasting my time in vain?” There is not a single seeker who has not asked themselves these questions. And if the question of fate sometimes remains open until the very end, almost every seeker struggles with determining his own destiny *in this life*. Destiny is no idle concept, and how far a person can grasp and understand the essence of his own destiny, if he has one at all, depends on how fully his is able to realize himself both in life and in Work. Fate is a far more general concept, incorporating *everything* that happens or will happen to a person, while destiny only touches on why, figuratively speaking, God has created him and for what purpose he has sent him to this wicked earth. It is typical that anyone interested in their own destiny will always end up in one form or another working on knowledge of their essence and the search for Truth. It is also typical that people outside of the spiritual search, generally speaking, do not have any particular destiny, and for this reason they find their realization in some banality like carrying on the family name or treasure hunting.

It can happen that a person's fate gives him the opportunity to fulfil his own destiny. For example, a person reaches higher realization and becomes a Master—this is how his fate unfolds. And then as a Master and conductor of the Will he gives people a new spiritual teaching, a new expression of Truth—and in this he fulfils his destiny. It can also happen the other way around: when a person's destiny is completely determined, and can be fully realized only in the conditions of Work, but he is unable to make enough effort to succeed in that Work, and he remains not realized at all. I have also had occasion to see this.

In other words, fate and destiny are not strictly connected to one another. The way that fate unfolds depends on which particular manifestation of his personal Pattern a person chooses, while destiny may only be realized in certain conditions, which can only be brought about as the result of a completely determined choice and corresponding fate. That said, the seeker wants to find their destiny, because it makes his difficult path more meaningful and gives him stronger motivation to work on himself.

It can also happen that from a young age a person *senses and knows* about his destiny, but his fate does not unfold in the right way, or the force of the Downward Stream turns out to be higher than the force available to him, and for this reason he does not get to fulfil his role in life's main event, which in many cases is pure improvisation. Life really is a funny thing.

Nevertheless, many seekers manage to get to a realization of their destiny, but its full realization may become possible only after opening the Heart and after the Surrender of the Will. The complete realization of a person is, to all appearances, impossible without the involvement of the Creator, and in order for Him to be able to create, He needs a conductor on the plane of our physical reality. A person who has surrendered their Will may become such a conductor, and in this his life gains new meaning and a specific destiny. To become a conscious conductor of Will and in some

sense a contributor to Creation is not a bad destiny, although in the end it almost always takes on some specific form.

In Sufism there is a general position on the Sufi's destiny—it is service to God and people. Normally this service does not take social forms and does not spill over into inventing new kinds of benevolent activity. Service to God comes in following His Will, within the limits of one's power and comprehension, while service to people takes place in maintaining Knowledge and supporting the opportunity for those who really need it to receive it. Service is both a spiritual and mystical practice, and the essence of the life of any true Sufi. It fulfils, supports and leads the Sufi to the experience of ever newer aspects of Truth.

But individual destiny within this service is opened up to every seeker as he advances on the Path and undergoes that personal transformation, when he ceases to be a seeker and becomes a Sufi.

## PATTERNS

Thus, the plane of Creation is figuratively called the Pattern. I fully suspect that the word “pattern” had certain other meanings in the tradition of Naqshbandi, however, due to changes in the conditions of Work, many of them are no longer relevant. Although the poetic dispositions of fantasists can always come up with something and give an old word new meanings that have nothing to do with the reality. But I am going to talk about the meaning that originally existed and has never lost its relevance.

Given that Creation is the multilayered and highly complex work of God, this plane cannot be simple, and there are not merely one or two Patterns in existence. Every Level of Being has its own Patterns, and their interweaving is so subtle that it is beyond the understanding of our limited minds. On the other hand, it is not beyond our possible vision at the level of the fourth body, though we rarely see the Pattern itself in all its complexity. More often, we are able to perceive two or three of its lines, which appear to us in the form of possible variations in which an event in our or someone else’s life may develop. Figuratively speaking, these are *lines of fate*, or more precisely, its possible variations,

which are manifested in reality as a person starts to take decisions and implement choices. Or the opposite, to deviate from any choice, giving himself over to the will of “fate” and, as a rule, greatly worsening his own actual fate as a result. Anyone who declines to choose when a choice is needed becomes a so-called victim of circumstance, when a decision is taken for him by others, or otherwise he moves to a new segment of his personal Pattern, which deprives him of all possibilities, putting the current situation on hold for a substantial length of time. So, for example, a person has lost his job and not put in any effort to find a new one. The possibility of transition that emerges in the Pattern exists for a fixed time, and by throwing it away the person is *doomed* to remain in that position for a certain segment of time with no hope for any sort of improvement. This is what happens when you have both freedom of will and predetermination—inertia of the will causes you to end up in a circle where nothing at all can be changed, at least not for some time. It is individual for everyone, though no one has seriously studied this matter. However if you look back at the important segments in your life, or look at the lives of the people you know, then you may recall at least one instance where delaying on a decision led to totally forfeiting all other opportunities on a particular course. “Opportunity is precious, and time is a sword,” as the ancient Sufi wisdom goes. And although it refers to Work, it is entirely applicable to ordinary situations as well.

The above-mentioned inertia of the will is of course connected to fear, an unwillingness to exert oneself, or resistance to change, and in general to the necessity of living and doing anything at all. This is all very banal and obvious. As usual, opportunities of every order are missed. But there is a flip side to this. Often, people moved by strong desire try to change their lives, but all of their efforts are ultimately fruitless. They put in some kind of effort, they try, seek some opportunity but do not find it, and all their

efforts disappear like water into sand. This is where predeterminism comes in, which cannot be altered, because the person is trying to influence a segment of the Pattern where changes are not allowed for.

There is a further Sufi law: the greatest effect has the right impact at the right time. Knowing when it will be possible to affect one's personal Pattern or, in other words, knowing when the opportunity will arise, is a great blessing for a person seeking change. It is therefore of no little importance that this knowledge is necessary to the seeker. The seeker has the chance to receive concentrated knowledge on this thanks to his work on awareness and the Heart. Many seekers receive impulses of knowledge about what direction they ought to move in and what to do right now, and if they do not demonstrate inertia of the will, they may move to a new line of their personal Pattern. It is somewhat easier for those working under instruction, because they are more likely to recognize an emerging opportunity from their instructor, and after that they have only to follow his recommendations.

As we know, the universe is expanding, but Creation continues here and now, in that humanity is constantly creating, and on other Planes of Being different kinds of motion and change are taking place. Therefore Patterns change, they are plastic. And therefore a person may alter his fate, if he manages to apply the right effort into doing so. In any case, it is possible within the realms of spiritual or mystical work. A person working on themselves—meditating, being aware of their own suppressed energies and getting rid of them, on the one hand changes the frequency of their own vibrations and gradually shifts through the forces of the Upward Stream. On the other hand, he is constantly implementing external choices, enabling him to achieve his aims—that is, to change the form of his life, find work that will not get in the way of his exercises, and so on. In other words, he is always implementing a choice that increases his opportunity to move further

towards his cherished aims. By continuing to move, the seeker changes the frequency of his vibrations more and more, and soon becomes connected to the egregor that will enable his opportunities to vibrate energy to become greater still. At some point, with highly intensive inner work, a person may transition to a new line of the Pattern; even to that segment of it where the point of choice does not exist. This happens, for example, at the moment of enlightenment and generally at all moments of serious transformation.

