

A Book of Saints

Comparative Religion



Selected and Edited by

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Meditation in a Toolshed

C. S. Lewis

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.

But this is only a very simple example of the difference between looking at and looking along. A young man meets a girl. The whole world looks different when he sees her. Her voice reminds him of something he has been trying to remember all his life, and ten minutes casual chat with her is more precious than all the favours that all other women in the world could grant. He is, as they say, “in love”. Now comes a scientist and describes this young man’s experience from the outside. For him it is all an affair of the young man’s genes and a recognised biological stimulus. That is the difference between looking *along* the sexual impulse and looking *at* it.

When you have got into the habit of making this distinction you will find examples of it all day long. The mathematician sits thinking, and to him it seems that he is contemplating timeless and spaceless truths about quantity. But the cerebral physiologist, if he could look inside the mathematician’s head, would find nothing timeless and spaceless there—only tiny movements in the grey matter. The savage dances in ecstasy at midnight before Nyonga and feels with every muscle that his dance is helping to bring the new green crops and the spring rain and the babies. The anthropologist, observing that savage, records that he is performing a fertility ritual of the type so-and-so. The girl cries over her broken doll and feels that she has lost a real friend; the psychologist says that her nascent maternal instinct has been temporarily lavished on a bit of shaped and coloured wax.

As soon as you have grasped this simple distinction, it raises a question. You get one experience of a thing when you look along it and another when you look at it. Which is the 'true' or 'valid' experience? Which tells you most about the thing? And you can hardly ask that question without noticing that for the last fifty years or so everyone has been taking the answer for granted. It has been assumed without discussion that if you want the true account of religion you must go, not to religious people, but to anthropologists; that if you want the true account of sexual love you must go, not to lovers, but to psychologists; that if you want to understand some 'ideology' (such as medieval chivalry or the nineteenth-century idea of a 'gentleman'), you must listen not to those who lived inside it, but to sociologists.

The people who look *at* things have had it all their own way; the people who look *along* things have simply been brow-beaten. It has even come to be taken for granted that the external account of a thing somehow refutes or 'debunks' the account given from inside. 'All these moral ideals which look so transcendental and beautiful from inside', says the wiseacre, 'are really only a mass of biological instincts and inherited taboos.' And no one plays the game the other way round by replying. 'If you will only step inside, the things that look to you like instincts and taboos will suddenly reveal their real and transcendental nature.'

That, in fact, is the whole basis of the specifically 'modern' type of thought. And is it not, you will ask, a very sensible basis? For, after all, we are often deceived by things from the inside. For example, the girl who looks so wonderful while we're in love, may really be a very plain, stupid, and disagreeable person. The savage's dance to Nyonga does not really cause the crops to grow. Having been so often deceived by looking along, are we not well advised to trust only to looking at?—in fact to discount all these inside experiences?

Well, no. There are two fatal objections to discounting them *all*. And the first is this. You discount them in order to think more accurately. But you can't think at all—and therefore, of course, can't think accurately—if you have nothing to think *about*. A physiologist, for example, can study pain and find out that it 'is' (whatever *is* means) such and such neural events. But the word *pain* would have no meaning for him unless he had 'been inside' by actually suffering. If he had never looked *along* pain he simply

wouldn't know what he was looking *at*. The very subject for his inquiries from outside exists for him only because he has, at least once, been inside.

This case is not likely to occur, because every man has felt pain. But it is perfectly easy to go on all your life giving explanations of religion, love, morality, honour, and the like, without having been inside any of them. And if you do that, you are simply playing with counters. You go on explaining a thing without knowing what it is. That is why a great deal of contemporary thought is, strictly speaking, thought about nothing—all the apparatus of thought busily working in a vacuum.

The other objection is this: let us go back to the toolshed. I might have discounted what I saw when looking along the beam (i.e., the leaves moving and the sun) on the ground that it was 'really only a strip of dusty light in a dark shed'. That is, I might have set up as 'true' my 'side vision' of the beam. But then that side vision is itself an instance of the activity we call seeing. And this new instance could also be looked at from outside. I could allow a scientist to tell me that what seemed to be a beam of light in a shed was 'really only an agitation of my own optic nerves'. And that would be just as good (or as bad) a bit of debunking as the previous one. The picture of the beam in the toolshed would now have to be discounted just as the previous picture of the trees and the sun had been discounted. And then, where are you?

In other words, you can step outside one experience only by stepping inside another. Therefore, if all inside experiences are misleading, we are always misled. The cerebral physiologist may say, if he chooses, that the mathematician's thought is 'only' tiny physical movements of the grey matter. But then what about the cerebral physiologist's own thought at that very moment? A second physiologist, looking at it, could pronounce it also to be only tiny physical movements in the first physiologist's skull. Where is the rot to end?

The answer is that we must never allow the rot to begin. We must, on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking *at* is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking *along*. One must look both *along* and *at* everything. In particular cases we shall find reason for regarding the one or the other vision as inferior. Thus the inside vision of rational thinking must be truer than the outside vision which sees only movements of the grey matter; for if the outside vision

were the correct one all thought (including this thought itself) would be valueless, and this is self-contradictory. You cannot have a proof that no proofs matter. On the other hand, the inside vision of the savage's dance to Nyonga may be found deceptive because we find reason to believe that crops and babies are not really affected by it. In fact, we must take each case on its merits. But we must start with no prejudice for or against either kind of looking. We do not know in advance whether the lover or the psychologist is giving the more correct account of love, or whether both accounts are equally correct in different ways, or whether both are equally wrong. We just have to find out. But the period of brow-beating has got to end.

From God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics

Paths That Lead to the Same Summit: Some Observations on Comparative Religion

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

“There is no Natural Religion.... As all men are alike (though infinitely various), so all Religions, as all similars, have one source.” —William Blake

“There is but one salvation for all mankind, and that is the life of God in the soul.”
—William Law

The constant increase of contacts between ourselves, who for the purposes of the present essay may be assumed to be Christians, and other peoples who belong to the great non-Christian majority has made it more than ever before an urgent necessity for us to understand the faiths by which they live. Such an understanding is at the same time intrinsically to be desired and indispensable for the solution by agreement of the economic and political problems by which the peoples of the world are at present more divided than united. We cannot establish human relationships with other peoples if we are convinced of our own superiority or superior wisdom, and only want to convert them to our way of thinking. The modern Christian who thinks of the world as his parish is faced with the painful necessity of becoming himself a citizen of the world; he is invited to participate in a symposium and a *convivium*; not to preside—for there is Another who presides unseen—but as one of many guests.

It is no longer only for the professed missionary that a study of other religions than his own is required. This very essay, for example, is based upon an address given to a large group of schoolteachers in a series entitled “How to Teach about Other Peoples,” sponsored by the New York School Board and the East and West Association. It has, too, been proposed that in all the schools and universities of the postwar world stress should be laid on the teaching of the basic principles of the great world religions as a means of promoting international understanding and developing a concept of world citizenship.

The question next arises, By whom can such teaching be properly given? It will be self-evident that no one can have understood, and so be qualified to teach, a religion, who is opposed to all religion; this will rule out the rationalist and scientific humanist, and ultimately all those whose conception of religion is not theological, but merely

ethical. The obvious ideal would be for the great religions to be taught only by those who confess them; but this is an ideal that could only be realized, for the present, in our larger universities. It has been proposed to establish a school of this kind at Oxford.

As things are, a teaching about other than Christian faiths is mainly given in theological seminaries and missionary colleges by men who believe that Christianity is the only true faith, who approve of foreign missions, and who wish to prepare the missionary for his work. Under these conditions, the study of comparative religion necessarily assumes a character quite different from that of other disciplines; it cannot but be biased. It is obvious that if we are to teach at all it should be our intention to communicate only truth: but where a teaching takes for granted that the subject matter to be dealt with is intrinsically of inferior significance, and the subject is taught, not *con amore*, but only to instruct the future schoolmaster in the problems that he will have to cope with, one cannot but suspect that at least a part of the truth will be suppressed, if not intentionally, at least unknowingly.

If comparative religion is to be taught as other sciences are taught, the teacher must surely have recognized that his own religion is only one of those that are to be “compared”; he may not expound any “pet theories” of his own, but is to present the truth without bias, to the extent that it lies in his power. In other words, it will be “necessary to recognize that those institutions which are based on the same premises, let us say the supernatural, must be considered together, our own amongst the rest,” whereas “today, whether it is a question of imperialism, or of race prejudice, or of a comparison between Christianity and paganism, we are still preoccupied with the uniqueness ... of our own institutions and achievements, our own civilization.”¹ One cannot but ask whether the Christian whose conviction is ineradicable that his is the only true faith can conscientiously permit himself to expound another religion, knowing that he cannot do so honestly.

We are, then, in proposing to teach about other peoples, faced with the problem of tolerance. The word is not a pretty one; to tolerate is to put up with, endure, or suffer the existence of what are or appear to be other ways of thinking than our own; and it is neither very pleasant merely “to put up with” our neighbors and fellow guests, nor very

¹ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 1934, p. 5.

pleasant to feel that one's own deepest institutions and beliefs are being patiently "endured." Moreover, if the Western world is actually more tolerant today than it was some centuries ago, or has been since the fall of Rome, it is largely because men are no longer sure that there is any truth of which we can be certain, and are inclined to the "democratic" belief that one man's opinion is as good as another's, especially in the fields of politics, art, and religion. Tolerance, then, is a merely negative virtue, demanding no sacrifice of spiritual pride and involving no abrogation of our sense of superiority; it can be commended only in so far as it means that we shall refrain from hating or persecuting others who differ or seem to differ from ourselves in habit or belief. Tolerance still allows us to pity those who differ from ourselves, and are consequently to be pitied!

Tolerance, carried further, implies indifference, and becomes intolerable. Our proposal is not that we should tolerate heresies, but rather come to some agreement about the truth. Our proposition is that the proper objective of an education in comparative religion should be to enable the pupil to discuss with other believers the validity of particular doctrines, leaving the problem of the truth or falsity, superiority or inferiority, of whole bodies of doctrine in abeyance until we have had at least an opportunity to know in what respects they really differ from one another, and whether in essentials or in accidentals. We take it for granted, of course, that they will inevitably differ accidentally, since "nothing can be known except in the mode of the knower." One must at least have been taught to recognize equivalent symbols, e.g., rose and lotus (*Rosa Mundi* and *Padmāvati*); that Soma is the "bread and water of life"; or that the Maker of all things is by no means accidentally, but necessarily a "carpenter" wherever the material of which the world is made is *hylic*. The proposed objective has this further and immediate advantage, that it is not in conflict with even the most rigid Christian orthodoxy; it has never been denied that some truths are embodied in the pagan beliefs, and even St. Thomas Aquinas was ready and willing to find in the works of the pagan philosophers "extrinsic and probable proofs" of the truths of Christianity. He was, indeed, acquainted only with the ancients and with the Jews and some Arabians; but there is no reason why the modern Christian, if his mental equipment is adequate, should not learn to recognize or be delighted to find in, let us say, Vedāntic, Sūfī, Taoist, or American Indian

formulations extrinsic and probable proofs of the truth as he knows it. It is more than probable, indeed, that his contacts with other believers will be of very great advantage to the Christian student in his exegesis and understanding of Christian doctrine; for though himself a believer, this is in spite of the nominalist intellectual environment in which he was born and bred, and by which he cannot but be to some degree affected; while the Oriental (to whom the miracles attributed to Christ present no problem) is still a realist, born and bred in a realistic environment, and is therefore in a position to approach Plato or St. John, Dante or Meister Eckhart more simply and directly than the Western scholar who cannot but have been affected to some extent by the doubts and difficulties that force themselves upon those whose education and environment have been for the greater part profane.

Such a procedure as we have suggested provides us immediately with a basis for a common understanding and for cooperation. What we have in view is an ultimate “reunion of the churches” in a far wider sense than that in which this expression is commonly employed: the substitution of active alliances—let us say of Christianity and Hinduism or Islam, on the basis of commonly recognized first principles, and with a view to an effective co-operation in the application of these principles to the contingent fields of art (manufacture) and prudence—for what is at present nothing better than a civil war between the members of one human family, children of one and the same God, “whom,” as Philo said, “*with one accord* all Greeks and Barbarians acknowledge together.”² It is with reference to this statement that Professor Goodenough remarks that, “So far as I can see Philo was telling the simple truth about paganism as he saw it, not as Christian propaganda has ever since misrepresented it.”

It need not be concealed that such alliances will necessarily involve an abandonment of all missionary enterprises such as they are now; interdenominational conferences will take the place of those proselytizing expeditions of which the only permanent result is the secularization and destruction of existing cultures and the pulling up of individuals by their roots. *You* have already reached the point at which culture and religion, utility and meaning, have been divorced and can be considered apart, but this is

² Philo Judaeus, *De specialibus legibus* II, 65; E. R. Goodenough, *Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 1940, pp. 105, 108.

not true of those peoples whom you propose to convert, whose religion and culture *are one and the same thing* and none of the functions of whose life are necessarily profane or unprincipled. If ever you should succeed in persuading the Hindus that their revealed scriptures are valid only “as literature,” you will have reduced them to the level of your own college men who read the Bible, if at all, only as literature. Christianity in India, as Sister Nivedita (Patrick Geddes’ distinguished pupil, and author of *The Web of Indian Life*) once remarked, “carries drunkenness in its wake”³—for if you teach a man that what he has thought right is wrong, he will be apt to think that what he has thought wrong is right.