In the mystical practices—for example, in intensive prayer—almost the same thing happens, only to begin with the increase in possibilities comes as a consequence of the believer interacting with the Divine Presence, and then later through an egregor. In mystical work that is carried out in groups—again, with sufficient intensity—opportunities arise that mean even the relatively low spiritual potential of some of its members extends to infinity. At least, while this work is being conducted. Incidentally, this is what people are trying to do who practice positive thinking and different kinds of Transurfing. They are attempting through intention and visualization to achieve some alteration in their fate and learn to “direct reality”. But here, again, without intensive, constant work, nothing meaningful can come of it. And intensive internal work is like spiritual work, though the intention—or the will of the magician—is a rather different thing.

Reality is permeated with connections from all different levels. And there are plenty of Patterns at each level. Changing the plane of Creation or any of the processes that take place on the Higher levels, can have a direct influence on the Pattern of all humanity, leading to an instantaneous change in everyone’s Pattern. This is what happens, for example, when great and minor wars begin. At these times, as Vladimir Visotsky sang, “there is no one, individual fate, all fates flow as one.”

Changing the Patterns is, of course, related to living nature.

The plane of Creation of the Physical Universe and the whole program of its development was put in place at the moment of the Big Bang, and then went on developing according to laws set down right from the beginning. If anything is changed then it is only within the system of laws by which the physical world exists. However, people, who are a part of the physical world but also have far more subtle bodies, are able to influence physical reality, both through the energy of concentration and affecting the mental plane of Reality. Furthermore, people have learned to destroy the physical world directly and immediately, without calling on the subtle energies, using only crude ones. In addition, in certain states people can influence the whole Pattern that affects the conditions of existence for the whole of humanity.

We have the plane of Creation that relates to the whole of humanity, in which the Patterns of each individual country are distinct. They are more lasting than *personal* Patterns, but the fate of each individual person is associated, in one way or another, with the Pattern of his country.

And elections—as means of changing governments—can certainly influence this Pattern, although serious change rarely comes through elections. Just as in the case of personal Patterns, a change in direction requires an intensity of energy that is all but absent from our elections. And yet intensity is one of the primary conditions for alteration and creating new opportunities within the Pattern.

In *Journeys with a Sufi Master*, the author talks about how Sufis have to intervene in a situation when the plane of Creation begins to distort. The book talks about the oblique influences that are produced on people's minds by means of certain ideas, which is to say the effect at the level of the mind. Inspired by these ideas, people begin to act in a different way (read: vibrate energy of a different quality), the situation corrects itself as a result, and the Pattern reaches the "correct" state. Idries Shah reminds us on

numerous occasions about this kind of work, but it all comes down to social activity and introducing new ideas into people's minds. In *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff also writes about this work in the example of missionaries sent from Above to train people and bring their state to a "norm" which, by virtue of various different circumstances, they have ceased to meet. So almost the same thing—an effect on the state of people which should have forced a change in their thinking, behavior, and partly their perception of the world, with the aim of bringing it into line with what is happening on the plane of Creation.

The reasons as to why this support for the Pattern is almost always necessary, and why it may generally be violated, are explained in different ways, or not explained at all. From my point of view, violating the Pattern is driven by an exertion of force, without which Creation could not be carried out at all. With no plus or minus, no different forms of polarity, like male and female, yin and yang, the movement of energy simply becomes impossible, and means that Creation will cease developing or existing. There is therefore a dynamic balance between the Upward and Downward Streams, between Darkness and Light. Distortion in the Pattern means a disproportionate increase or decrease in awareness among people. Unconsciousness leads to one kind of distortion on the plane, and a high level of awareness to another; this is something I have already discussed above. People are conductors of energy and in this way direct participants in Creation, albeit in most cases unconsciously. So what they conduct can seriously influence the development of subsequent events, leading to a completely different outcome on many levels of Reality—everything is interconnected, after all, and does not only affect us, and in fits of unconsciousness, we may influence certain Levels of Being connected to us. This is what is happening when the Pattern gets distorted.

There are people who come into the world to enable the plane

of Creation to be realized. They give people spiritual teachings, and describe the development of humanity for centuries to come. All the founders of the great religions are just such people. There are people who have the power to change the development of technology, and by virtue of their genius they advance humanity, also enabling the designs of the Creator to become a reality. These and others serve the Will, only they do so consciously, while others do so under the influence of some flash of inspiration, in other words, semi-unconsciously. There are breakthroughs in culture, which also bring about their own geniuses, who change the whole zeitgeist in a society and in this help make the Pattern real within our internal and external reality. And there are also mystical traditions and orders, which perhaps do not make great breakthroughs, but rather their function is in maintaining the balance of forces and maintaining the Pattern in an undistorted state. Distortion of the Pattern leads to the *death* of all its branches and trends, depriving anyone connected to those branches of many (and sometimes all) possibilities, down to the possibility of continuing existence in the physical body. As a result, entire peoples disappear from the Upward Stream and the whole picture of the world changes. Of course, changes are an integral part of Creation, but when the Pattern is distorted, they can lead to degeneration that later has to be compensated for by concentrated vibrations of energy by everyone still living, through surviving different kinds of catastrophes and taking part in bloody wars.

Maintaining the Pattern has been the job of mystics across all ages, and the Sufis do not have a monopoly on carrying out this work. Have you noticed how in times of crisis the Buddhists gather together and begin a special common prayer for peace, for example, lasting for several days? Some people leave, others arrive, but a vibration of energy of a particular kind continues around the clock—I once witnessed a similar event take place in Moscow. Performing a prayer like this is fully fledged mystical work,

directed towards re-establishing balance and maintaining the Pattern, although most of the people involved in it, fittingly, know only an abbreviated version of the truth regarding what it is being done for. And although the process has now become somewhat mechanical, it still adequately performs all its useful functions. In any case, any person involved in using it was a mystic, although Idries Shah would call them a Sufi, as for Idries Shah all true mystics were Sufis. But everyone has a right to their own opinion on this matter.

Work on maintaining the Pattern may be carried out only by a conscious conductor of the Will. Other people may also participate in the work, but their role would then amount to either following instructions or participating in an activity the true meaning of which they have no knowledge of. Without a person who has surrendered to the Will and who *perceives* distortion in the Pattern, it is impossible to do any useful work on it. There are magicians who can affect the course of events, and therefore the Pattern, via the mental plane, but this effect derives from egoistic purposes and stops extremely quickly. The part of the Pattern that relates to the world of people manifests on the mental plane, and for this reason a person with a developed mental body is capable of interacting with it directly. But it is better not to even approach the Pattern without the sanction of the Higher Will.

It must be said that the Pattern is not traced from one moment to the next in some kind of sequence. It is not a design that has been brought into Reality by some invisible artist working together with us. The Pattern is consecutively *stamped*. Imagine you put a stamp on a piece of paper. From this one-time instant action, you get an imprint that includes all the elements of the design of the stamp—characters, words, numbers and so on. It is the same with the Pattern—as though someone were putting a stamp on reality, on which all possible variations of the future were traced. Somebody's personal Pattern may be changed—when

a new stamp is applied, but for most, all transitions take place through changes in the Pattern *within* the design of the stamp, without going outside its limits. For some, one stamp is enough to go on living with that Pattern their whole lives, while for some dozens of changing Patterns will not suffice. It is therefore sometimes said of a person's spiritual potential that the higher it is, the higher the possibility of its being transferred from one design to another, which connects the seeker to other situations and circumstances of internal and external being. You could say that this is the whole essence of a person's spiritual potential.

Activity at a societal level is not the only possible way of maintaining the Pattern. Organizations and movements in which people will emit energy of the required quality last longer and in the sense of strategic impacts, perhaps, seem preferable, but there are other methods. There is the possibility of using energy for removing distortions in the Pattern that appear here and now, which might over time lead to highly regrettable consequences. This is not a strategy, but rather a tactic, but it also has a place in the work of maintaining the Pattern. Furthermore, prevention is better than a cure—this is common knowledge.