We are all alike in need of repentance and conversion, a “change of mind” and a “turning round”: not, however, from one *form* of belief to another, but from unbelief to belief. There can be no more vicious kind of tolerance than to approach another man, to tell him that “We are both serving the same God, you in your way and I in His!” The “compassing of sea and land to make one proselyte” can be carried on as an institution only for so long as our ignorance of other peoples’ faiths persists. The subsidizing of educational or medical services accessory to the primary purpose of conversion is a form of simony and an infringement of the instruction, “Heal the sick . . . provide neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey . . . [but go] forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.” Wherever you go, it must be not as masters or superiors but as guests, or as we might say nowadays, “exchange professors”; you must not return to betray the confidences of your hosts by any libel. Your vocation must be purged of any notion of a “civilizing mission”; for what you think of as “the white man’s burden” here is a matter of “white shadows in the South Seas” there. Your “Christian” civilization is ending in disaster—and you are bold enough to offer it to others! Realize that, as Professor Plumer has said, “the surest way to betray our Chinese allies is to sell, give or lend-lease them our [American] standard of living,”⁴ and that the hardest task you could undertake for the present and immediate future is to convince the Orient that the civilization of Europe is in any sense a Christian civilization, or that there really are reasonable, just, and tolerable Europeans amongst the “barbarians” of whom the Orient

³ *Lambs among Wolves*, 1903. See also my “Christian Missions in India” in *Essays in National Idealism* (1909).

⁴ J. M. Plumer, “China’s High Standard of Living”, *Asia and the Americas*, February, 1944.

lives in terror.

The word “heresy” means choice, the having opinions of one’s own, and thinking what we *like* to think: we can only grasp its real meaning today, when “thinking for oneself” is so highly recommended (with the proviso that the thinking must be “100 per cent”), if we realize that the modern equivalent of heresy is “treason.” The one outstanding, and perhaps the only, real heresy of modern Christianity in the eyes of other believers is its claim to exclusive truth; for this is treason against Him who “never left himself without a witness,” and can only be paralleled by Peter’s denial of Christ; and whoever says to his pagan friends that “the light that is in you is darkness,” in offending these is offending the Father of lights. In view of St. Ambrose’s well-known gloss on I Corinthians 12:3, “all that is true, *by whomsoever it has been said*, is from the Holy Ghost” (a dictum endorsed by St. Thomas Aquinas), you may be asked, “On what grounds do you propose to distinguish between your own ‘revealed’ religion and our ‘natural’ religion, for which, in fact, we also claim a supernatural origin?” You may find this question hard to answer.

The claim to an exclusive validity is by no means calculated to make for the survival of Christianity in a world prepared to prove all things. On the contrary, it may weaken enormously its prestige in relation to other traditions in which a very different attitude prevails, and which are under no necessity of engaging in any polemic. As a great German theologian has said, “human culture [*Menschheitsbildung*] is a unitary whole, and its separate cultures are the dialects of one and the same language of the spirit.”⁵ The quarrel of Christianity with other religions seems to an Oriental as much a tactical error in the conflict of ideal with sensate motivations as it would have been for the Allies to turn against the Chinese on the battlefield. Nor will he participate in such a quarrel; much rather he will say, what I have often said to Christian friends, “Even if you are not on our side, we are on yours.” The converse attitude is rarely expressed; but twice in my life I have met a Roman Catholic who could freely admit that for a Hindu to become a professing Christian was not essential to salvation. Yet, could we believe it, the Truth or Justice with which we are all alike and unconditionally concerned is like the Round Table

⁵ Alfred Jeremias, *Altorientalische Geisteskultur*, Vorwort. “A long metaphysical chain runs throughout the world and connects all races” (Johannes Sauter, in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, Berlin, October, 1934).

to which “al the worlde crysten and hethen repayren” to eat of one and the same bread and drink the same wine, and at which “all are equal, the high and the low.” A very learned Roman Catholic friend of mine, in correspondence, speaks of Srī Rāmākṛishna as “another Christ . . . Christ’s own self.”

Let us now, for a moment, consider the points of view that have been expressed by the ancients and other non-Christians when they speak of religions other than their own. We have already quoted Philo. Plutarch, first with bitter irony disposing of the Greek euhemerists “who spread atheism all over the world by obliterating the Gods of our belief and turning them all alike into the names of generals, admirals and kings,” and of the Greeks who could no longer distinguish Apollo (the intelligible Sun) from Helios (the sensible sun), goes on to say: “Nor do we speak of the ‘different Gods’ of different peoples, or of the Gods as ‘Barbarian’ and ‘Greek,’ but as common to all, though differently named by different peoples, so that for the One Reason (*Logos*) that orders all these things, and the One Providence that oversees them, and for the minor powers [i.e., gods, angels] that are appointed to care for all things, there have arisen among different peoples different epithets and services, according to their different manners and customs.”⁶ Apuleius recognizes that the Egyptian Isis (our Mother Nature and Madonna, *Natura Naturans*, *Creatrix*, *Deus*) “is adored throughout the world in diverse manners, in variable customs and by many names.”⁷

The Muslim Emperor of India, Jahāngīr, writing of his friend and teacher, the Hindu hermit Jadrūp, says that “his Vedānta is the same as our Tasawwuf”:⁸ and, in fact, Northern India abounds in a type of religious literature in which it is often difficult, if not

⁶ Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 67 (*Moralia*, 377). So William Law, in continuation of the citation above, “There is not one [salvation] for the Jew, another for the Christian, and a third for the heathen. No, God is one, human nature is one, and the way to it is one; and that is, the desire of the soul turned to God.” Actually, this refers to “the baptism of desire”, or “of the Spirit” (as distinguished from baptism by water, which involves an actual membership in the Christian community), and only modifies the Christian dogma *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. The real problem is that of the proper meaning of the words “Catholic Church”; we say that this should mean, not any one religion as such, but the community, or universe of experience, of all those who love God. As William Law says also: “The chief hurt of a sect is this, that it takes itself to be necessary to the truth, whereas the truth is only then found when it is known to be of no sect but as free and universal as the goodness of God and as common to all names and nations as the air and light of this world.”

⁷ Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, XI, 5.

⁸ *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (Memoirs of Jahangir), in the version by Rogers and Beveridge, 1905, p. 356.

impossible, to distinguish Muslim from Hindu factors. The indifference of religious forms is indeed, as Professor Nicholson remarks, “a cardinal Sūfī doctrine.” So we find Ibn al-‘Arabī saying:

My heart is capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a
convent for Christian monks,
And idol-temple and the pilgrim’s Ka‘ba [Mecca], and the tables of the
Torah and the book of the Koran;
I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take; my religion
and my faith is the true religion.⁹

That is to say that you and I, whose religions are distinguishable, can each of us say that “mine is the true religion,” *and* to one another that “yours is the true religion”—whether or not either or both of us be truly religious depending not upon the form of our religion but upon ourselves and on grace. So, too, Shams-i-Tabriz:

If the notion of my Beloved is to be found in an idol-temple,
‘Twere mortal sin to circumscribe the Ka‘ba!
The Ka‘ba is but a church if there His trace be lost:
My Ka‘ba is whatever “church” in which His trace is found!¹⁰

Similarly in Hinduism; the Tamil poet-saint Tāyumānavar, for example, says in a hymn to Shiva:

Thou didst fittingly ... inspire as Teacher millions of religions.
Thou didst in each religion, while it like the rest showed in splendid
fullness of treatises, disputations, sciences, [make] each its tenet to be
the truth, the final goal.¹¹

The *Bhaktakalpadruma* of Pratāpa Simha maintains that “every man should, as far as in him lieth, help the reading of the Scriptures, whether those of his own church or those of

⁹ R. A. Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam*, 1914, p. 105. Similarly, “If he [the follower of any particular religion] understood the saying of Junayd, ‘The color of the water is the color of the jar containing it,’ he would not interfere with the beliefs of others, but would perceive God in every form and in every belief” (Ibn al-Arabi, Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 1921, p. 159). And “Henceforth I knew that there were not many gods of human worship, but one God only, who was polyonymous and polymorphous, being figured and named according to the variety of the outward conditions of things” (Sir George Birdwood, *Sva*, 1915, p. 28).

¹⁰ R. A. Nicholson, *Diwani Shams-i-Tabriz*, 1989, p. 238, cf. 221.

¹¹ Sir P. Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations*, Columbo, 1937, p. 201.

another.”¹²

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* (VII, 21) Śrī Krishna proclaims: “If any lover whatsoever seeks with faith to worship any form [of God] whatever, it is I who am the founder of his faith,” and (IV, 11), “However men approach Me, even do I reward them, for the path men take from every side is Mine.”

We have the word of Christ himself that he came to call, not the just, but sinners (Matthew 9:13). What can we make out of that, but that, as St. Justin said, “God is the Word of whom the whole human race are partakers, and those who lived according to Reason are Christians even though accounted atheists ... Socrates and Heracleitus, and of the barbarians Abraham and many others.” So, too, Meister Eckhart, greatest of the Christian mystics, speaks of Plato (whom the Muslim Jīlī saw in a vision, “filling the world with light”) as “that great priest,” and as having “found the way ere ever Christ was born.” Was St. Augustine wrong when he affirmed that “the very thing that is now called the Christian religion was not wanting amongst the ancients from the beginning of the human race, until Christ came in the flesh, after which the true religion, which already existed, began to be called ‘Christian’”? Had he not retracted these brave words, the bloodstained history of Christianity might have been otherwise written!

We have come to think of religion more as a set of rules of conduct than as a doctrine about God; less as a doctrine about what we should *be*, than one of what we ought to *do*; and because there is necessarily an element of contingency in every application of principles to particular cases, we have come to believe that theory differs as practice must. This confusion of necessary means with transcendent ends (as if the vision of God could be earned by works) has had unfortunate results for Christianity, both at home and abroad. The more the Church has devoted herself to “social service,” the more her influence has declined; an age that regards monasticism as an almost immoral retreat is itself unarmed. It is mainly because religion has been offered to modern men in nauseatingly sentimental terms (“Be good, sweet child,” etc.), and no longer as an intellectual challenge, that so many have been revolted, thinking that *that* “is all there is to” religion. Such an emphasis on ethics (and, incidentally, forgetfulness that Christian doctrine has as much to do with art, i.e. manufacture, making, what and how, as

¹² Translation by Sir George Grierson, *JRAS*, 1908, p. 347.

it has to do with behavior) plays into the skeptic's hands; for the desirability and convenience of the social virtues is such and so evident that it is felt that if that *is* all that religion means, why bring in a God to sanction forms of conduct of which no one denies the propriety? Why indeed?¹³ At the same time this excessive emphasis upon the moral, and neglect of the intellectual virtues (which last alone, in orthodox Christian teaching, are held to survive our dissolution) invite the retorts of the rationalists who maintain that religion has never been anything but a means of drugging the lower classes and keeping them quiet.

Against all that, the severe intellectual discipline that any serious study of Eastern, or even "primitive," religion and philosophy demands can serve as a useful corrective. The task of co-operation in the field of comparative religion is one that demands the highest possible qualifications; if we cannot give our best to the task, it would be safer not to undertake it. The time is fast coming when it will be as necessary for the man who is to be called "educated" to know either Arabic, Sanskrit, or Chinese as it is now for him to read Latin, Greek, or Hebrew. And this, above all, in the case of those who are to teach about other peoples' faiths; for existing translations are often in many different ways inadequate, and if we are to know whether or not it is true that all believing men have hitherto worshiped and still worship one and the same God, whether by his English, Latin, Arabic, Chinese, or Navajo names, one must have searched the scriptures of the world—never forgetting that *sine desiderio mens non intelligit*.

Nor may we undertake these activities of instruction with ulterior motives: as in all other educational activities, so here the teacher's effort must be directed to the interest and advantage of the pupil himself, not that he may do good, but that he may be good. The dictum that "charity begins at home" is by no means necessarily a cynicism: it rather takes for granted that to do good is only possible when we are good, and that if we are good we shall do good, whether by action or inaction, speech or silence. It is sound Christian doctrine that a man must first have known and loved himself, his inner man, before he loves his neighbor.

¹³ The answer can be given in the words of Christopher Dawson: "For when once morality is deprived of its religious and metaphysical foundations, it inevitably becomes subordinated to lower ends." As he also says, the need for a restoration of the ethics of vocation has become the central problem of society—"vocation" being that station of life to which it has pleased God to call us, and not the "job" to which our own ambitions drive.

It is, then, the pupil who comes first in our conception of the teaching of comparative religion. He will be astounded by the effect upon his understanding of Christian doctrine that can be induced by the recognition of similar doctrines stated in another language and by means of what are to him strange or even grotesque figures of thought. In the following of the *vestigia pedis*, the soul “in hot pursuit of her quarry, Christ,” he will recognize an idiom of the language of the spirit that has come down to us from the hunting cultures of the Stone Age; a cannibal philosophy in that of the Eucharist and the Soma sacrifice; and the doctrine of the “seven rays” of the intelligible Sun in that of the Seven Gifts of the Spirit and in the “seven eyes” of the Apocalyptic Lamb and of Cuchulainn. He may find himself far less inclined than he is now to recoil from Christ’s harder sayings, or those of St. Paul on the “sundering of soul from spirit.” If he balks at the command to hate, not merely his earthly relatives, but “yea, and his own soul also,” and prefers the milder wording of the Authorized Version, where “life” replaces “soul,” or if he would like to interpret in a merely ethical sense the command to “deny himself,” although the word that is rendered by “deny” means “utterly reject”; if he now begins to realize that the “soul” is of the dust that returns to the dust when the spirit returns to God who gave it, and that equally for Hebrew and Arabic theologians this “soul” (*nefesh*, *nafs*) imports that carnal “individuality” of which the Christian mystics are thinking when they say that “the soul must put itself to death”; or that our existence (distinguishing *esse* from *essentia*, γένεσις from οὐσία, *bhū* from *as*) is a crime; and if he correlates all these ideas with the Islamic and Indian exhortation to “die before you die” and with St. Paul’s “I live, yet *not* I,” then he may be less inclined to read into Christian doctrine any promise of eternal life for any “soul” that has been concreated with the body—and better equipped to show that the spiritualists’ “proofs” of the survival of human personality, however valid, have no religious bearings whatever.

The mind of the democratic student to whom the very name of the concept of a “divine right” may be unintelligible is likely to be roughly awakened if he ever realizes that, as Professor Buckler often reminds us, the very notion of a *kingdom* of God on earth “depends for its revelation on the inner meaning of eastern kingship,” for he may have forgotten in his righteous detestation of all dictatorships, that the classical definition of “tyranny” is that of “a king ruling in his own interests.”

Nor is this a one-sided transaction; it would not be easy to exaggerate the alteration that can be brought about in the Hindu's or Buddhist's estimate of Christianity when the opportunity is given him to come into closer contact with the quality of thought that led Vincent of Beauvais to speak of Christ's "ferocity" and Dante to marvel at "the multitude of teeth with which this Love bites."

"Some contemplate one Name, and some another? Which of these is the best? All are eminent clues to the transcendent, immortal, unembodied Brahma: these Names are to be contemplated, lauded, and at last denied. For by them one rises higher and higher in these worlds; but where all comes to its end, there he attains to the Unity of the Person" (*Maitri Upanishad*). Whoever knows this text, but nothing of Western technique, will assuredly be moved by a sympathetic understanding when he learns that the Christian also follows a *via affirmativa* and a *via remotionis*! Whoever has been taught a doctrine of "liberation from the pairs of opposites" (past and future, pleasure and pain, etc., the Symplegades of "folklore") will be stirred by Nicholas of Cusa's description of the wall of Paradise wherein God dwells as "built of contradictories," and by Dante's of what lies beyond this wall as "not in space, nor hath it poles," but "where every where and every when is focused." We all need to realize, with Xenophon, that "when God is our teacher, we come to think alike."

For there are as many of these Hindus and Buddhists whose knowledge of Christianity and of the greatest Christian writers is virtually nil, as there are Christians, equally learned, whose real knowledge of any other religion but their own is virtually nil, because they have never imagined what it might be to *live* these other faiths. Just as there can be no real knowledge of a language if we have never even imaginatively participated in the activities to which the language refers, so there can be no real knowledge of any "life" that one has not in some measure lived. The greatest of modern Indian saints [Sri Ramakrishna] actually practiced Christian and Islamic disciplines, that is, worshiped Christ and Allah, and found that all led to the same goal: he could speak from experience of the equal validity of all these "ways," and feel the same respect for each, while still preferring for himself the one to which his whole being was naturally attuned by nativity, temperament, and training. What a loss it would have been to his countrymen and to the world, and even to Christianity, if he had "become a Christian"! There are many paths

that lead to the summit of one and the same mountain; their differences will be the more apparent the lower down we are, but they vanish at the peak; each will naturally take the one that starts from the point at which he finds himself; he who goes round about the mountain looking for another is not climbing. Never let us approach another believer to ask him to become “one of *us*,” but approach him with respect as one who is already “one of *His*,” who *is*, and from whose invariable beauty all contingent being depends!

From *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*

In Quest of God

Swami Ramdas (1884-1963)

To those who always remain absorbed in My meditation, to those ever harmonious, I bring full peace and security.

Bhagavad Gita, 9:22

It was about two years ago that Ram first kindled in the heart of His humble slave, Ramdas, a keen desire to realise His Infinite Love. To strive to approach and understand Ram is to recede from the world of vanishing forms, because Ram is the only Truth—the only Reality. Ram is a subtle and mysterious power that pervades and sustains the whole universe. Birthless and deathless is He. He is present in all things and in all creatures who only appear as separate entities, due to their ever-changing forms. To wake up from this illusion of forms is to realise at once the Unity or Love of Ram.

Love of Ram means Love of all beings, all creatures, all things in this world; because Ram is in all and all is in Ram, and Ram is all in all. To realise this Great Truth we who, through ignorance, feel as separate individuals, should submit ourselves to the will and working of that Infinite Power—that Infinite Love: Ram, who is one and all-pervading. By a complete surrender to the will of Ram, we lose consciousness of the body, which keeps us aloof from Him, and find ourselves in a state of complete identification and union with Ram, who is in us and everywhere around us. In this condition, hatred, which means consciousness of diversity, ceases, and Love, consciousness of Unity, is realised. This Divine Love can be attained by humbling ourselves to such a degree as to totally subdue our egoism, our self-assertion as a separate individual existence. Having reached this stage we, by the awakened consciousness of Unity or Love, are naturally prompted to sacrifice all the interests that concern the body for the welfare of our fellow men and fellow creatures, who are all manifestations of the same Ram.

Struggle and Initiation

For nearly a year, Ramdas struggled on in a world full of cares, anxieties, and pains. It was a period of terrible stress and restlessness—all of his own making. In this utterly helpless condition, full of misery, “Where is relief? Where is rest?” was the heart’s cry of Ramdas. The cry was heard, and from the Great Void came the voice “Despair not! Trust Me and thou shalt be free!”—and this was the voice of Ram. These encouraging words of Ram proved like a plank thrown towards a man struggling for very life in the stormy waves of a raging sea. The great assurance soothed the aching heart of helpless Ramdas, like gentle rain on thirsting earth. Thenceforward, a part of the time that was formerly totally devoted to worldly affairs was taken up for the meditation of Ram, who, for that period, gave him real peace and relief. Gradually, love for Ram—the Giver of peace—increased. The more Ramdas meditated on and uttered His name the greater the relief and joy he felt. Nights, which are free from worldly duties, were in course of time utilised for *Rambhajan* with scarcely one or two hours’ rest. His devotion for Ram progressed by leaps and bounds.

During the day, when cares and anxieties were besetting Ramdas due to monetary and other troubles, Ram was coming to his aid in unexpected ways. So, whenever free from worldly duties—be the period ever so small—he would meditate on Ram and utter His name. Walking in the streets he would be uttering, “Ram, Ram”. Ramdas was now losing attraction for the objects of the world. Sleep, except for one or two hours in the night, was given up for the sake of Ram. Fineries in clothes and dress were replaced by coarse *khaddar*. Bed was replaced by a bare mat. Two meals were reduced to one meal a day, and after sometime this too was given up for plantains and boiled potatoes—chillies and salt were totally eschewed. No taste but for Ram; meditation of Ram continued apace. It encroached upon the hours of the day and the so-called worldly duties.

At this stage one day, Ramdas’ father came to him, sent by Ram, and calling him aside, gave him the *upadesh* of Ram Mantram—“Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram!”, assuring him that if he repeated this Mantram at all times, Ram would give him eternal happiness. This initiation from the father—who has thereafter been looked upon by Ramdas as *Gurudev*—hastened on the aspirant in his spiritual progress. Off and on he

was prompted by Ram to read the teachings of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, of Buddha in *Light of Asia*, of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, of Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India* and *Ethical Religion*. The young plant of *bhakti* in Ram was thus nurtured in the electric atmosphere created by the influence of these great men on the mind of humble Ramdas. It was at this time that it slowly dawned upon his mind that Ram was the only Reality and all else was false. Whilst desires for the enjoyment of worldly things were fast falling off, the consideration of *me* and *mine* was also wearing out. The sense of possession and relationship was vanishing. All thought, all mind, all heart, all soul was concentrated on Ram, Ram covering up and absorbing everything.

Renunciation

Now from the narrow pond of a worldly life Ram had lifted up his slave to throw him into the extensive ocean of a universal Life. But to swim in the wide ocean, Ram knew, Ramdas wanted strength and courage, for gaining which Ram intended to make his ignorant and untrained slave to pass through a course of severe discipline, and this under His direct guidance and support. So, one night while engaged in drinking in the sweetness of His name, Ramdas was made to think in the following strain:

O Ram, when Thy slave finds Thee at once so powerful and so loving, and that he who trusts Thee can be sure of true peace and happiness, why should he not throw himself entirely on Thy mercy, which can only be possible by giving up everything he called 'mine' ? Thou art all in all to Thy slave. Thou art the sole Protector in the world. Men are deluded when they declare, 'I do this, I do that; this is mine, that is mine'. All, O Ram, is Thine, and all things are done by Thee alone. Thy slave's one prayer to Thee is to take him under Thy complete guidance and remove his 'I'-ness.

This prayer was heard. Ramdas' heart heaved a deep sigh; a hazy desire to renounce all and wander over the earth in the garb of a mendicant in quest of Ram wafted over his mind. Now Ram prompted him to open at random the book "Light of Asia", which was before him at the time. His eyes rested upon the pages wherein is described the great renunciation of Buddha, who says:—

“For now the hour is come when I should quit
This golden prison, where my heart lives caged,
To find the Truth; which henceforth I will seek,
For all men’s sake, until the truth be found.”

Then Ramdas similarly opened the New Testament and lighted upon the following definite words of Jesus Christ:

“And everyone that hath forsaken houses or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life.”

Then again he was actuated in the same way to refer to the *Bhagavad Gita*, and he read the following *sloka*:

“Abandoning all duties come to Me alone for shelter, sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins.”

Ram had thus spoken out through the words of these three great *avatars*—Buddha, Christ, and Krishna—and all of them pointed to the same path: renunciation. At once Ramdas made up his mind to give up for the sake of Ram all that he till then hugged to his bosom as his own, and leave the samsaric world. During this period, he was very simple in his dress, which consisted of a piece of cloth covering the upper part of the body and another wound round the lower part. Next day, he got two garments of this kind dyed in *gerrua* or red ochre, and the same night wrote two letters—one to his wife, whom Ram had made him look upon for sometime past as his sister, and another to a kind friend whom Ram had brought in touch with Ramdas for his deliverance from debts. The resolution was made. At five o’clock in the morning he bade farewell to a world for which he had lost all attraction and in which he could find nothing to call his own. The body, the mind, the soul—all were laid at the feet of Ram—that Eternal Being, full of love and full of mercy.

Adoption of *Sannyas*

The morning train carried Ramdas away from Mangalore and dropped him in the evening at Erode, a railway junction. He had taken with him a sum of Rs. 25 and a few books including the *Gita* and the New Testament. At Erode he found himself strangely helpless without any plans or thought for the future. He did not know where he was being led by Ram. He wandered about for sometime and when darkness fell, he approached a small, low hut on the roadside and finding at its entrance a middle-aged mother, requested her to give him some food. The kind mother at once welcomed him into her hut and served him some rice and curds. The mother was very kind. With great difficulty could she be induced to accept some money for the food supplied by her.

On leaving the hut, he proceeded to the Railway station. He laid himself down in a corner in the station and took rest for sometime. He did not know what to do or where to go. At midnight, a bell rang to announce the arrival of a train. He got up and found near him a Tamilian, who inquired of him regarding his movements. Ramdas was unable to say anything in reply. Ram alone could determine his future. Here this friend promised Ramdas to take him with him as far as Trichinopoly, for which place he was bound. Money was given him for the purchase of a ticket for Ramdas, and both boarded the train. It was evening when the train reached Trichinopoly station. Alighting from the train, he proceeded to the city. All the time, all the way from Mangalore, the divine mantram of Sri Ram was on his lips. He could never forget it. The utterance of Ram's name alone sustained and cheered him. Taking rest for the night on the verandah of a house by the roadside, next morning he started on foot to Srirangam, about seven miles from Trichy. He reached the place at about 8 o'clock.

Here Ramdas was first let into the secret of Ram's purpose in drawing him out from the sphere of his former life and surroundings—and that purpose was to take him on a pilgrimage to sacred shrines and holy rivers. At Srirangam the beautiful river Kaveri was flowing in all her purity and majesty. Going up to the river, he bathed in its clear waters. Here on the banks of the Kaveri he assumed, by Ram's command, the robe of a *sannyasin*. It was a momentous step, and by taking it Ram gave him an entirely new birth. The white clothes previously worn by him were offered up to the Kaveri, who

carried them away in her rushing waters. The *gerrua* or orange-coloured clothes were put on, and the following prayer went up to the feet of Almighty Ram:

O Ram! O Love Infinite, Protector of all the worlds! It is by Thy wish alone that Thy humble slave has been induced to adopt *sannyas*. In Thy name alone, O Ram, he has given up *samsara*, and cut asunder all bonds, all ties.

O Ram, bless Thy poor devotee with Thy grace. May Ramdas be endued with strength, courage and faith to carry out in Thy name, Ram, the following vows and bear all trials and all kinds of privations that may beset the path of a *sannyasin* in his passage through the rough and perilous life of a mendicant:—

1. This life be henceforth entirely consecrated to meditation and the service of Sri Ram.
2. Strict celibacy be observed, looking upon all women as mothers.
3. The body be maintained and fed upon the food procured by *bhiksha* or on what was offered as alms.

Srirangam

The thrills of a new birth, a new life, with the sweet love of Ram was felt. A peace came upon Ramdas' struggling soul. The turmoil ceased. Ram's own hands seemed to have touched the head of his slave—Ram blessed. O tears, flow on, for the mere joy of deliverance! Sorrow, pain, anxiety and care—all vanished, never to return. All glory to Thee, Ram. The great blessing came from Ram: "I take thee under my guidance and protection—remain ever my devotee—thy name shall be Ramdas."

Yes, Ramdas, what a grand privilege it is to become the *das* of Ram who is all love—kindness—all mercy—all forgiveness!

Now, he came up to a *dharmashala*, close to the river and found some Sadhus sitting on the floor of the passage leading out to the main road. They were busy performing *Rambhajan* to the accompaniment of cymbals and *ektar*. They were singing the glorious name of Ram. Ramdas also squatted beside the two young *sannyasins* and placed his *lota*—procured at Trichy—in front of him to receive *bhiksha* from the pilgrims, who passed that way after their bath. The *bhajan* of the two young devotees was

really very sweet. Time passed most pleasantly. It was about 12 noon that the *bhajan* came to a close. Looking upon the cloth spread in front of them the young Sadhus observed only 3 quarter anna pieces lying on it—all they had got for the day. With a disappointed look one of them remarked:

“Since morning we have been singing the glory of God, and He has given us only this much. Hunger is pinching the stomach. How are we to procure food, O God? Is Thy *bhajan* from morning till now worth only 9 pies?”

This question was at once answered by Ramdas: “No, young brothers, no value can be set upon your *bhajan*. God is always kind and loving. He never forsakes those who depend upon Him. Ram has sent through His humble slave money for your food today.”

So saying, he dropped into the hands of the Sadhus one rupee out of the amount he was then carrying with him. The poor Sadhus simply stared at him in amazement. Their eyes were filled with tears. They exclaimed:

“O God, Thy ways are wonderful—pardon, pardon Thy unworthy slaves, we doubted Thee and Thy love. In future, grant that we may never blame Thee, but bear all sufferings patiently in Thy name.”