There are many ways of describing Reality. But they are only as valuable as they are able to help in the practical activity of those who use one particular variation of one of these descriptions. Of course, the situation with Patterns is more complicated than I am describing, but even the picture you have picked up from what you have read here may help you in the Work. Simply knowing that the Pattern exists and that there is the possibility of a change in the direction of its movement within that Pattern, it may help you make the right choice on your own future. Had I not known that this was possible, I would never have begun to write this chapter. Furthermore, the plane of Creation is a part of the Higher Reality, and it would not have been right to have said nothing about it. In recent years I have witnessed more than once how my own

personal Pattern has been altered, and I have also seen how it has changed for other people. It is possible and, more than that, it happens. And anyone who wants to change their fate must have patience, and attain the highest intensity of internal energy in their practices. And then anything is possible.

## THE PRACTICES

Attitudes differ on the necessity or value of different practices, but in all this one thing is absolutely clear—you cannot do without them altogether. The practices are dictated by the aim that the practitioner is pursuing, and are chosen on this basis. There are those that are called classics, for example *muraqabah*, *lataif* and *dhikr* in Sufism. These, you might say, are the foundational practices that are shown to any person intending to set out upon the Sufi Path. *Muraqabah* is pure meditation, being in the presence; *lataif* is working on the centers, and in particular it allows one to open the Heart; *dhikr* is at its core a mystical practice, though it also includes elements of contemplation and awareness. Prayer is mentioned very rarely in Sufism as a separate practice, inasmuch as it is part of the duty of any true believer. Because Sufism has now come out of the shadow of Islam to a certain extent, thanks to the efforts of Idries Shah, prayer has once again become important as an independent practice, enabling a connection to be built between God and man.

Every age has its own practices and, moreover, every Master has to invent his own practices that work here and now—at this

time and with these people. This is a truth few people understand—the techniques given by a Master work most effectively in his presence, in his field of Work. Therefore, for example, after the Master has departed, many of the practices given by him lose some of their force. The presence of a conductor of the Will has a huge impact on the effectiveness of the practices invented by them. Hence the mystery of why after the death of a Master whole trends of the Work simply shuts down and disappear. You need a living conductor in order for these trends to exist. Without him, several forms of Work that were in place during his lifetime will also go. Work cannot exist without someone to do it, and therefore without a conductor of the Will it takes on strange and unsustainable forms, when people vibrate energy and motivate themselves by words and examples from a past which is no longer there. Herein lies the true value of the Master, that which is impossible in his presence becomes possible, and the practices work a little differently. Energy from the awakened consciousness of a Master, and also the mystical aspect of how it works influences human reality in such a way that, sometimes, almost anything becomes possible.

It is hard to explain, but to believe the explanation is even harder: Osho Dynamic Meditation was twice as effective while he was alive than it is now. This also happened with the practices like Gurdjieff's Movements or *Beelzebub's Tales*. Without any mystical components, which can only be implemented by a Master, all these practices are transformed into methods of vibrating energy, with no obvious benefit to the seeker for themselves. Of course, by performing the practices every day a person can train and develop their own will, as well as building within themselves the *opportunity* for growth and the next steps toward bringing the aims of their search to life. But even a simple thing like showering with cold water affected the followers of Porfiry Ivanov differently when

he was alive. This is a great secret whose very existence followers of all types necessarily ignore. Their hearts would break if they were to suddenly understand that what they are following is only a means of maintaining the necessary egregor and the vibration of a particular kind of energy, but it is no good for anything else. Very often the death of a Master turns everything he discovered on the path into blind alleys. It is for this reason that those traditions are valued so highly where there is a continuation, where the work of the Master is not a lone activity, but works as part of a line of communication where the old core methods and practices remain, and a general understanding of the basis of the Path exists.

One could count the number of such traditions on the fingers of one hand, and in these postmodern times they may seem like an anachronism that is of no use to anyone. However, in that very chain of continuity it is possible to keep practices alive and avoid their being transformed over time into a useless and even harmful product. It is clear that the minds of people change as society changes, and for this reason the approach to working with them should also be changed. In this sense, old study materials might be an obstacle, or they might be an aid; and just as new wine may be poured into old wineskins, so within traditions Truth may be given new meaning and new expression, by using old symbols and language everyone already knows. And the old practices also then get used, if it is not their form but their essence that is followed, and they are adapted to people's current condition.

And the essence of all spiritual practices is simple—it is either working with concentration, or working with the energies of the body, including from the physical and the mental. Working with concentration enables growth in awareness and the overall *awakening* of the person. It has to begin with awareness and observation of the sensations of the physical body, as this is the basis of our existence in physical reality. In the body everything is reflected in one way or another, and without working on awareness of the

body it is impossible to get to a situation where you can remain constantly aware at any time of day or night. In fact, our physical body is the key to revealing and realizing all the other bodies, and it would be very foolish to ignore it. On the other hand, exercising only the physical body—tiring it out with yoga, diets and all different kinds of expurgatory exercises—is also not very smart. Balance is needed in everything, and the practice of awareness of the body will always be more useful than any physical burden, although you sometimes cannot do without them. Through the simple practice of awareness of the body one may reach everything—awareness of all the higher bodies, revealing the centers, acceptance of the Will. And yet this path is quite protracted, and this is why there are ancillary exercises to make it shorter. These are exercises in which a person works with energy from different levels, for example expressing suppressed emotions. Generally, all work with energies is connected to suppressed feelings or working through energy blocks in the different bodies; the exceptions are practices aimed at developing the mental body, as there are no suppressed feelings in it. The suppressed energies of emotions and desires become obstacles to revealing the Heart and block the function of conduction—one of the main functions of a human being. A person who suppresses their fear ultimately becomes a conductor of fear—and never a conductor of the Will. Working with suppressed energies is necessary—it enables the cleansing of all the bodies and an increased sensitivity of the person as a whole, and growth in awareness is also accelerated because of it.

Spiritual practices may also be performed without a Master, although their effectiveness is also increased if the practitioner has a connection to a field of Work that has been established by a Master. Nevertheless it is entirely possible to do it independently, and for most seekers now, to be honest, there is not much choice because today's "masters" prefer talking about Advaita and the concept of how our "I" is an illusion. Or other no less high-minded

things. No one talks about work—it is boring and difficult to sell. At the same time, no one except Christian preachers talks about God, because that is also boring. But Christian preachers have no need for seekers, they want more followers. So in a certain sense our seekers are languishing on their quests.

For the practice of awareness there is no need, essentially, for either Master or God. It is a journey within oneself, which may be undertaken alone. However practice demonstrates that it is quite difficult to take this path alone. The most difficult thing is to figure out those suppressed feelings and get to the root of one's own fear or desires—it is here that one may deceive oneself or spend a long time stuck. Therefore guidance or even just talking to someone who has gone further is desirable, though not necessary. Individuals may take their own paths and wind up somewhere one way or another. The path of awareness may absolutely be the individual's path. It is another thing if he wants to find his destiny and realization through Surrender (and there is no other realization, although in some traditions

Surrender is described differently), in which case he has to enter the common Path, which cannot be travelled alone. The lone path always implies a certain level of exclusivity on the part of seeker, and in these conditions there is a certain development of ego, so arriving at Surrender alone is always more difficult. Normally the individualist is his own God, however vehemently he may deny that in moments of weakness.

The Sufi tradition has no room for individualists. They do not want relationships and want to reserve the right to a certain choice, even if it is illusory. So they preserve their own egos and there is nothing more to add on this. As I have already written, mystics live not through relationships, but through a connection with God. It does happen that individualists gain this connection and live in it, but as a rule they are not capable of achieving that intensity of energy after which spiritual work transforms into

mystical work. There were saints who prayed around the clock, but there are almost none of those people left now. At least, I have not met any.

Without achieving a certain degree of intensity in one's internal energy, one cannot enter into mystical work. It just does not happen. Likewise it is not possible to get an answer, or else it will be a straightforward answer to a prayer that does not bring with it any new development or other opportunities.

Not everyone manages to get to the level of mystical work, including those who seek it and use different magical methods to do so. There are always fewer mystics than magicians, because it is quite easy to become a magician—you just have to really want it, to read a few books and start “bending” Reality. A magician wants to become ruler of the world, which is to say a minor God (or even a major one—in this everyone is different). Of course, magicians cannot do anything special—they are counteracted by the laws of our physical Reality, but they are fully capable of inflicting all kinds of unpleasantness upon themselves and other people. For some reason they rarely get to do anything but unpleasantness.

On the other hand, mystical work can sometimes provide opportunities to those who participate in it, which no magician could ever dream of. Here a further mystery is concealed—or a Truth that cannot be understood, without gaining the proper experience, although *finding out* about it is possible. Mystical practices deliver such possibility that the potential of each individual person taking part in the Work ceases to have any meaning, because at a certain point it becomes almost limitless. An impulse received from the Higher sphere performs all the Work with such force that the individual qualities of the people involved in it are lost, and all that remains is the aim that this practice is working towards. Mystical Work is practically impossible without a conductor of the Will, or better yet a Master. Not every conductor

of the Will becomes a Master, but every Master is a vehicle of the Will.

It is the Will that introduces an unpredictable and to some extent divine element to the activity of every Master, through whom the practices begin to work more effectively. The Will of God is what creates the world and gives it life, so it should come as no surprise that conductors of it possess certain powers in terms of transforming people. I have written about this quite a lot already, and it is not worth repeating myself here. It is all about the mystical aspect of Work. In recent times, with successes in technical progress and the spread of false teachings, the mystical aspect has come to be forgotten about. The Dalai Lama travels all over with his Buddhist teachings about the good, here in Russia our priests stress the importance of observing the moral principles; the whole history of modern seeking comes down to either morals or magic—in the form of positive thinking and using *intention*—or indeed to Avdaita, which confidently asserts that nothing matters. The mystical aspect of the search has been vulgarized in the extreme, and Pelevin, for instance is by no means the main culprit in this. Everything is simplified, hence the essence of everything gets lost. The consequences of seventy years of atheist propaganda are making themselves felt—nobody believes in anything, but everyone is afraid his neighbor will give him the evil eye.

To live by the mind is all good and proper in the outside world, and this bears bountiful fruit within that world. The inner world goes by different rules and a connection must be built between God and man. Or to put it another way, it must be uncovered and acknowledged by any person who wants to move beyond the bounds of the ordinary. Beyond the bounds of the self, beyond the bounds of one's own trivial concerns and similarly trivial desires. And if they seem big and important to you that just means the time of your meeting with God has not yet arrived. More likely, a

real search is not for you. Everything is fine for you as it is in the Downward Stream. Mystical practices are the basis of mystical Work, which plays an equally important role as the mystic path. I repeat: to understand this without the relevant experience is almost impossible. But that is not to say that people sitting underground can never talk about the sky. Perhaps as a result of this discussion they will get the desire to change something and try something new. Perhaps they will be tempted by new spaces and the possibilities that are hidden within them. All Masters do not live in hope; but with that sense of kinship that binds people together in difficult moments, and, knowing the Truth, Masters look not to the mind but to the Heart of a person who retains the memory of the true state of things and of man's true role in this world.

Mystical practices enable one to move beyond the bounds of the limitations placed upon man by his smallness, his weakness and the short duration of his life in the body. Mystical practices, as distinct from spiritual practices, always take the form that is most suited to the tasks before their practitioners. During the time that they are performed, mystical practices unite a person with God, and that is their principal value. Through them, not only is a connection brought about, but a *fusion* with the Creator, if only for a brief moment. This is how experience of the beyond works, which is almost impossible to acquire in any other way, at least not before the moment when you have passed through all stages of spiritual transformation.

Mystical Work means conscious collaboration with the Will, and it also rarely happens outside of a group. Mystical Work takes different forms, but one can only get to it after first mastering the mystical practices—there is no other way. This, in part, is what constitutes the mystic path—by mastering one set of practices after another, you rise up to a higher level of personal being, and at that point possibilities will open up to you that you had abso-

lutely no idea about, but which you are in fact prepared for thanks to the work you have already done. People who deny the value of the practices are either liars or fools. Finding practices that work and are suited to your condition is not always easy, but this is a different matter; the true seeker will always overcome this obstacle—he simply cannot allow himself to be lazy or stupid.

## EXPERIENCE

**P**ersonal experience lends a person knowledge of a subject in the same way as reading a book only gives him an idea about it. For this reason, person experience is always granted the greatest significance on the spiritual or mystic path. Nothing you have ever read can ever give you the same knowledge that comes from experience—this is an incontrovertible Truth of spiritual Work. By reading mystical texts multiple times, you will raise your level of understanding to new heights, it's true, but this can never compare to the level of understanding of someone who has gone through everything I have described in their own personal experience.

Personal experience on the spiritual Path may be true or false. Of course, one may call it false relatively speaking, because *thinking* about awareness is not awareness, but may be perceived by a person as the attainment of some new level of being. The mind may make several such substitutions in error, releasing its own imaginings into the true reality, and for this reason alone this experience should be called false in relation to real experience. Although, those who are aware of this self-deception and the traps the mind lays for the seeker, will gain a real and useful experience. But at the same time they will acquire the habit of differentiation,

through which they will be able to distinguish activity of the mind from the phenomena that come about through correctly performing the spiritual practices. Below I shall be writing mainly about true experience only.

Generally speaking, the first experience comes while performing the practices. Inasmuch as every practice has its own fairly specific effect—both immediate and remote—by trying out the latest practice, a person may *learn through experience*, how it works. It must be said that every spiritual practice without exception works on people in exactly the same way; the fact that it may take one person two months of performing a particular exercise to get a particular given result and another two years, is a different matter. That is the only difference.

By doing the practice for a long enough period of time, you will get to know its effects and begin to understand what you can and cannot achieve with its help. This is how you get experience, which is converted into knowledge. Every practice will give you new experience and new knowledge, which you will be able to share as you wish. Although most seekers all too often prefer to think of their experience as being true and other people's experience as false. This is how their distrust, jealousy and pride manifest themselves.

Experience of another level is connected to different kinds of transformations taking place. For example, when you consciously work through fear for the first time and feel liberated from it, this is the experience of a change in your internal situation, which will influence your being in one way or another. Passing through "death" at the different levels of your own being enriches you with valuable experience, which allows you to be unafraid of anything and enter into every new stage of Work calmly. Every transformation makes your experience more profound and you yourself stronger and more mature.

Further along the spiritual Path comes the experience of

growth in awareness, when after you reach a particular level, no effort is required to remain there. It is also a specific experience that bears a specific kind of knowledge. There is then the experience of revealing the centers, the experience of one's individual efforts and participation in group work... One gains the most varied experience on the spiritual Path.