The Sadhus then left the place. Looking into his own *lota* Ramdas discovered in it 2 pies. His heart leaped with joy at the sight of these tiny coins, the first proceeds of *bhiksha*! Buying two small plantains with the coins he ate them with all pleasure. At this time in the same line in which he was sitting there was another Sadhu on the right, whilst the young Sadhus aforementioned were on his left. Now, this Sadhu coming forward enquired as to where Ramdas was proceeding. He could not, of course, find a reply to his question. Ram alone could do so. Receiving no reply, the Sadhu proposed to take Ramdas with him to Rameshwaram whither he was going.

O Ram, Thy kindness is indeed very great. To guide Thy helpless slave Thou hast sent to him this Sadhu—why? He can be taken to be none other than Ram Himself.

From time to time Ramdas met Sadhus who not only led him on the pilgrimage but also took every care of him. All these Sadhus, shall, by Ram’s will, go by one name, ‘*Sadhuram*.’

Rameshwaram

The guide was at once accepted. Ramdas had then with him about Rs. 9, which amount he handed over to the Sadhuran and felt much relieved by doing so. To carry money is to carry anxiety with you; for it draws your attention to it now and again. On making over the money, he suggested to the Sadhuran to get the rupees changed into one anna coins and have them all distributed to the poor, who were begging at the doors of temples, and this desire he carried out. Now, Ramdas threw himself more completely than ever on the support of Ram with only two clothes and a few books, all his possessions in the world. He started with the Sadhuran, whom Ram had sent as a guide. He led him to the railway station and both got into a train running to Rameshwaram. No ticket—Ram was ticket and all in all.

Whilst in the train, Ramdas continued his meditation of Ram. The train traveled on until it reached a station about six miles from Rameshwaram. Here a Ticket Inspector came into the compartment in which Ramdas and his kind guide were seated. After checking the tickets of other passengers, he approached the Sadhus and cried, “Tickets—Tickets”.

“No tickets, brother, we are Sadhus”, was the reply.

“Without tickets you cannot travel any farther. You have to get down here”, said the Inspector.

At once getting up, Ramdas told the Sadhuran that it was Ram’s wish that they should alight at that place. Walking out of the station they came to the high road. Here the Sadhuran grumbled over the action of the Inspector. To this Ramdas said:

“Brother, we cannot travel all along to Rameshwaram by train. Pilgrimages should be made on foot. But somehow Ram was kind enough to take us on the train so far. We have only to walk a distance of six miles in order to reach Rameshwaram. It is the will of Ram that this distance should be covered on foot. Be cheerful, brother.”

They started to walk. When they traveled about two miles Ram brought them in touch with a barber. Till then, since he started from Mangalore, Ramdas had not had a shave. So, here, he first got his beard, moustache, and head all shaved after the manner of *sannyasins*. As they were nearing Rameshwaram, they came to a tank by the roadside

named *Lakshman kund*. After bathing in this tank they passed by a number of small tanks, bearing different names.

At last Ram directed their steps to the famous temple of Rameshwaram. The temple is a gigantic structure. One actually loses oneself in the bewildering passages, corridors, and aisles that lead to the place of worship. When the Sadhus approached the Holy of holies they found the door open; the worship of Rameshwar was going on in all its ceremonial *éclat*. O Ram! All glory to Thee! The occasion and the place sent thrills of joy into Ramdas' soul. Here Ramdas came in touch with some *mahatmas* who had come there on pilgrimage, of whom one, Swami Govindanand, was very kind to him. The Swami said that he belonged to the Mutt of Shri Siddharudh Swami of Hubli and offered an invitation to Ramdas to attend the *Shivaratri* festival in the Hubli Mutt, which was then shortly to take place.

In the Cave

Now, at the prompting of Ram, Ramdas, desiring to remain in solitude for some time, placed the matter before the Sadhuram. The Sadhuram was ever ready to fulfill his wishes. Losing no time, he took Ramdas up the mountain behind the great temple. Climbing high up, he showed him many caves. Of these, one small cave was selected for Ramdas, which he occupied the next day. In this cave he lived for nearly a month in deep meditation of Ram. This was the first time he was taken by Ram into solitude for His *bhajan*. Now, he felt most blissful sensations since he could here hold undisturbed communion with Ram. He was actually rolling in a sea of indescribable happiness. To fix the mind on that fountain of bliss—Ram—means to experience pure joy!

Once, during the day, when he was lost in the madness of Ram's meditation, he came out of the cave and found a man standing a little away from the mouth of the cave. Unconsciously, he ran up to him and locked him up in a fast embrace. This action on the part of Ramdas thoroughly frightened the friend, who thought that it was a mad man who was behaving in this manner and so was afraid of harm from him. It was true, he was mad—yes, he was mad for Ram, but it was a harmless madness, which fact the visitor realised later. The irresistible attraction felt by him towards this friend was due to the

perception of Ram in him. “O Ram, Thou art come, Thou art come!” with this thought Ramdas had run up to him. At times, he would feel driven to clasp in his arms the very trees and plants growing in the vicinity of the cave. Ram was attracting him from all directions. Oh, the mad and loving attraction of Ram! O Ram, Thou art Love, Light, and Bliss. Thus passed his days in that cave.

For food, he would come down in the morning, and going into the city, beg from door to door and receive from the kind mothers of the place handfuls of rice in his small *lota*. When the *lota* was a little over half-full, he would return to the cave. Collecting some dry twigs, he would light a fire over which he would boil the rice in the same *lota*. Water was at hand. A small stream of pure, crystal water was flowing down the hill just in front of the cave, and in this stream it was also most refreshing to take the daily bath. This boiled rice was taken to appease hunger, without salt, or anything else, and only once a day. To share with him in this simple fare, a number of squirrels would visit the cave. Fearlessly, at times, they would eat from his hands. Their fellowship was also a source of great joy to Ramdas. Everyday, he would wander over the hills amidst the shrubs, trees, and rocks—a careless, thoughtless child of Ram! It was altogether a simple and happy life that he led in that mountain retreat. The kind-hearted Sadhuran would meet him everyday, either up the hill or in the city, when he came down for *bhiksha*. A day came when he received Ram’s command to leave the place—whereto, Ram alone knew.

God is Everywhere

They traveled to Kalahasti. After a day’s stay here, they left for Jagannath Puri. It was noon, the Sadhuran and Ramdas were in the train. A Ticket Inspector, a Christian, dressed in European fashion, stepped into the carriage at a small station, and coming up to the Sadhus asked for tickets.

“Sadhus carry no tickets, brother, for they neither possess nor care to possess any money,” said Ramdas in English.

The Ticket Inspector replied: “You can speak English. Educated as you are, you

cannot travel without a ticket. I have to ask you both to get off.”

The Sadhuram and he accordingly got down at the bidding of the Inspector. “It is all Ram’s will,” assured Ramdas to his guide.

They were now on the platform, and there was still some time for the train to start. The Ticket Inspector, meanwhile, felt an inclination to hold conversation with Ramdas, who, with the Sadhuram, was waiting for the train to depart.

“Well,” broke in the Inspector looking at Ramdas. “May I know with what purpose you are traveling in this manner?”

“In quest of God,” was his simple reply.

“They say God is everywhere,” persisted the Inspector. “Where is the fun of your knocking about in search of Him, while He is at the very place from which you started on this quest, as you say?”

“Right, brother,” replied Ramdas, “God is everywhere, but he wants to have this fact actually proved by going to all places and realising His presence everywhere.”

“Well then,” continued the Inspector, “if you are discovering God wherever you go, you must be seeing Him here, on this spot, where you stand.”

“Certainly, brother,” rejoined Ramdas, “He is here at the very place where we stand.”

“Can you tell me where He is?” asked the Inspector.

“Behold, He is here, standing in front of me!” exclaimed Ramdas enthusiastically.

“Where, where?” cried the Inspector impatiently.

“Here, here!” pointed out Ramdas smiling, and patted on the broad chest of the Inspector himself. “In the tall figure standing in front, that is, in yourself, Ramdas clearly sees God, who is everywhere.”

For a time, the Inspector looked confused. Then he broke into a hearty fit of laughter. Opening the door of the compartment from which he had asked the Sadhus to get down, he requested them to get in again, and they did so, followed by him. He sat in the train with the Sadhus for sometime.

“I cannot disturb you, friends. I wish you all success in your quest of God”. With these words he left the carriage, and the train rolled onwards. O Ram, Thy name be glorified!

Kashi

The city of Kashi is a city of magnificent temples, the domes and turrets of which, when viewed from a height, lend a charm to the scene on the banks of the holy river Ganges. The whole of India rightly recognises that Kashi is one of the most important shrines of Hindustan. Everyday, pilgrims by thousands are pouring into the place from all parts of India. As Ram took Ramdas on this pilgrimage in winter, the cold was very great here, and the Sadhuras and he had not sufficient clothing, and sleeping as they were in an open place on the bank of the river, the cold was felt very acutely—especially by the Sadhuras. The Sadhuras was getting impatient everyday. His main object of traveling in the North seemed to have been fulfilled after visiting Kashi. Now he wanted to return to South India. Ram's will. Nothing happens in this world that is not subject to His divine will. Ram's ways are inscrutable.

Next day, the train carried the Sadhuras and Ramdas to Ayodhya, the place where Sri Ramachandra lived and reigned. It was night when the pilgrims reached the place. They rested for the night in the open passenger-shed outside the station. The cold was intense. The Sadhuras suggested that they should lie down back to back, the backs touching each other. This device was adopted in order to exchange one another's heat of the body for mutual warmth. Really an original idea! Thus passed the night. Early next day, both proceeded to the city and then to the Sarayu river. Washing the hands and feet, the Sadhuras suggested that no bath need be taken as the cold was very great. So, returning from the holy river, they visited various *mandirs* of Sri Ramachandra and Hanumanji, secured food at a *kshetra*, and that very night caught a train going down towards Bombay.

Now the Sadhuras had once and for all decided to close the northern India pilgrimage and hence the journey towards Bombay. O Ram, Thy will is supreme. Although Ramdas has yet to visit more shrines of north India, it is beyond Thy humble slave to know the reason for Thy taking him to Bombay. Every move Thou givest to the situation of Thy *das* is considered by him to be for the best. The train traveled, taking the Sadhus south and south. Station after station was passed. At a small station, while the

Sadhuram was dozing, some passenger who had not perhaps any pot with him, took away, while alighting, the brass pot of the Sadhuram, who woke up and discovered his loss after the train had left that station. He began to fret over the loss a great deal; in fact he wept bitterly over it like a child.

The next station was Jhansi which was duly reached. Here the ticket inspection was very strict. So the ticket-clerk pulled down these Sadhus as well as many others from other carriages, and led them all near the gate, leading out of the station. There were in all about ten Sadhus. The ticket-clerk made all of them stand in a line on one side of the entrance or exit; it was both. The passengers were now going out of the station and the clerk was collecting tickets at the gate, his back turned against the Sadhus, who were made to stand only at arm's length from the clerk. The first in the line of the Sadhus was a young *sannyasin* with a *jatah* or tuft of matted hair. Whenever the ticket-clerk had a momentary respite from the collection of tickets, he would turn round and clutching the *jatah* of the young Sadhu, who was nearest to him, shake his head violently. The next moment he had to attend to ticket collection. When the stream of passengers thinned and there was some break, he would again handle the head of the Sadhu and give it a shake or inflict blows upon it with his fist. While this was going on, by a look at the face of the Sadhu, who was next to him in the line, Ramdas made out that there was a happy smile on the face of the young Sadhu.

Love Conquers Hate

The Sadhu seemed to enjoy the treatment. He was calm and contented. Ramdas, wishing also to taste the pleasure, requested the Sadhu to exchange places with him and thus offer him also the unique opportunity of receiving the attention of the ticket-clerk. But the Sadhu would not be persuaded to abandon his enviable position. Off and on, the clerk was meting out this treatment to the willing Sadhu. This continued for nearly half an hour. The ticket collection work at last stopped. Now the clerk was totally free from work, and he turned right towards the Sadhus. He approached the other Sadhus, of whom Ramdas was the second, with the object of handling them roughly one by one. Ramdas

felt much relieved to see that his turn had at last come. The clerk coming up caught his hand in a firm grasp and looked on his face in which he discovered a most welcome smile, bright and beaming. At once he let go of his hand and drawing himself back a few steps seemed to have given himself to some thinking. It was Ram who was at work. For next instant, he asked all the Sadhus to go out of the station. Accordingly all the Sadhus left the station and went out one by one.

O Ram! When Thy invincible arm protects Thy slave, where was fear for him? One thing was proved incontestably and beyond any doubt: Thou disarmest the evil intentions of an adversary when he approaches you in a violent mood by meeting him with a smile instead of with fear or hatred. Love can surely conquer hate. Love is a sovereign antidote for all the ills of the world. After all, the whole occurrence might be only Ram testing the Sadhus to see if they would lose their self-control under provocation. All that Ram does is for the best.

Now the time was about 2 o'clock past midnight. It was pitch dark. So the Sadhus sought for a place on the station for taking rest for the night. But conditions for this were far from favourable. The station was full to overflowing, as it were, with passengers. Every available nook and corner of that portion of the station intended for passengers was occupied, and they were all scattered on the floor, sleeping in fantastic postures—all space filled up. However, Ramdas and his guide, the Sadhuram, crept near a pillar where there was found room for both to sit on their legs. The cold here also was very severe. The Sadhus sat up close to and pressing each other, so much so that they seemed almost moulded into one piece. *Rambhajan* was going on. Ramdas became unconscious and dozed away where he sat and did not wake up until he was roused by a strong and shrill voice asking all passengers to take to their feet and walk out of the station. This was the order of the railway police.

Ramdas opened his eyes and instantly became conscious of his body which was discovered to be in a peculiar condition—the legs had turned so stiff with cold that they had stuck fast at the bend of the knee-joint, and on a look at them he further made out that from the knee downwards both the legs had swollen, and also the feet, as though they were stricken with elephantiasis. However by rubbing them briskly with both hands for about five minutes, he could unlock the stiffened joints. Slowly rising up, he hobbled

along for some distance. As he walked on, the stiffness disappeared. About 8 a.m. they reached the city of Jhansi, about four miles from the station.