On the mystic path, things are not so straightforward when it comes to experience. Firstly, interacting with God makes the whole process profoundly individual, which is also reflected in the experience one gains—everyone gets what they are ready for *right now*, and also what is closer to them in terms of the possibilities of their Pattern and their destiny. In other words, there is experience, too, of course, but it is harder to categorize, and even harder to determine its truth or falsity. This, perhaps, is something that only people who know some part of the Truth are capable of. Others may only guess at the madness or holiness of someone recounting some mystical experience of their own. Although sometimes madness and holiness go hand in hand. And therefore there is no point in engaging in mystical practices without preliminary preparation in the way of performing spiritual practices. Without the abilities of differentiation and awareness, one may get caught in the traps of the subtle world, compared to which the traps of the mind are like the playthings of preschool kids.

Secondly, things like transcendental experiences and mystical revelation are always there. As a rule, these cannot be explained and are therefore beyond critique. One may believe in descriptions of the next world or the seven heavens, or not believe in them; in fact this is all that we have to do. A number of religions have been based on revelations, but in most of them they have no value in practical work. Such experiences have a particular value for those who experience them, however if you remember in what conditions interaction with the Ultimate takes place (the degree of preparation and level of possibility), for everyone else the value of

the revelation received may be non-existent due to its lack of development.

In any case experience is the most important thing a person acquires as he travels along the Path. With experience, understanding grows and wisdom comes. And in line with this, without having experience, for example, of group work, a person will not have adequate knowledge of it. Such is the law of our being and there is nothing you can do about it. However we witness all too often how something can push a person internally to make a judgement on something in which they do not have the slightest experience. In these times of information overload and false narratives, this has become practically the norm.

The experience that we have acquired is the one thing we take from this life and does not disappear when we die. Metaphorically speaking, we gladden the Creator with the uniqueness of our experience and what beauty it possesses when we return to Him. Mystics live for and in the name of God, and gaining knowledge of Truth comes to be the most important experience that they bring with them to the Source. Their experience is both unique and, in its own way, invaluable—for those who seek the Path and the Truth. Although every seeker must take this Path themselves and gain their own no less invaluable and unique experience upon it. And this is also a law.

## BLOOD

The world turns on symbols. The mental plane also apparently influences all levels of our “ordinary” being, and it is therefore in symbols—to a certain extent—that our so-called familiar world is contained. Blood is one of the most important symbols, because everything rests on blood—from a person’s life to any pretensions to power by right of blood. Blood is a unique artefact, whose meaning the unconscious mind automatically follows for many people.

Blood has always had the most important meaning, because the issues of inheriting property and power play an important role here—at least as far as *inheritance* itself is concerned. Blood has always symbolized bonds, or more simply, a connection—it is this that enables unions to be created, which up to a certain time were almost unbreakable. Inheritance is closely connected to heritage, and in this the purity, or otherwise impurity, of blood is again valued as the highest indicator of *chosenness*. It has to be said that religions themselves elevated the status of blood and made it all-decisive, after all the tribes of Israel and affiliation with them immediately identified a person, gave meaning to their life, and

generally preordained their fate. So it was believed, at least, and so this story has been passed down throughout the ages.

It is a little strange to read of honorable people that their family has a blood connection, for example, to The Prophet; it seems that this idea is still meant to instill respect in those around and lend a certain added value to them. All of this has quite a limited scope, given there is a multitude of people who have no faith in the idea that The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, brought new Truth to this world. When it comes to blood, this immediately raises the question: before he was chosen, did The Prophet have some sort of special blood? And at this point I get the answer that yes, he belonged to the Quraysh tribe, who were bound in service to three hundred gods. In other words, The Prophet belonged to the clergy caste of the time. The right blood always guarantees *chosenness*.

In India, the question of blood was even more radical—they invented castes, from whose strict limits it was impossible to escape. If you are born a Shudra, you will die a Shudra—there is no way out and no way in—everything is determined by the blood you are given from birth. The rule of blood is an easy way to settle the problems that arise in society. In contemporary western society, the question of blood has all but vanished—in any case, common people now seemingly have an open path to join the elite, except those parts of society where formerly one would be accepted only by having pure aristocratic blood.

Inheritance exists, of course, and there is nothing you can do about that. The physical body is entirely conditioned by the combination of the parents' genes, while the emotional body and the mind also follow the same kind of transference. Temperament, speed and strength of reactions, all this is *inherited*, but it is not by this that a person is glorified in mysticism. The limitations given us by our parents may be overcome; temperament and reactions may be *changed*, if a person works upon himself. And the changes

whose possibility I am talking about here have nothing to do with training oneself as animals are trained in the circus. It is not about outward behavior, but rather the inner essence of a person, when inheritance is no longer able to exert any influence over him. It is this question—the question of surmounting insurmountable influence—that lies at the center of the spiritual quest and spiritual work.

Genetics predetermines the three bodies and partially sets the potential development of the fourth. And then that predetermination is also relative—combining different genes sometimes gives unexpected results. So it is clear why royal families only breed their offspring with each other—this sort of selection was meant to keep the blood pure, but quite often led to degeneration. In this case, inheritance was equated with fate, which could have been good or bad, but the main thing was its inescapability. Blood is equivalent to fate, and humanity has lived with this outlook for thousands of years. Blood ties have always been considered the strongest.

Blood ties were symbols of the connections that superseded any relationships between people who were not connected by blood. The laws of the clan, the family or the tribe, in which everyone would be connected by their common ancestors, is always the thing that people unite around. But the symbol of a connection and a true connection are not the same thing. The blood connection is a surrogate for the true connection that happens between people, sometimes in love, but more often in spiritual work. Blood ties are always both a form of defense and a form of slavery at the same time.

The fatalism that comes to us through inheritance is only partly inescapable. A lot may be done even with the body, by training it and feeding it properly; the emotions and one may work with the emotions and the mind to far greater effect. But to do this you have to understand that your inheritance is not a

sentence. Inheritance has no power over awareness or over those aspects of being that are opened up to a person according to his progression within the self. Inheritance is merely the basis on which a person may build something new or carry on going around in circles that he can then never get out of.

The seeker moves beyond his human limits—if, of course, he succeeds in approaching his goals. Predetermination by blood is for him more an obstacle than an aid. This is the Truth: the son of an alcoholic will not always become an alcoholic, and by no means will the son of a mystic always become a mystic. Here, inheritance is merely a selection of potentials that may be realized or may be lost. We are all able to escape the authority of our own genes or at least to limit their influence over us. This is an anti-scientific statement, but it becomes a reality on the mystic path. It is not easy to believe this, but here is another piece of Truth for you: a person walking the mystic path rids himself of all dependencies connected with inheritance. He cleanses himself and cleanses everything, including the illusion of a connection with family and the special *chosenness* by which this “connection” is normally built up. On the path to God, man loses the human and gains the divine. In gaining a connection to the Ultimate, a person must lose all other connections, and if we do not lie and do not rely on retaining the things that we like, then we may recognize this self-evident fact. Anyone who means to reach the limits of Being cannot allow themselves to become attached even to their own existence, let alone the affairs of his various relatives.

All too often, the question of blood becomes an obstacle at this point, and the basis for condemnation—thus they pointed to Jesus’s

family, saying that the son of a carpenter could not be a messiah. And the question immediately arises—who then can be a messiah? Muhammad, whose lot was to take The Prophet’s mission on himself, sought the answer to this question, though he

had no blood evidence, and indeed could not have. On the other hand, now everyone and his brother claims to be related to him and traces his genealogy directly back to The Prophet. And blood once more becomes the main issue of debate.