Ram, the Friend of the Poor

During his visits to the village, the villagers tried to dissuade Ramdas from staying in the jungle at nights, as they warned him of tigers and other wild animals, because the place occupied by him formed part of a dense and extensive forest. But when the all-powerful Ram was there to save him where was fear for him and from whom? Ram is pervading everywhere—in all things, in all beings, in all creatures. He continued there for eight days, when he received the command from Ram to move on.

A small incident which took place here has to be chronicled at this stage. One day, when he was passing the small bazaar of this place with his *lota* in hand, he felt thirsty. He now approached, as he walked on, a number of small low huts on one side of the road. Going up to one of them, at its entrance he found an old mother sitting. He begged of her to give him some water in his *lota*. The old mother shook her head and said:

“Maharaj, you cannot take water at my hands.”

“May Ramdas know the reason for this objection?” inquired Ramdas.

“The simple reason is,” put in the mother, “I belong to a very low caste; to be brief, I am a barber woman.”

“What of that?” said Ramdas, nothing surprised. “You are Ramdas’ mother all the same; kindly satisfy the thirst of your son.”

She was highly pleased at this reply, and going in brought out a seat for him and her water vessel out of which she poured some water into his *lota*. He quenched his thirst, occupying the seat so kindly offered by her. Now the old mother said that she was utterly miserable. Left alone in the world, she spent all her days and nights in pain, fear, and anxiety. Ramdas then assured her:

“O mother, there is no cause for fear and anxiety or for a feeling of loneliness when there is Ram to protect us all—Ram is always near us.”

“But a poor, weak-minded woman like myself does not possess any faith in Ram, because I am a sinner.” So saying the mother burst into tears.

“You shall have faith, kind mother, by the grace of Ram. Don’t despair, Ram is always the friend of the poor and the humble,” said Ramdas.

“Then show me the way,” asked the old mother.

“Repeat the one name ‘Ram’ at all times of the day and at nights when you are awake. You may be sure that you will not feel lonely or miserable as long as you are uttering that glorious name. Where this name is sounded, or meditated upon, there resides no sorrow, no anxiety—nay, not even death.”

Saying thus, Ramdas started to go, when she begged him to visit her again the next day. As desired by her, he went to her hut again the following day at about the same time.

“Well mother, how do you do?” was his question.

There was a cheerful smile on the face of the mother. She said that she had acted upon his advice and was finding herself much relieved from fear and cares. Then she offered him some *laddoos* which she said she had got from the sweetmeat shop.

“Mother, this is not what Ramdas wants; he wants something prepared by your own hands,” said he.

At this she went in and got for him a piece of *roti* or bread made by her, which he ate with no small amount of pleasure. Later, he saw her once again, when she was busy uttering “Ram, Ram!”

God Never Punishes

By Ram’s command Ramdas came back to Jhansi, where Mahadev Prasad welcomed him most heartily, and pressed him to spend a few more days with him. At this time Ram brought him into contact with more than a dozen friends at Jhansi, who were all very kind and hospitable to him. Of these, one young friend named Ramkinker was extremely kind. One day, in the course of a conversation, he heard that on the Himalayas there were two shrines—Kedarnath and Badrinath—and the path leading to these places was very

difficult, and also the cold there was very intense. O Ram, it was all your suggestion. For him there was always a fascination for dangerous journeys and perilous places. Kedarnath he had read of in the splendid writings of that great Mahatma Swami Rama Tirtha. His mind was made up. Ram prompted, and the resolution was sealed that he should visit these shrines, however difficult the path that led to them. He expressed Ram's wish to his friends. Mahadev and others, who valued his frail body so dearly, did not at first appreciate the idea. They said that the journey was a terrible one, and it would prove so especially to Ramdas, whose body was so weak and emaciated. He replied:

“Ram has given his fiat, and Ramdas obeys, placing full trust in Him. The burden is on Ram to see that he is taken care of; even if his body were to drop off at the will of Ram, he would not grumble. He will then be Ram's entirely. Go he must.”

At once Ramkinker, the young friend, proposed to follow him on his journey to Kedarnath and Badrinath. So, he had to remain at Jhansi for some days more at the request of these friends, which gave Ramkinker sufficient time to make his preparations for the journey.

Some other incidents in connection with his stay at Jhansi have to be narrated here before he describes his pilgrimage to the Himalayas. After the resolution was made, he was taken over by Ramkinker, who kept him in a *Rammandir* near his own house and carefully looked after his personal wants. In this *mandir* there was a *pujari* known as Pandaji. O Pandaji! How very kind you were too. At midday, everyday, Ramdas would saunter out in the hot sun and walk in the streets of Jhansi for two or three hours. The heat of the sun at midday in that season was very severe; but he would not mind it. Observing this one day, Pandaji, who was treating him as a child, warned him thus:

“Look here Maharaj, you are everyday going out at midday and wandering about in the hot sun. Your head, which is clean-shaven, is always uncovered. If you are obstinate, I shall have to lock you up in the temple before I go out.”

With this threat—an indication of his great love for Ramdas—he would press him to sleep in the afternoon and would not leave the *mandir* for midday meals until he saw Ramdas asleep. O Ram, how kind Thou art!

One day, during his midday walks, Ramdas got thirsty, and he discovered on the way a well at which some mothers were drawing water. He went up to the place and

requested one of them to give him some water to quench his thirst. In reply, the mother who was asked for water said:

“Maharaj, I am a Mahomedan and you being a Hindu monk, it is not proper that you should accept water at my hands.”

“O mother!” replied he, “Ramdas knows no caste distinctions. He finds in you that Universal Mother, Sita, as he finds in all women. Therefore, do not hesitate to provide your son with some water.”

The mother was strangely surprised at this reply, washed the water-pot thoroughly and, drawing water afresh, poured it out in the hollow of his hands, and he drank as much water as he wanted. Then he continued his walk. For about ten days he was staying in the *Rammandir*, and during evenings a number of friends of the city would come and put him various questions about Ram, and he would try to satisfy them by such replies as were prompted him by Ram Himself. On one occasion a certain friend came up specially to have a discussion with him on a religious point.

His first question was: “Who are you?”

“I am Ramdas,” was his simple reply.

“No, you speak a lie there,” retorted the friend. “You are Ram Himself. When you declare you are Ramdas, you do not know what you say. God is everywhere and in everything. He is in you, and so you are He. Confess it right away.”

“True, dear friend, God is everywhere,” replied Ramdas. “But at the same time, it must be noted that God is one, and when He is in you and everywhere around you, may I humbly ask to whom you are putting this question?”

After reflecting for a time, the friend was driven to say: “Well, I have put the question to myself.”

This reply was given as a desperate attempt to reconcile his first contention. If he would say that the question was put to Ramdas there was a clear sense of duality accepted by the disputant himself—“I and you.”

“As a matter of fact,” put in Ramdas, “Ram does not speak; the moment he speaks he is not Ram. Speech creates always a sense of duality: the speaker and the man spoken to. Ram is one and indivisible. It is sheer ignorance for a man—whose ego is a great obstruction for his complete realisation of the oneness of God—to say that he is God.”

The friend persisted for some time more to uphold his argument and eventually gave it up. At the desire of Ramdas, who liked to stay for some days in a retired place, the friends at Jhansi took him to a garden about a mile away from the city, where there was a small shed. Here he lived for some days, visited every evening by a number of friends.

Here again a schoolmaster came for a discussion. He belonged to the Arya Samaj started by that great Saint, Swami Dayananda Saraswati. This friend, in the course of a talk, became very hot and excited. The point was about the *shuddhi* movement set on foot by Swami Shraddhanandji. Ramdas was clearly opposed to this movement as he is, in fact, opposed to every effort on the part of anybody to create differences in religious faiths. That all faiths lead to the same goal is a most beautiful and convincing truth. At the close of the discussion, the friend exceeded the limits of decent talk. However, Ramdas was cool and collected by the grace of Ram. At parting, he assured the friend that he loved him most dearly in spite of any objectionable words used by him. Next day, about the same time, this friend came again in a great hurry. He could scarcely talk. He could only whisper; his throat was choked up. His condition was pitiable.

“O Maharaj,” he exclaimed falling at the feet of Ramdas. “God has punished your slave for having used rough words to you yesterday. See how my throat is choked, and I can’t speak out properly.”

“O friend, Ramdas is really sorry to hear this, but be assured of this—God never punishes. God is love and is always kind. Our own doubts are our enemies and create a lot of mischief. The so-called evil is of our own making.”

At once, pulling out Ramdas’ right hand the friend rubbed the palm on his throat and, strange to say, his throat cleared and he began to talk more clearly and in a few minutes he was all right!

“Behold! Maharaj, how powerful you are!” he cried exultantly.

“You make a mistake, dear friend,” replied Ramdas. “Ramdas is a poor slave of Ram, possessing no powers at all. Your faith alone has cured you and nothing else.”

From this time onwards the friend became very much attached to him and was very kind. O Ram, Thy ways are so wonderful that Ramdas gets utterly bewildered at times.

The friends at Jhansi whom he met daily in that city were all very charitable in

disposition—especially were they kind and hospitable to Sadhus. When he was living with Mahadev Prasad, he found this friend a pattern of charity and humility. Mahadev would never send away a hungry man from his door without feeding him. He would forego his own meal to satisfy a hungry man. His heart was so soft and so tender. Mahadev's humility was exemplary. Ram certainly gave Ramdas the society of this friend so that he might know what true charity and humility meant in actual practice. Ramkinker—the young friend who accompanied him on his pilgrimage to the Himalayas—made it a rule to utilise about ten per cent of his salary for charity. This is really a beautiful hint for all. While speaking of charity, the ideal of charity followed by the householder of northern India is indeed very noble and lofty, the ideal of the ancients, namely, that the householder has no right to exist as such if he does not share his food everyday with a hungry man of no means, such as a beggar or a Sadhu. In fact, it is declared that a man assumes *grihastashrama* with the specific object of carrying out this noble ideal. There are some *grihastas* who would not wait for a guest to turn up but would go seeking for one in the streets, in temples, or *dharmashalas*; such is the piety of the householders. Ramdas' experience in southern India was also full of incidents in which charity played a most laudable part. In fact, the whole of India is a great land of charity.

Himalayan Journey

On the fourth day, they started on their journey higher on the hills. As they climbed higher and higher, the scenes and landscapes they saw were found to be simply enchanting. On the right the sacred Ganga was rushing downhill in all her glory, and on the left, high, rocky hills, full of foliage and trees, presented at once a thrilling and absorbing sight. The very air there was charged with the divine presence of Ram. The far-off hills and valleys, the varied-hued sky in which the white fleecy clouds assumed fantastic shapes, the snow-capped mountains, hundreds of miles away up, dazzling in the rays of the sun as though they were covered with sheets of silver: all these constituted indeed an imposing sight! O, the charm of the scenes! O Ram! poor Ramdas cannot find adequate words to describe the grandeur, the beauty, the wonderful glory of the sights

that met his bewildering gaze.

As he walked on, he drank deeper and deeper of the splendour of Ram's infinity and was lost, lost, lost in the intoxication of it all. O Ram, Thy kindness to Thy slave is really unbounded. From day to day both Ramkinker and Ramdas walked on at a high speed. Ramdas felt no fatigue, no pain, no discomfort of any kind. He was as fresh as ever. It was all due to Ram's grace, whose name was always on his lips. Thus mountain after mountain was traversed, and as they climbed on grander and newer scenes presented themselves before their wondering sight. It was a journey in the land of enchantment. It was all a bewitching dream full of the glory and greatness of Ram. There Ram exhibits His marvelous powers. He is a mighty conjurer, vision after vision dances and flits before your eyes, and unconsciously you fall under the subtle charm and spell of this great Magician. You forget what you are and where you are. You are simply absorbed and lost in the surroundings—like a wisp of smoke in a hurricane.

Ramdas was walking at high speed—nay, he was veritably flying; even the difficult ascents were scaled in no time. Most of the time, he was unconscious of his body. His mind was entirely merged in Ram who alone appeared to him in those enchanting scenes. Higher and higher climbed the indefatigable pilgrims. Ramkinker, who had a heavy bundle to carry, complained of Ramdas' running speed, since he could not keep pace with him. But Ramdas was not his own master. Ram was his master. At a certain place they missed each other, causing anxiety to both; but Ram brought them together at a stage called Rudraprayag. Thousands of pilgrims are every year ascending these hills and during this season, from March to June, a regular stream of people is going up and coming down the hills. All the pilgrims, Sadhus, and others whom Ramdas met on the way were very kind to him. Some rich merchants from cities like Bombay were very solicitous. Because Ram is kind, all are kind, and Ram is in all.

The mountains are peopled by hill-tribes—a fair-complexioned and well-built race. They live by cultivation and cattle and goat-breeding. Naturally their lives and ways are simple. Their faith in God is very great. "Ram, Ram," is always on their lips. If you talk to them they tell you with a glow of pride that they are the descendants of the Rishis that lived in those hills. Their clothing is wholly made of wool. Males wear long woollen coats and drawers and a black cap, and women, rough blankets in place of *sarees*. These

blankets are prepared there out of the wool yielded by the sheep they tend. So the food-stuffs and clothing—the two essentials of life—are the produce of their own labour. Even while walking from place to place, every man and woman carries a quantity of wool which he or she is spinning on the way. They have simple pit looms on which they weave the yarn into cloth. Since their mode of life is free from the baneful touch of modern civilization, they live simple, pure, honest and pious lives.

At different stages of the journey over the hills, under trees or in small huts or caves, are seen Sadhus engaged in austerities. To seek their company and remain there, for ever so small a period, is a great privilege. The society of a Sadhu is a much needed bath for the mind. The pure atmosphere he creates around him by his meditations is the river in which the mind bathes and is purged of evil thoughts and impressions. Upon these sacred hills are the *ashramas* of such famous Saints as Narada and Agastya Muni. There is also a place called Pandukeshar where the Pandavas are said to have halted for sometime during their journey to Kailas. There is a temple here and some old inscriptions, upon plates of copper. The first place visited by Ramdas and Ramkinker on the heights was Trijugarain. The ascent to this spot was sharp and steep, and it was a plateau surrounded by hills covered with snow. Hence the cold here was intense. The pilgrims remained here for one day.