Degeneration can take many different forms. Imagine you do not have to make any effort in working on yourself, because you already have the “right” blood, and your father, let us say, is a veritable Sufi Sheikh. If that were so, you would certainly have a tough childhood in store for you, but you would not necessarily be able to take his place. Transferring power through blood brought many Sufi orders to the point of collapse. It is hard for me to talk about this, but every case of this kind of transference that I know of has led to a blind alley in many people’s work. In this case, inheritance serves as an example of how low one may fall when a mystical connection is substituted for a blood connection. These golden times of ours provide us with more and more such examples.

The nafs—as a manifestation of the animal part of every human being—could not get anywhere because now everyone has their gadgets and their electronic gizmos. The nafs has become something subtle, and its movement is now not so obvious, particularly as the mind finds an “adequate” explanation for everything that happens. Its primary principle is to deceive itself. Therefore the nafs of people with special blood is far superior to the nafs of common people.

I have no family. All my ancestors are buried in the ground and were peasants. And even if there had been someone different among them, I do not know about it. For better or worse, I do not consider myself to be connected to their fate. My blood is *mine alone*, and I have no intention of pushing accountability for my actions onto anyone else. And the question of blood is always a question of accountability. Or more precisely—unaccountability. Special blood will take away all your sins. Special blood is a symbol of a special *chosenness*.

Which takes us back to the start. Blood as a symbol will go on existing for some time to come. It is also a symbol of life, a symbol of love and a symbol for the existence of vampires. Blood, like everything in modern culture, has become a simulacrum of the symbol that has been used throughout history, but no one thinks of where it comes from. Because of this, actual blood may be spilled, and this be described in the news as a necessary sacrifice that could not have been avoided. And that any person is deserving of death who does not behave as they ought to.

In Reality, blood and blood ties have no meaning. There is also something called karma, but there is not a lot to it. Attachments and the sense of accountability to specific people, has nothing to do with what you are seeking on the mystic Path. One may confuse blood ties with the attachments that emerge in the process of long discussions with one's relatives, though this is not exactly rational. Anyone who understands this is capable of escaping the limits of his own causality. And also the limits of everything, including his own personal genotype, and all that it imposes on a person. Beyond the limits of blood, beyond the limitations of the body—all these limitations that shut a person off from the possibilities that are opened up to them on the Path to God.

## TIME

Time is plastic and changes depending on a person's state. The perception of time is profoundly subjective, and for this reason it may change at any second, both in terms of the quickening of its flow and extreme slowing down, which can sometimes be very hard to withstand. Time for mystics is different to time for so-called normal people. It is based on the difference in subjective perception of the stream of time, and perception generally.

If you wanted to formulate the essence of the phenomenon of time, then it would be that time indicates the speed of *destruction of our world*. The time of a human life is objective—it is the time it takes a person to grow old and die. As we count off every new year of our lives, we understand perfectly that we are approaching our inevitable end, when our time will draw to a close. Objectively, time does not heal anything, but it fixes the speed of a thing's annihilation, and that of any matter. This becomes most obvious when you recall the “heavy” elements of the periodic table—where half-life is the principal measure of their existence. Speed of decay is what the concept of time is most often applied to, although in the conventional understanding it pertains to the duration of a thing's

existence and the course of processes. Although all of this essentially comes down to the same thing.

And if external time is the time of the physical world's existence and has to a certain degree a constant value, the internal time of a person is almost always changeable. More accurately, it is the *sense* of time that is changeable, and the subjectivity of that perception has been numerously described by poets and writers. It must be said that speed also plays a central role in internal perception of time. For example, the speed of your mental responses. This is the paradox—the higher that speed, the more slowly time passes for you. As we know, time drags for children, whose internal reaction speed is very high. Over the years, the situation changes, and for adults time starts to rush by, because due to their suppressed feelings, their inclination towards inactivity and habitually avoiding the majority of possible reactions, they slide along the surface of their own inner world like pond-skaters, never plunging into the depths. And time also slides by, and the days tick by like seconds on a clock.

Mystics have a completely different sensation of time. It is like neither that of a child nor an adult. Mystics' time matches their not entirely ordinary perception of reality. Think of it this way; because of his open Heart, the mystic is connected to the Source, and also to a space that is sensed as an endless infinity. And if you manage to do this, then you will immediately become aware that in infinity there is no time and there cannot be. Time always relates to finite things. In fact it is merely the manifestation of one of the properties of matter that is connected to its non-eternity. And the mystic may plunge himself into a state where there is no time but, after returning, live again within time. It is a strange state, which you gradually get used to, but because of it you cannot take time in our physical world seriously.

When my Heart was opened, for six days I did not feel time at all. This experience was so unusual I thought I had lost my mind.

Day replaced night, the sun rose and set, there was movement happening around me; I went to work and spoke to people, imitating normality, but inside me there was no movement at all. It is quite difficult to properly describe it, but there was this sensation of a complete halt inside. And there was no sensation of time at all. An hour, two hours, two days—it was all the same and did not provoke any sort of sensation or feeling in me at all. Then the situation levelled out and once again I felt the passing of time, but this feeling was now very different to what I had had before.

Time belongs to the material world, and consciousness, for example, knows nothing of time, because it is eternal. Consciousness is our central magnet, which joins together all our various different bodies; it is like the Divine magnet of Creation that turns and holds together all worlds. The concept of time is familiar to the consciousness, but time itself cannot influence it in any way. And this is the paradox of our being—everything that can die, everything, essentially, that we can be in this life—must die. All that remains is the immortal, which, of course does not include the human. And for this reason, only the part of us that is mortal is subject to the effects of time, for time is death's chief messenger, the symbol for which is the clock, counting down the passing minutes of our lives. That the death of the subtle bodies is sometimes drawn out is a different matter—at this time, possibilities arise for contacting the dead, who tell us about our lives from the other side of the Light.

Mystics' time is compressed by the number of impressions and different impulses they receive in each unit of time. It is the same thing that distinguishes the awake from the sleeping—their contact with Reality is fuller and their perception sharper. The sleeping have contact with Reality through their dreams, which appear to them in the form of projections, wishes, hopes and different sorts of illusions. But in dreams, as we know, everything is fuzzy and indistinct, the motivations for and the essence of the

actions we undertake is not always clear, and in dreams time flows this way and that. For those who are awakened, the speed at which time flows changes and is binary—on the one hand, a day for them may take two or three, and on the other a week may fly by unnoticed. This is also a paradox, as with a lot of things connected to mystics in general. That long, drawn out sensation of time is connected, as I have already said, with a high density of impressions—mainly internal, but also external—that the mystic receives. This density is connected to the higher sensitivity and wider range of perception, which develops in the process of activating the centers, and growing awareness. And it happens that here and now time moves quite slowly, fitting a large number of internal events into small intervals. And the lack of expectations or attachments allows them not to cling to that sensation of time, and because of this, there is in the perception of most intervals of time—for example, “last week”—the feeling that it has passed rather quickly, even though a lot has happened in it. It is quite complicated to describe this paradoxical mode of perception in an accessible way, because the higher the realization of the mystic, the more complex his being and the more forks in Reality he lives at. States become available to him where time completely ceases to have any function and seems not to be there—through submersion in the Heart or entering into full Consciousness, and he must at the same time return to the world in which time plays an essential function—albeit by taking opportunities that appear in Work. This status is also what gives rise to the mystics’ unusual outlook, and their less than serious attitude towards our physical reality—after all, for a mystic it is far from being the only one.

The lives of many mystics are examples of great working capacity. Osho, for example, memorized six hundred books, and indeed others did not just sit there with their arms folded. Partly, this productivity in work is connected to how mystics do not waste their time and energy on the nonsense that people normally waste

their time on. Partly, time for mystics has certain mystical properties anyway, and sometimes flows in a slightly different way, enabling them to not only receive more impressions, but also to perform more activities within a fixed unit of time. It is almost impossible to comprehend this, but one may have a lived experience of it. Nevertheless, it is the kind of mystery before which I stop and fall silent, as it is impossible to talk any further of it, due to the limitations of language and the possibilities of communication. Life at the intersection of different levels of Reality is mysterious and, between us, almost everyone will encounter this, because whether they want to or not, even in their ordinary, undeveloped state, they still live on several of its levels. Almost everyone will encounter the mystical phenomena of Being if only once or twice in their lifetime. But most people either ignore these phenomena and quickly forget about or try not to think of them, or give them a significance that they do not objectively have. Both of these serve to hold onto their dreams, hopes and wishes. And also to not think of how all the time in your life is being wasted in vain.

## THE PATH OF THE MYSTIC

**T**he mind lives on comparisons and conceptualizations—such is its path. First it selects ideas, and then it judges the state of the world on the basis of them—this is the normal functioning of what mystics call the conditioning of a person's reactions. Coming up with a conceptualization of the Path is an intrinsic part of the mind of a seeker—even if he believes that no such Path actually exists. Those who seek enlightenment or Truth involuntarily absorb a number of contradictory conceptualizations of the Path, whether they want to or not. Hence, for example, the eightfold Path outlined by the Buddha. Its stages are spelled out perfectly clearly—right view, right aspiration, right action and various other things that are right. A definition of what is meant by “right” in each case is also spelled out clearly and concisely. At the same time, there is no guarantee that you will be able to pass along this Path, and how much time it will take you to do so. The human mind does not like such uncertainty, and so it begins to look for further guarantees in examples from the lives of holy people, or at least from fellow travelers who have progressed upon this path. The mind seeks *certainty*, and this is something that is absent on the mystic Path. Then it begins creating *prostheses* in the

hope of introducing the illusion of certainty into the situation, and these prostheses are played by conceptualizations of how things will be (or should be), plus a belief in the rightness of the chosen path.

Masters have, to a certain extent, to artificially come up with a description of their own Path, outlining certain stages on it. The Sufis, for example, have in their description of the Path a series of “stations”, each of which represents a particular step or stage where the seeker will find themselves at a given time. The stations are not described or interpreted the same way in different orders, but that is not the point. With this description, the seeker is given a map of the Path, which soothes the heart and mind. Inasmuch as the mind is involved in carrying out the work, albeit outside of the mind, the possibility of his falling into a state of anxiety can severely constrain the seeker’s progress. That said, the sequential description of the stations, which often appears in literature dedicated to Sufism, is a simplification, because it is not uncommon for a person to pass two stations at the same time. Any map is to a certain degree conditional, and its value is absolute only to those who have learned the map but have not taken the Path.

Along with conceptualizations of the Path, any seeker will also have a conception of his own aims—and you also will not get anywhere with this at first. Normally it is an image that is based on actually existing prototypes, like Christ, George Gurdjieff, Seraphim of Sarov and other remarkable figures. The same problem arises—the inevitable idealization of the image, dragging with it those features bestowed upon it which real people do not have. What happens next is the seeker wants and hopes to acquire those qualities he does not particularly need, and which are not in fact attainable. And pupils contrive to project their dreams and desires onto living Masters, while all the best things hang upon the dead ones, as on the Christmas tree at the Kremlin.

Do you know which of the mystics has the most memoirs

written about him? Gurdjieff. There have been several dozen published on him. And this number of memoirs can be explained quite easily—in these memoirs, people are trying to unpick the mystery that the Master posed, and which he himself cultivated and maintained in all possible ways. And yet, what can we learn about Gurdjieff from these memoirs? Almost nothing. Descriptions of events and activities that the author was present at; most memoirs consist of a description of the impression that Gurdjieff left on people. And so reading the description of one impression, you gain a different impression, *as though it were your own*, and on that you construct a conception of the thing you need to arrive at. And you end up with distortion squared. So you gain the illusion that you know who Gurdjieff was and who you should become. And both of these are absolute drivel.

The example I have alluded to above concerns all mystics and seekers without exception. The mind always prolongs the illusion if you let it, but a real mystic is always hard to *grasp* and understand. The mystic eludes your perception, because yours is not developed, and because it is hard for you to understand the motives for the actions he takes, and his behavior in general. All mystics who come to operate in the world make mistakes, many are inclined to exaggerations and mystifications that are easily discovered and not readily explicable from a common-sense perspective. There are as many examples of this as you like. Pupils and researchers try to find explanations for this from a common-sense perspective, but this is worthless here.

The fact is that the Path is predictable only where it concerns work with the ego and the three lower bodies of a person, in other words, where it relates to spiritual work. In this, everything goes according to plan, and everything is subject to the laws of logic. But just as the centers and the mental body begin to reveal themselves and the level of awareness grows, the linearity and predictability of the processes breaks down. There are many

factors at play here, and one can only talk of them in general terms, because the *minutiae* are in each case different. As I have written above, by working on himself, the seeker changes the frequency of energy that he is “vibrating”. For this reason, he moves to the influence of the Upward Stream of Creation. But the Downward Stream does not really like to let go of people, all the more so as they have within them a mystical component called Darkness. And every seeker that begins to move towards the Light, always encounters some opposition from Darkness. This opposition may take many different forms, but as a rule, it is normally close family and friends, or lovers, who become its conductors, suddenly turning on the seeker, demanding that he immediately give up everything he is doing and do something real. That is to say, to pay attention to his loved ones and generally to change his behavior. This is a very typical reaction, and when it happens, it means the movement towards the Light has already begun. And here it is hard to explain the sudden interest of one’s loved ones in what one is doing as anything other than a reaction of opposition, because before then they could spend years paying no attention (at all) to one’s “whims”. Opposition can take many different forms and miracles can happen that it is impossible to believe in until you seem them with your own eyes.

Owing to this opposition, the Darkness has in all ages come to be the chief enemy of most mystics. Actually, at a certain point on the Path, the opposition between internal and external Darkness and Light becomes the main focus of what is happening. Yet if a person’s sixth center is activated, he will begin to perceive Darkness and Light absolutely clearly, as forces that *objectively* exist. This is how warriors of the Light appear, and mystics cannot be blamed for this, when after all their Path—to the Upward Stream—is also the Path to the Light. But sooner or later, every mystic comes to understand that Darkness and Light are merely elements in the grand scheme of Creation, and he then ceases to attach

himself to the Light, escaping the limits of this beautiful though fearful duality.

Strictly speaking, a person may only call themselves a mystic or Sufi after he has accepted the Will and begun to follow it. It can be that someone may be called a mystic whose Heart has been opened, given that he has a conscious connection to the Source. The rest remain seekers, pupils and so on, until they have gone through the processes of opening the Heart and accepting the Will. Only after this does their life become fully the life of a mystic, which is to say, only then does it lose its predictability.

All conceptions of the mystic Path that a person may hold within their mind are rather primitive and will never match its true reality. This is determined by two factors: distortions that come about both in expression—when experience is translated into words—and in perception—when the person listening has no corresponding experience to correctly comprehend what has been said. Distortion in communication and perception is the primary factor that enables completely inaccurate conceptualizations of the Path to be created. The second is when a seeker bases their conception on the example of *another person*. Another person—no matter how accomplished he is—is still not you. And your journey will never repeat the path of someone who has gone before.

This is the greatest mystery and the greatest beauty—every person's Path to God is unique. Just as the qualities that appear and flourish within a person on the Path are unique. Our journey does not end after Surrender, on the contrary, in some sense it has only just begun. No matter what different people say about the blessing of enlightenment to lure people tired of suffering; from the perspective of higher realization, this blessing is a very minor, almost meaningless thing. There is no place in the search, or on the Path, for those seeking respite and contentment, indeed they will never get to it. The Upward Stream is entered by overcoming oneself, and this task is not easily done. Serving God and people

and realizing one's own destiny are also not simple exercises. It is not for nothing that many mystics are perceived as supermen, when after all this is precisely what they become on the Path to God.