Then after descending some distance another chain of hills was mounted. Here the path was narrow, rugged and dangerous; frail, rickety bridges had to be crossed; at three places large tracts of snow had to be traversed. On account of the perilous nature of the path, every year many pilgrims are reported to have slipped down the cliffs and been washed away in the rushing torrents of the river, many hundreds of feet below. One instance of a narrow escape may be mentioned here.

At a certain stage in the middle of an ascent, Ramdas was sitting on the path awaiting Ramkinker. This was the edge of a high cliff, and the river was flowing far below. The path was very narrow. A girl of about 16 years, full of energy and activity, was coming down on her return journey. It was a sharp descent. Her pace was rapid and the sharp downhill path only accelerated her speed, and in spite of herself she was running down at uncontrollable velocity. Down, down she came. She was excited, her face was flushed, and she knew she was being drawn down automatically, and it was

beyond her power to control herself. Instead of running towards the hillside, she was staggering down to the edge of the path—the very brow of a precipice.

Ramdas watched the scene with breathless suspense. He was silently calling upon Ram to save her. Ram alone could and none else. Now she came up to the edge, and with a superhuman effort controlled herself. She had come to the very brink. Part of her left foot was out of the edge. O Ram, how terrible a condition! Ram, Thy name be glorified. Ramdas looks and sees the girl falling on the path right across uttering Ram, Ram. Saved, saved! Ram saved her! She got up; did not wait a minute, but continued her walk further down. Dauntless girl! What a marvelous faith in Ram is thine!

The other was the case of an old woman who gave up her body in the basket in which she was being carried by a sturdy mountaineer who was specially engaged for the purpose. At certain stages in the journey this carrier would lower down his burden for relief, and the last time he did so it happened to be near the place where Ramkinker and Ramdas were resting on the roadside. The bearer, as usual with him, lowered the basket on a rock and asked the old mother to step out of the basket for sometime. But receiving no reply, the hillman peeped into the basket and a cry of surprise and pain started from him.

“The poor woman is gone”, he exclaimed.

O Ram, Thy will is done. Then walking higher and higher, Ramdas and his kind guide eventually reached Kedarnath. This was indeed a grand place. It was plain land in the midst of high towering mountains covered with snow. The cold here was extremely severe. O Ram, Thy kindness to Thy slave was so great that Thou hadst made him almost proof against cold.

Mathura, Gokul and Brindaban

Mathura is the birth-place of that great incarnation Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna is the veritable personification of Love itself. His imperishable name lives still green and in all its pristine glory in the minds of all people in India. The *Bhagavad Gita* stands unrivalled in the depth of its philosophy, pointing out the one Goal all human endeavour should aim

at as the ultimate accomplishment of all life and existence. Mathura still remembers vividly the child Krishna and his charmed life, which is proved by the variety of *mandirs* in the place in which he is worshipped daily in the form of gaudily dressed idols. On the day of Ramdas' arrival at Mathura—Ramkinker being laid up with fever—Ramdas, before he came in touch with the new Sadhuram, went to the city in quest of the holy river Jumna. Ram, who was ever ready to offer help to him, now brought him in touch with a Brahmin going towards the river. He came of his own accord towards him and proposed to lead him to the river.

Having reached the holy Jumna, Ramdas first washed his clothes and then descended into the river for a bath. But before doing so, he placed his small *lota* on one of the stone steps, and into it he also put his spectacles. Finishing the bath he was returning to the spot where he had placed the *lota*, and he was only a moment too late, because a monkey coming up carried off the spectacles. Now without spectacles he could not clearly see objects at a distance. The Brahmin guide seeing this was annoyed. But Ramdas unperturbed said:

“It was all Ram's wish,” and thought within himself that perhaps Ram meant to restore his failing sight.

But the Brahmin would not rest content. He requested two boys standing nearby to run after the monkey for the pair of spectacles. The monkey, meanwhile, was jumping from one turret of the temple to the other closely followed by a number of other monkeys, who thought the first one had got some eatable in its grasp. However, in about a quarter of an hour, the boys returned, bringing with them the pair of spectacles in a sound condition. It was after all a test of Ram on his humble slave. After visiting some temples of Sri Krishna by the kindness of this Brahmin guide, he proceeded next day to Govardhan, in the company of the new Sadhuram.

Govardhan was situated at a distance of 14 miles from Mathura. They reached this place at midday. Here was the famous hill of Govardhan, which is said to have been lifted by Sri Krishna and supported on the tip of his little finger to protect the cows and cowherds—his playmates—from the heavy torrent of rain sent down by the angry god Indra. But this hill is fast diminishing and has come down almost to the level of the surrounding land. The stones cut out from the hill have been for the most part used in the

erection of houses at the place. However, to represent the hill, a piece of rock from it is preserved, enclosed by an iron fence and with a top roof. Upon this rock pilgrims pour ghee, milk, curds, *etc.*, and offer *puja*. Even from this rock bits are knocked off by the pilgrims and carried as mementos. After securing food at a *dharmashala*, Ramdas and the Sadhuram rested for a while in the afternoon.

In the evening, both the Sadhuram and he were out on the road going about the town when they heard from a distance the sound of *bhajan*. Thither Ram led him and the Sadhuram. Shortly after this, they found themselves in a small *Rammandir*, and in front of the images about half a dozen Saints were sitting and singing the glorious name of Ram to the accompaniment of cymbals, *tamburine*, and *mridang*. The words were “Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram Ram, Hare Hare! Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare!”

This *bhajan* was sung repeatedly in a variety of tunes producing in the atmosphere an electric influence full of peace. In this place he remained for nearly four hours fully absorbed in the charming sound of Ram’s name. Next day, he and his guide started back for Mathura, and after a short stay there Ramdas, who missed the Sadhuram, proceeded alone to Gokul, lying at a distance of about five miles. Ah! Gokul is the place where Sri Krishna grew up as a child, played his games, and exhibited his extraordinary powers! Here also the blessed Jumna flows. It was here in this river, perhaps, that Sri Krishna rode and danced on the hood of the venomous serpent Kaliya. After a day’s stay here, he returned to Mathura, whence he proceeded to Brindaban about six miles off.

Brindaban is a very delightful place. Here the same Jumna flows in all her tameness and purity. There are beautiful natural gardens of *nim* and other trees on the banks of the river. To sit under their cool shade, when the fresh breeze is blowing over the place from the bosom of mother Jumna, is to enjoy heaven itself. He was charmed with the place and stayed on the banks of the river for a fortnight, made the dry sand his bed and seat for the night, and the shade of the trees a little above, his resting place for the day. Moonlit nights here were all-bewitching. The very air seemed to be charged with the presence of that Love incarnate, Sri Krishna, and when soft breezes were blowing they seemed to be carrying into Ramdas’ ears the maddening music of Sri Krishna’s flute, and the silvery sound of the tinkling tiny bells of his blessed dancing feet. Now and

again, a deep, soft, and resonant voice would travel in the air—“Radheshyam, Radheshyam.” Ramdas lived there in a state of complete ecstasy and rapture, Days passed by unconsciously. The whole stay seemed to be one long-drawn, sweet, and pleasant dream.

At Brindaban, he visited many *Krishna-mandirs*, of which the *Ranganath-mandir* is a huge and picturesque structure. It resembles a fortress enclosed by high massive walls. The gateway and interior building and roofs are all made of stone artistically carved. The command came at last from Ram to leave. Returning to Mathura, he got into a train directed by the friends of the place.

Sri Siddharudha Swami

Ramdas, catching a train going still southward, reached Hubli at last. The idea of going to Hubli was put into his head by brother Ramakrishna Rao of Bombay, who is a great *bhakta* of the famous Saint of Hubli, Sri Siddharudha Swami. Ram took him here to obtain for him the *darshan* of this great Sage. It was past midday when he reached the Mutt of Sri Siddharudha, which is about three miles distant from the railway station. The Mutt consisted of three sets of buildings. The first one in the lines was a solid block of granite over which was erected a tall conical *gopura*. This temple was intended to serve as a repository of the remains of the Swami after he had entered *mahasamadhi*. The other two were extensive buildings constructed in such a way as to leave a large, square yard in the interior. Of these, the second one was a *dharmashala* wherein reside *sannyasins*, *bhaktas*, and pilgrims. Facing the Mutt there were two beautiful tanks. On the other side of the tanks there was a grove of trees yielding cool shade. The Mutt was situated in very charming and healthy surroundings.

Ramdas, entering the Mutt, was through the kindness of friends there duly introduced to Sri Siddharudha, at whose feet he prostrated himself most reverently. Here he spent about ten days most happily. In the mornings and evenings there were reading and exposition of religious texts. Ramdas listened to, nay, drank in the words of wisdom that fell from the lips of the learned Sage. Ram had so arranged matters for him that the

upadesh the Swami gave during those days happened to be just what would lead him further in his spiritual progress. At other times, he would wander about in the fields behind the Mutt and remain mostly at the tomb or *samadhi* of the late Kabirdas, the great Muslim Saint of that place. Ramdas was clearly able to experience a spiritual atmosphere charged with peace and calmness inside the Math and *dharmashala*, especially at the time of the presence of the great Swami. Sri Siddharudha was a great Yogi of an advanced age. He was kind, affable, hospitable, and full of tranquility.

Now news reached Mangalore that Ramdas was staying at the Mutt at Hubli. His former wife but present mother—as all women are mothers to Ramdas—and his child came there to fetch him. Sri Siddharudha Swami was appealed to by them in the matter and the kind-hearted Saint advised him to go with them to Mangalore. Ramdas submitted to the order, feeling that it came from Ram Himself. Ram always means well, and He does everything for the best. The mother (that is, Ramdas' former wife) proposed to him to return to *samsara*, to which he replied:

“O mother, it is all the work of Ram. Ram alone has freed humble Ramdas from the bonds of samsaric life, and he resides now at Ram's holy feet. He is now the slave of Ram and prays to Him always to keep him as such. To trust and acknowledge His supreme powers of protection over all, and believe that He alone is the doer of all actions and possessor of all things, is the only way to be rid of the miseries of life. Therefore, O mother, throw off your burden of cares and anxieties and approaching the divine feet of Ram, live there always in peace and happiness. This is all poor Ramdas can ask you to do.”

Now, under the kind care and escort of the mother, he started by train and reaching Mormugoa embarked upon a steamboat which took them in due course to Mangalore. As the party came up to the *bundar*, Ramdas, as bid by Ram, walking in advance, directed his steps straight to the Kadri hills, where he remained for the night. Next day, by Ram's will, he visited the house of brother Sitaram Rao—a brother by the old relation and a great *bhakta* of Ram. A few days later, he had the happiness of the *darshan* of his Gurudev (father by old relationship), who had given him the *upadesh* of the divine *Rammantram*. Now Ramdas stays by Ram's command in a cave called Panch Pandav Cave on the Kadri hill, and lives there a serene life, devoting his whole time in

talking about, writing of, and meditating on that all-loving and glorious Ram.

Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram!

Glossary

Ahankar	...	Ego-sense
Akhada	...	Abode of Sadhus
Annakshetra	...	Free feeding house for religious mendicants
Asan	...	A seal or Yogic posture
Avatars	...	Incarnations of God
Bhajee	...	Vegetable curry
Bhaktas	...	Devotees of God
Bhakti	...	Devotion
Bhiksha	...	Alms
Bundar	...	Sea-port
Chandan	...	Sandalwood paste
Charka	...	Spinning wheel
Chela	...	Disciple
Chits	...	Meal tickets
Dal	...	A preparation of pulse
Darshan	...	Visit or Vision
Das	...	Servant
Dharmashala	...	Rest-house
Dhed	...	Pariah
Doli	...	Cradle-like conveyance for going uphill
Ektar	...	One-stringed musical instrument
Fakir	...	Religious mendicant
Gadi	...	A seat made of cotton mattress
Gerrua	...	Red ochre used for dyeing the clothes of a Sannyasi
Gomata	...	Mother cow
Gopura	...	Tower of a temple
Grihasta	...	Householder
Grihastashrama	...	Life of a householder
Guru	...	Spiritual preceptor

Gurustan	...	Abode of the Guru
Kam	...	Lust or desire
Kamandal	...	Water-vessel carried by Sannyasis
Kambal	...	Woollen blanket
Kaupin	...	Loin cloth
Krodh	...	Anger
Kshetra	...	Place or field—here refers to free feeding house
Ladoos	...	Sweetmeat balls
Lobh	...	Greed
Lota	...	A small hand water-vessel
Mada	...	Pride
Mahant	...	Head of a religious institution
Maharshi	...	A great sage
Mahasamadhi	...	Ultimate absorption of a saint in God after dissolution of his body
Mahatma	...	A great soul
Mandap	...	A decorated structure for seating the image of Divinity or an honoured person
Mandir	...	Temple
Mantram	...	Incantation
Masjid	...	A Muslim place of worship
Matsara	...	Jealousy
Maya	...	Illusive power of God
Moha	...	Attachment
Mridang	...	A drum used in Indian music
Mukti	...	Emancipation
Namaskar	...	Salutation
Nim	...	A species of Indian tree with leaves of bitter taste, but possessing medicinal properties
Pranava	...	The sacred syllable-OM
Prasad	...	Food offered to God

Puja	...	Worship
Pujari	...	Worshipper
Purees	...	Fried wheat-bread
Ram-Bhajan	...	Devotional singing, or meditation on God
Ram-Japa	...	Repetition of the name Ram
Ram-Smaran	...	Remembrance of God
Roti	...	Home-made bread
Sadavart	...	Food-stuffs given free to Sadhus
Sadhana	...	Spiritual discipline
Sadhu	...	Ascetic
Samadhi	...	Saint's tomb or spiritual trance
Samsara	...	Worldly life or the wheel of birth and death
Samsaric	...	Pertaining to worldly life
Sandhya	...	The prayers of the Hindus during the three specified periods of the day
Sannyasin	...	Religious mendicant
Sarees	...	The main garments of a Hindu woman
Satis	...	Here refers to Hindu women who immolate themselves in the funeral pyre of their departed husbands
Sat-Sang	...	Association with Saint
Seth	...	Merchant
Shiva-Ling	...	Phallic symbol of Shiva, worshipped by Hindus
Shivaratri	...	The night on which special worship is offered to Shiva annually
Shishya	...	Disciple
Slokas	...	Verses
Tabooth	...	A Muslim term—see Mandap
Tambourine	...	Stringed Indian musical instrument
Tapasya	...	Austerity
Upadesh	...	Initiation or religious exhortation
Vakils	...	Lawyers

Novice to Master

Soko Morinaga (1925-95)

The Prospect of My Own Death

If I were to sum up the past forty years of my life, the time since I became a monk, I would have to say that it has been an ongoing lesson in the extent of my own stupidity. When I speak of my stupidity, I do not refer to something that is innate, but rather to the false impressions that I have cleverly stockpiled, layer upon layer, in my imagination.