It must be said that the Will of God, which the mystic follows, sometimes comes across as being irrational, in the same way that human desires are. It can lead him to paths one would scarcely want to take. In this there is always a higher providence, but sometimes this is known only to God, and it is often not possible for a person to see the Pattern as a whole. However, the mystic must follow the Will and follow it to the best of his strength and intelligence, though his actions may strongly differ from people's expectations and other conventionalities. This is how stories of the outlandish behavior of holy people, and the eccentricities of mystics, come about. Although, of course, one cannot do without this uniqueness, which appears in both thought and action, and generally in the features of their higher realization.

Following the Will is an individual and to a certain degree intimate thing, because the connection to God and interaction with Him concerns all aspects of a mystic's life. A mystic cannot say—now I am serving God and fulfilling the Will, and now I am living for myself—that does not happen. The mystic is always in service and preparing for it. His life is a sacrifice, and the Path is full of mysteries. And this is not a metaphor—after Surrender, all sorts of miracles begin to happen which are difficult to adequately describe, and all but impossible to adequately comprehend. The point is that continuing on the Path after Surrender leads the mystic to new heights, both in his personal being, and in the possibilities of his service. But the territory he is heading into has so far not been described to anyone, in that his Path is unique. There are certain things someone may have encountered before, but many, many things the mystic will go through are new, and may be the first and last time in the whole of human history. In the process of

conducting the Will, he gains new experience, new powers and new abilities and continues to grow in his understanding of and insight into Truth. The mystic's opportunities for growth at a certain point become unlimited and his mystic potential boundless. Although of course in reality all this is limited by the duration of his life in the physical body.

It is due to the uniqueness of each mystic's journey on the Path that so many different descriptions exist, as they are taken from their experience. Hence the confusion in the heads of those who read a lot. Sooner or later all readers arrive at a simplified understanding of the Path and, perhaps, begin their Path, which is bound to contradict all their pre-conceptions regardless. Reality is infinite, and God does not like to repeat Himself, and He has no interest in playing the same game over again, simply changing the figure on the board. This is why the games are always different, and life is very varied. And it is also why both life and the Path are so beautiful. Although to those looking for certainty and predictability, and who wish to keep everything under control, it does not seem that way. But this book is not for them. It is for those who are ready to risk everything and lose it all, in exchange for gaining the highest form of realization, which is only possible in this world, as this is the only way to become a mystic in the true sense of the word.

## CONCLUSION

**E**very age has its own expression of Truth. Only a hundred years ago, to talk of energies that a person conducts would have been impossible, because the necessary level of understanding on the question of energy was lacking even in the sciences, to say nothing of those outside scientific circles. A century ago, almost half the population of Russia could not read or write. And this is why in different ages the Truth has been set down in language people would at least somehow be able to understand. This language has been simplified as much as possible in all ages, because to speak in complex language about complex things means failing your listeners and readers. So Truth has been passed down from one age to the next, but people tend to attach themselves to what is sanctified by the ages, and cling to long-outdated expressions of Truth. In so doing, they forget altogether that mystics do not start talking out loud about their experience to introduce a new philosophy or gather a cadre of followers, but so that born seekers may more quickly and easily find their own Path and take it.

All mystics, whether they are writing about God and the world order or spiritual practices, target those who are still asleep but are

now ready to wake up. It is just that some talk about the causes of sleep and dreaming, while others talk about ways of waking up. A sizeable amount of works dedicated to these topics has also been created by Sufi mystics over the millennia. Many of them have become dated, but many remain relevant to this day. Poems, parables and treatises dedicated to the human ego and the problems of the spiritual quest in principle cannot age, because man remains essentially as he was before, regardless of scientific and technological progress.

Nevertheless, the human world has now become far more complex than it was even a century ago. As a result, people are now able to perceive far more complex ideas and more complex Truth, which furthermore may be explained at a completely new level compared to before. We must not forget that for the modern mind, previous methods of simplifying communication of Truth have now become too primitive, and thereby obviously false and unconvincing. Because a gap forms between the accepted symbols for describing higher states then, and the subjects that come up in the modern age, and furthermore even ordinary language is constantly changing, not to mention the language of mystical expression, which has to be adapted to the times and to the people.

As far as I can see, the time has come to give contemporary descriptions of the mystic Path, along with the laws and principles of spiritual work. I have not complicated it especially, but I have tried also not to simplify it, as far as that is possible in laying out such subtle matters. One of the main aims I have followed in writing this book has been to show the complexity of man's makeup, the complexity and multiplicity of connections that permeate Reality, and also how simple answers to complex questions can sometimes do more harm than good. Although with simple answers a person may gain an opportunity to act and to move towards an understanding of far more complex things.

Nevertheless, due to the excess of simplifications our spiritual life is now in a very sorry state, while spiritual seekers get into all kinds of garbage and cannot escape the vicious cycle of false formulas for salvation.

It is now possible to describe all the processes in man's existence in terms of energy interactions, as I have done. This description is far closer to the Truth. In that knowledge of Truth is the process of endlessly elaborating existent and non-existent causes, there is of course a lot that could be added to what I have written. Perhaps I will do this at a later date, and perhaps someone else will take this on. In any case, the expression of Truth should be updated according to the requirements of people and the demands of time. So it has been and so it shall be.

Mysticism is the science of exploring the hidden sides of Being, both human and general. In contrast with ordinary science, its main research tool is human beings themselves. To a certain extent, they become both the target of mysticism—in the sense of undergoing a spiritual transformation—and the means, because simply by immersing oneself within, one may develop one's own powers of perception and conducting energy. In exploring oneself and journeying within oneself, one's main tool is concentration, while in exploring Higher Reality, the human being as a whole, with all its centers and bodies, is transformed into a tool, through which knowledge of Truth is made possible.

And strangely enough, the reality of God comes to be known much more fully on the inside, than on the outside. To know God from the outside—if you do not have a developed sense of perception—is only possible by inventing him, or projecting one's own desires onto the outside world. All accidents or manifestations of interactions of a far lower order are ascribed to God. On the other hand, atheists call the manifestations of Presence that sometimes occur within their lives accidents to make everything okay.

True knowledge cannot be gained from any book, for a book

either gives you an *explanation* of an experience you have already had, or points you in the direction in which that experience may be sought. The book you have in front of you contains examples of both. Other than that, a good mystical book may increase the level of your understanding, again through properly explaining what you have already felt, sensed and experienced, but were unable to connect together.

True knowledge comes only with personal experience—the experience of passing through the stages of transformation, the experience of opening the Heart and discovering connections to the Source. Then faith becomes unnecessary, as there is personal, hard won knowledge, and there is nothing dearer in this world. But you may only find out if it is true or not by entering the Path and travelling at least halfway along it. Though each step will bring personal discoveries, and even if they are in line with what I have written, they will still be *your* discoveries, and it will still be *your* connection to God, and *you* that He is answering. Every discovery of Truth happens anew, and every seeker comes to their experience of it as though he were the first to discover it. Such is the allure of the search, and such is the reward upon the Path, that at a certain point you become a pioneer of everything, including Truth. And though the limits to experiencing Truth are the same in all mystics, no matter the school or the movement they belong to, the experience itself is always fresh and incredible. Such is the Lord's game, and it has the same beauty and perfection that is inherent in all of His Creation.