Whenever I travel to foreign countries to speak, I am invariably asked to focus on one central issue: Just what is *satori*, just what is enlightenment? This thing called *satori*, however, is a state that one can understand only through experience. It cannot be explained or grasped through words alone.

By way of example, there is a proverb that says, “To have a child is to know the heart of a parent.” Regardless of how a parent may demonstrate the parental mind to a child, that child cannot completely understand it. Only when children become parents themselves do they fully know the heart of a parent. Such an understanding can be likened to enlightenment, although enlightenment is far deeper still.

Because no words can truly convey the experience of enlightenment, in this book I will instead focus on the essentials of Zen training, on my own path to awakening.

Let me start by saying that Zen training is not a matter of memorizing the wonderful words found in the *sutras* and in the records of ancient teachers. Rather, these words must serve as an impetus to crush the false notions of one’s imagination. The purpose of practice is not to increase knowledge but to scrape the scales off the eyes, to pull the plugs out of the ears.

Through practice one comes to see reality. And although it is said that no medicine can cure folly, whatever prompts one to realize “I was a fool” is, in fact, just such a medicine.

It is also said that good medicine is bitter to the taste, and, sadly enough, the medicine that makes people aware of their own foolishness is certainly acrid. The realization that one has been stupid seems always to be accompanied by trials and

tribulations, by setbacks and sorrows. I spent the first half of my own life writhing under the effects of this bitter medicine.

I was born in the town of Uozu in Toyama Prefecture, in central Japan. The fierce heat of World War II found me studying with the faculty of literature in Toyama High School, under Japan's old system of education. High school students had been granted formal reprieve from military duty until after graduation from university. When the war escalated, however, the order came down that students of letters were to depart for the front. Presumably, students of science would go on to pursue courses of study in medicine or the natural sciences and thereby provide constructive cooperation in the war effort; students of literature, on the other hand, would merely read books, design arguments, and generally agitate the national spirit.

At any rate, we literature students, who came to be treated as non-students, had to take the physical examination for conscription at age twenty, and then were marched, with no exceptions, into the armed forces. What is more, the draft age was lowered by one year, and as if under hot pursuit I was jerked unceremoniously into the army at the age of nineteen.

Of course we all know that we will die sooner or later. Death may come tomorrow, or it may come twenty or thirty years hence. Only our ignorance of just how far down the road death awaits affords us some peace of mind, enables us to go on with our lives. But upon passing the physical examination and waiting for a draft notice that could come any day, I found the prospect of my own death suddenly thrust before my eyes. I felt as though I were moving through a void day by day. Awake and in my sleep, I rehearsed the various ways in which I might die on the battlefield. But even though I found myself in a tumult of thoughts about death, there was no time for me to investigate the matter philosophically or to engage in any religious practice.

People who entered the army in those days rushed in headlong, fervently believing that ours was a just war, a war of such significance that they could sacrifice their lives without regret. Setting out in this spirit, we were armed with a provisional solution to the problem of death—or at least it was so in my case.

Among human beings, there are those who exploit and those who are exploited. The same holds true for relations among nations and among races. Throughout history,

the economically developed countries have held dominion over the underdeveloped nations. Now, at last, Japan was rising to liberate herself from the chains of exploitation! This was a righteous fight, a meaningful fight! How could we begrudge our country this one small life, even if that life be smashed to bits? Such reckless rationalization allowed us to shut off our minds.

And so it was that we students set out in planes, armed only with the certainty of death and fuel for a one-way trip, with favorite works of philosophy or maybe a book about Buddha's Pure Land beside the control stick, certain to remain unread. Many lunged headlong at enemy ships; still many others were felled by the crest of a wave or knocked from the air before making that lunge.

Then, on August 15, 1945, came Japan's unconditional surrender. The war that everyone had been led to believe was so right, so just, the war for which we might gladly lay down our one life, was instead revealed overnight as a war of aggression, a war of evil—and those responsible for it were to be executed.

Nothing Is Certain

For better or for worse, I returned from the army alive. Over a shortwave radio, an item extremely hard to come by in those days, I listened to the fate of the German leaders who had surrendered just a step ahead of the Japanese. When I heard the sentence that was read aloud at the Nuremberg Trials, "Death by hanging," the one word—*hanging*—lodged itself so tenaciously in my ears that I can still hear its echo. And then (perhaps through an American Occupation Forces policy?), a news film was shown. I saw this film at what is now the site of a department store, on the fifth floor of a crumbling cement block building that had only just narrowly escaped demolition in war-ravaged downtown Toyama.

In one scene, a German general was dragged to the top of a high platform and hanged before a great crowd that had assembled in the plaza. In another scene, the Italian leader Mussolini was lynched by a mob and then strung upside down on a wire beside the body of his lover. The film went on to show us how the dead bodies were subsequently

dragged through the streets while the people hurled verbal abuse and flung rocks at them.

Wearing cast-off military uniforms, my classmates and I went back to school, one by one. We returned, young men unable to believe in anything and hounded by the question of right and wrong. Technically classes were resumed, but in reality no studying took place. If a teacher walked into the classroom, textbook under his arm, he would be asked to take a seat on the sidelines while members of the group who had just returned from the army took turns at the podium:

“Fortunately or not, we’ve been repatriated, and we’re able to come back to school. But what we thought to be ‘right,’ turned out overnight to be ‘wrong.’ We may live another forty or fifty years, but are we ever going to be able to believe in anything again—in a ‘right’ that can’t be altered, in a ‘wrong’ that isn’t going to change on us? If we don’t resolve this for ourselves, no amount of study is ever going to help us build conviction in anything. Well, what do you fellows think?”

This went on day after day.

It so happened that in those days we had a philosophy teacher named Tasuku Hara. He later went on to become a professor in the philosophy department at Tokyo University. He was an excellent teacher, and I was sorry to hear that he died quite young. Anyway, one day this Professor Hara, who was like an older brother to us, stood up and insisted that we let him get a word in.

Taking the rostrum, he proceeded to talk to us, “Kant, the German philosopher in whose study I specialized, said this: We humans can spend our whole lives pondering the meaning of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ but we will never be able to figure it out. The only thing that human beings can do is come up with a yardstick by which to measure good and evil.”

“Looking at it this way,” he continued, “if we use the yardstick of the Japanese, this war was a holy war, while by American criteria, it was a war of aggression. So your life’s work is not to label this ‘good’ and that ‘evil,’ but to search for as useful a standard as you can find to apply anywhere you go on this earth. But this grand yardstick is not something you are going to come by in a day. Each of you will have to transcend time and place to find a standard that can have meaning to as many people as possible—and in order to do this, I suggest, first off, that you get on with your high school lessons!”

And so, with that kind advice, we resumed our classes. We did, however, also continue our self-indulgent theoretical debates. And I, for one, remained in a quandary over this question of good and evil; the problem had lodged itself deep in the back of my mind.

I think, in fact, that this was a dilemma of the times for Japan, common not only among young people like us, but among middle-aged and elderly people as well. We had completely lost sight of any ethical norm. I believe Japan had fallen into a state in which people scarcely knew what standards to apply even in raising their own children.

On top of all this, there were major changes in my own private affairs. To begin with, the year before the war ended, I had lost both of my parents in one blow: even as my mother was slipping away, my father suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died the very next morning, August twenty-fourth, without having regained consciousness.

I have three older sisters, but all of them had already married and moved away. They were living in Moji, Shanghai, and Manchuria. Travel conditions being what they were in that day, none of my sisters was able to attend the funeral. As the sole survivor on the family registry, I was responsible for the funeral arrangements, which I completed within two days with help from relatives. Then, before I could settle any further affairs, I received my mustering order and found myself off to the army.

Upon my homecoming after the war had ended, I was greeted with the twin problems of property and inheritance taxes. I come from a long line of landowners, and the small amount of land we had was under tenancy in rice fields. My father had always told me, "There's nothing as dependable as land. Even if there's a fire, it won't burn. If there's a flood, it won't wash away. If a thief sneaks in, he can't cart it off on his back. No matter what else you do in this life, don't you let go of that land!"

It so happened, though, that through no action of my own, my family's land was lost to the government's agrarian reform program. So now with even *this* gone, what was left to believe in? All that I had ever thought to be certain had turned out to be uncertain.

The war I had thought was holy turned out to be evil. I had not expected my own parents to die so suddenly, and yet there they went, one right after the other. The insurance money that my father had set aside to provide for his children in the event that something should happen to him was subject to a freezing of funds, and not a cent was

available for my use. And our ever-dependable land was now lost.

At the same time, prices were constantly on the rise. What could be bought for one yen one day cost ten yen the next, and before one knew it, a hundred-yen note was needed! It was practically unheard of in that time for students to hold part-time jobs, and consequently, I hadn't the slightest experience in using these hands and this body to earn wages. The problem of ethical standards aside, there was the very concrete economic question of how I was going to survive.

Looking back on myself in those days, I realize that it would not have been so curious if I had joined a gang of hooligans. Nor would it have been strange if I had committed suicide by hurling my body onto a railroad track. I woke up miserable every morning, and every day was as good as lost. Falling asleep in the worst of spirits, I would awaken to a new morning even darker.

This vicious cycle continued day after day, but somehow I managed to graduate from high school. However, as I had absolutely no inclination to enroll in university or to study anything at all, I went on to pass the days idly slouching around. Then, in the midst of that intense mental agony, I finally struck upon a realization: for as long as I could remember, I had done nothing but read books, acquire knowledge, churn up theories. The reason that I was now at a total loss for what to do with myself was, in the end, that I had never really used this body of mine in any kind of disciplined way.

The Encounter at Misery's End

So it was, through these mysterious causes and conditions, that I was led to knock at the gates of Zen temples. I still feel very grateful that, after calling at two or three temples, I was brought to Daishuin in Kyoto, where I still reside, to train under Zuigan Goto Roshi. Zuigan Roshi, formerly the abbot of Myoshinji and at that time the abbot of Daitokuji, was a truly great man.

I showed up at Roshi's door with long stringy hair, unkempt, with a towel hanging from my waist and heavy clogs on my feet. This great man's first words to me were, "Why have you come here?"

In reply, I rambled on for about an hour and a half, covering the particulars of my situation up to and including my present state. Roshi listened in silence, not attempting to insert so much as a single word.

When I had finished my exposition, he spoke, “Listening to you now, I can see that you’ve reached a point where there’s nothing you can believe in. But there is no such thing as practice without believing in your teacher. Can you believe in me?”

“If you can, I’ll take you on right now, as you are. But if you can’t believe in me, then your being here is just a waste of time, and you can go right on back where you came from.”

Zuigan Roshi, for his part, set forth in no uncertain terms from the very beginning the precept of believing wholeheartedly in one’s teacher, but I was not sensible enough at that time to yield with a ready and honest affirmation.

Roshi was then seventy years old, and I told myself, “That foolish old man! So what if he is the head of Myoshinji or the head of Daitokuji. Lots of ‘important’ people in this world aren’t worth much. If believing were so easy that I could just believe, unconditionally, in somebody I had just met for the first time, then wouldn’t I have believed in something before I ever showed up here? Didn’t I come here in the first place because I *don’t* find it so easy to believe?”

All this ran through my mind, but I knew from the start that if I were to say it aloud, I would be told straightaway, “In that case, your being here is a waste of time. Go on home now.”

Figuring that, even if my words were a lie, this man would have to let me stay if I spoke them, I said, “I believe in you. Please.”

At that time, I had no idea of the weight of the words *I believe*, but it was a lesson I was to be taught before the end of that very day.

There Is No Trash

“Follow me,” directed the roshi, and he assigned me my first task: to clean the garden. Together with this seventy-year-old master, I went out to the garden and started sweeping

with a bamboo broom. Zen temple gardens are carefully designed with trees planted to ensure that leaves will fall throughout the entire year; not only the maples in autumn but also the oaks and the camphors in spring regularly shed their foliage. When I first arrived, in April, the garden was full of fallen leaves.

The human being (or, my own mind, I should say) is really quite mean. Here I was, inside my heart denouncing this “old fool” and balking at the very idea of trusting so easily; yet, at the same time, I wanted this old man to notice me, and so I took up that broom and swept with a vengeance. Quite soon I had amassed a mountain of dead leaves. Eager to show off my diligence, I asked, “Roshi, where should I throw this trash?”

The words were barely out of my mouth when he thundered back at me, “*There is no trash!*”

“No trash, but ... look here,” I tried to indicate the pile of leaves.

“So you don’t believe me! Is that it?”

“It’s only that, well, where should I throw out these leaves?” That was all that was left for me to say.

“You don’t throw them out!” he roared again.

“What should I do then?” I asked.

“Go out to the shed and bring back an empty charcoal sack,” was his instruction.

When I returned, I found Roshi bent to the task of combing through the mountain of leaves, sifting so that the lighter leaves came out on top while the heavier sand and stones fell to the bottom. He then proceeded to stuff the leaves into the sack I had brought from the shed, tamping them down with his feet. After he had jammed the last leaves tightly into the sack, he said, “Take these to the shed. We’ll use them to make a fire under the bath.”

As I went off to the shed, I silently admitted that this sack of leaves over my shoulder was perhaps not trash; but I also told myself that what was left of that pile out there in the garden was clearly trash, and nothing but trash. I got back, though, only to find Roshi squatting over the remains of the leaf pile, picking out the stones. After he had carefully picked out the last stone, he ordered, “Take these out and arrange them under the rain gutters.”

When I had set out the stones, together with the gravel that was already there, and

filled in the spaces pummeled out by the raindrops, I found that not only were the holes filled but that my work looked rather elegant. I had to allow that these stones, too, failed to fall into the category of trash. There was still more, though: the clods of earth and scraps of moss, the last dregs. Just what could anyone possibly do with that stuff, I wondered.

I saw Roshi going about his business, gathering up these scraps and placing them, piece by piece, in the palm of his hand. He scanned the ground for dents and sinks; he filled them in with the clods of earth, which he then tamped down with his feet. Not a single particle remained of the mountain of leaves.

“Well?” he queried, “Do you understand a little bit better now? From the first, in people and in things, there is no such thing as trash.”

This was the first sermon I ever heard from Zuigan Roshi. Although it did make an impression on me, unfortunately, I was not keen enough to attain any great awakening as a result of simply hearing these words.

From the first, in people and in things, there is no such thing as trash. These words point to the fundamental truth of Buddhism, a truth I could not as yet conceive in those days.

Every year, I go to Hokkaido to lecture, and one year, there was a woman present who asked to meet me after the talk. The young woman, an ardent believer in Christianity, had this to say: “Listening to your talk today, I could see that about all Buddhism tells us to do is throw away our desires. On the other hand, Christianity says, ‘Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and the door shall be opened to you.’ This teaching answers the hopes of young people like myself. What do you think about this, Roshi?”

I answered her with a question of my own. “Is that to say that no matter how you knock, no matter how you seek, you shall receive and the door will be opened to you? Is it not the case that unless one knocks and seeks in a way that is in accord with the heart of God, the door surely will *not* be opened, nor will one’s desires be granted?”

I have heard the Christian teaching, “You devise your way, but God directs your steps”—you desire and choose and seek as you please, but it is God who decides whether or not your wishes are to be granted.

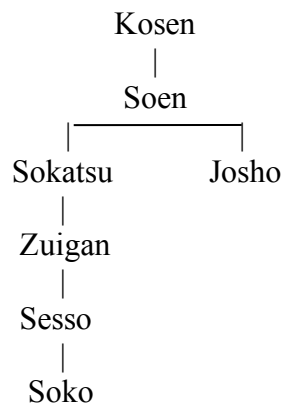
So, too, Buddhism does not say only to throw away all desire, to toss aside all seeking. It is especially in the Zen sect that we seek, that we knock at that door through a practice so intensive as to be like carving up our very bones. Buddhism points out, however, that after all the seeking, what we attain is the realization that what we have sought was always, from the first, already ours; after all the pounding away, we awaken to the fact that the door was already open before we ever began to knock.

So you see, Zuigan Roshi pointed out the most basic truth right from the start when he said, “From the first, in people and in things, there is no such thing as trash.”

Between Teacher and Student

One morning during the novice period of my training, Miss Okamoto asked Zuigan Roshi the following question during teatime: “Roshi, who was greater, Kosen Roshi or Soen Roshi?”

Some background information is needed here. I will give it in the form of a chart.



I am the “Soko” who appears last on the list, and Sesso is my elder brother in the *Dharma*. We both had Zuigan Roshi for our master, and his master was Sokatsu Roshi. If you trace the line all the way back, you arrive at Shakyamuni Buddha.

In the Zen school, the lineage of those great monks who have carried through with their training to attain *satori* is clearly known. This religious experience must be certified by the master, and only those who receive the seal of transmission of the *Dharma* enter

into the lineage. We know exactly who has received the seal from which master, and these successions are carefully preserved. In the Rinzai sect, the honorific title “Roshi” is used to refer to persons within these lines.

Kosen Roshi, who appears on the lineage chart above, refers to Kosen Imakita, an outstanding master who was the abbot of Engakuji in Kamakura from the latter days of the Tokugawa Period into the Meiji Period in the nineteenth century. During the time of the persecution of Buddhists, he rose above sectarianism and spared no efforts to revive Buddhism. There is a book about him by the layman D. T. Suzuki, who greatly admired him.

Kosen Roshi’s *Dharma* successor, Soen Shaku Roshi, who was the first to propagate Zen in America, also served as abbot of Engakuji in Kamakura. Soseki Natsume was one of the many who practiced Zen under this roshi.

It was these two masters to whom Miss Okamoto referred when she asked who was greater.

Zuigan Roshi, very austere and not one to joke, answered with a solemn face, “The master Kosen was greater.”

“Well, then, of Soen Roshi and Sokatsu Roshi, who was greater?” continued Miss Okamoto.

The Sokatsu Roshi to whom she now referred was one who chose not to live in a famous temple after he received the Dharma sanction to teach, but instead connected himself with a tiny hermitage called Ryoboan, in the Yanaka district of Tokyo, where he worked with lay householders in Zen practice. The first women to become famous for their outspoken stance on women’s rights in Japan were among his many followers. This Sokatsu Roshi was one of the subjects in question, but Zuigan Roshi replied, “The master Soen was greater.”

“Oh, Roshi, that’s terrible! Isn’t the lineage gradually thinning down to nothing? Well, who is greater, Sokatsu Roshi or Zuigan Roshi?” Miss Okamoto persisted.

Zuigan Roshi, responding to the lady’s concern that the lineage was thinning down to nothing, promptly answered, “I’m greater.”

Up to this point, it had always been the master who had been greater. But now when he comes to his own place in line he says, “I am greater than my teacher.”

This thoroughly pleased Miss Okamoto, who then asked, “Well, in that case, Roshi, who is greater, you or your disciple, Mister Sesso?”

At this, I thought I would burst out laughing. Zuigan Roshi, who had already filled the posts of abbot of Myoshinji and Daitokuji, was a high peak in the Zen world. His disciple, Mister Sesso, who did not even have his own temple yet, was living as a mere caretaker in a small hermitage inside the Myoshinji complex, just keeping the garden clean. Because I did not as yet have any insight into human beings’ intrinsic qualities and could only judge in terms of their social positions, I thought that comparing Zuigan Roshi and Mister Sesso was like comparing the moon and a turtle. There was simply no contest, and I was right on the verge of laughing out loud.

Zuigan Roshi, without stopping for even a second to consider, said, “Well, we don’t know that yet.”

When these words hit me, my face, which had been ready to burst into laughter, immediately straightened, and now, in spite of myself, I thought I was going to cry. I felt so blessed to be with this teacher. He might scold me unmercifully, call me worthless, and say that I am not fit to talk in front of anybody, but he always has his eye out to the future of his disciples. I realized that, even faced with my present immaturity, he believed in what I could become in a year, in two years, ten years, twenty years. Always bearing in mind my potential future form as well as my present one, he worked with me. I could feel this come through strongly when he said, “Well, we don’t know that yet.”

As it turns out, this Mister Sesso managed, some years later, to live up to these words, becoming the successor of Zuigan Roshi and then the abbot of Daitokuji. Following the instructions of Zuigan Roshi, I was able to stay by Sesso Roshi’s side for many years, and I later became his *Dharma* successor. At the time of his death, Sesso Roshi had achieved a towering state of mind, not inferior to that of his own teacher.

So, that single episode that one morning at teatime enabled me, at last, to trust my teacher from the bottom of my heart.

“For the Disposal of Your Corpse”

I hope that so far I have shown how a fellow, myself, who could not do anything properly, was taken in hand and turned into somebody who could at least cook food over a wood fire, make a bath, clean a toilet, and work in a garden. And, in time, I was also taught other things, such as *sutra* reading and the etiquette appropriate for a priest.

And then one day, after I had been at Daishuin over a year, the roshi said to me, “It is necessary for human beings, especially those who become priests, to have contact with other people. You must not live in isolation. You must form plenty of relationships. While it is, in a sense, sufficient for a disciple to practice alone under one teacher, for the purpose of forming social ties with others, you must go to a training hall.”

There are two types of Zen temples. Monks generally live in one type, as novices, until they graduate from the university. Once graduated, young monks gather in a professional monastery in order to carry on intensive *zazen* practice. It was decided that I would enter Daitokuji monastery for this latter type of training.

A monk takes with him to the professional training hall a sort of box to carry his robes in. It is traditionally a frugal affair made of thick paper hardened by lacquer, about a size larger than a book satchel. Bowls and chopsticks for eating, a razor and sharpening stone for shaving the head, *sutra* books, underclothes, and a raincoat are packed into two bundles and tied up with string so that the monk can carry all his worldly belongings on his back. He tucks his robes up at the waist, wraps his legs in gaiters, ties up his straw sandals, dons a wicker hat, and sets out for the monastery.

I was preparing my robe box when Roshi came into the room and asked, “How is it going? Have you tied up your box yet?”

“No, not yet. That is what I was just about to do.”

“Well, it’s good timing then. Bring the lid of your box with you and come into my room,” he instructed.

Wondering what roshi had in mind, I carried the lid into his room. The roshi took the lid from me and pasted three thousand-yen notes to its underside. (In those days, a thousand-yen note still carried some clout!)

“Do you understand the meaning of this?” he asked me after he had done this.

“Is it pocket money?” I started to ask, but checked myself before the words were out, knowing that I would be yelled at if I said something clumsy.

Roshi was already at the advanced age of seventy-one when I showed up begging to be taken in as his disciple. He had warned me then, “I don’t know how much longer I’m going to live. If your teacher dies on you, you might get cut off in the middle of your training. If there is nobody to take care of your financial needs, you are in trouble. You had better look for a younger master.”

“I still have something left from my father. I will not be a financial nuisance to you at all,” I had pleaded.

With this promise, I had been taken under Roshi’s wing as his disciple. In accordance with our agreement, he had never given me a penny for spending money.

Now, I was leaving for the monastery, and I thought that Roshi, even being as steadfast as he is, might be sending me off with some funds for personal expenses. Contrary to my expectations, however, he informed me, “This is *nirvana* money.”

The figure of Shakyamuni Buddha lying on his side to die is known as the “*nirvana* figure.”

“You’re heading out now for the training hall where you will lay down your life. If fortune goes against you, you’ll fall out and die by the wayside during training. So that you don’t become a burden to anybody, this money is for the disposal of your corpse.”

Roshi was ordinarily very stern and did not indulge in jokes. To hear him say, with that solemn face, “This money is for the disposal of your corpse,” sent a shudder down my spine. With renewed determination, I vowed to myself, “*I will do it!*”

I had thought about death before, as a student departing for the war front; however, the death implied in Roshi’s words—“This money is for the disposal of your corpse”—had a completely different meaning. It was not the death of the physical body to which he referred, but the death of my own ego.

No matter how cleverly we might manipulate ideas, coming right down to it, our real motive is to pamper our own precious selves. Unless we practice to overcome the obstinate attachment to looking out for our own dear person first, we cannot open our mind’s eye. This is how the roshi’s words struck me. I felt his words about disposing of my body as a spur in my side. Today, I send my own disciples off to the monastery with a

ten-thousand-yen note attached, for the disposal of their corpses.

The next morning, when it was still pitch dark, I went to the roshi's room to bid him a formal farewell, and then I let myself out the back door and stepped down onto the earthen floor at the entrance way. A novice monk is not allowed to use the front door. When I reached for my straw sandals, I heard Roshi come out behind me. Because Roshi was always one to stand on his dignity and not the type to see novice monks off at the door, it surprised me to see him come out through the kitchen. What's more, he stepped down onto the dirt floor, squatted at my feet, and made to tie the strings on my straw sandals.

Embarrassed, I drew my foot back and protested, "No, that's all right. I'll do it myself."

"Here, give me your foot," he urged, pulling my leg toward him. After he had tied the strings on my sandals, he tapped his fingers on the knots and said, "Do not thoughtlessly untie these strings."

Of course, once I reached the monastery and received permission to enter, I would untie the strings on these straw sandals. What he was saying, I understood, was not to ever lightly loosen the strings of the vow to practice. Again, I trembled under the strength of my own resolution as I sank into a deep bow before Roshi and then set out on foot through the still dark morning for the meditation hall at Daitokuji, in Kyoto.

The Meaning of Courage

When a monk aspiring to enter a training monastery reaches its entrance hall, he takes off his wicker hat and places it out of the way in a corner, climbs up the step, and announces himself. In a large Zen temple, there is a small step that gives way to a wide stretch of the vast corridor beyond. Although there may be dozens of monks in training within the heart of the temple, not a sound is heard in the tomblike stillness. Kneeling on that small step, the monk calls out in a long, loud voice, "*I beg your favor,*" in a form established many long years past.

The aspirant monk feels his own voice sucked up into the depths of the

monastery. Presently an answer rises from the distance, “Who is it?” An older monk appears, wearing a cotton robe and looking very experienced. “Where have you come from?” he demands.

The young novice places his hands politely before him on the step, along with papers that he has brought with him. Included in the papers are a record of his personal history, a formal letter requesting entry into the monastery, and a statement in which he pledges to sacrifice his life for practice, all written with brush and ink and enclosed in an envelope.

With great formality, the newcomer states his name and identifies the prefecture, town, and temple from which he comes and priest under whom he apprenticed. He promises that he has come to this place because he would like to assume the mantle of training and hang his bowl, staff, and robe on a hook in this training hall. He then asks that his request be made known.

The applicant is bid to wait as the monk disappears into the back. Returning after some time, the monk categorically does *not* say, “You are most welcome here. Please step inside.” Instead, without fail, he conveys the verdict that the newcomer’s request is refused. He might say, for example, that the training hall is full at the moment or that, because provisions in the monastery are extremely meager at this time, another monk could not possibly be accommodated.

In my own case, while my present weight is 150 pounds, back then I weighed less than 90 pounds and appeared to be nothing but skin and bones when I first begged entrance into the monastery. I was turned down with this excuse: “Your health appears to be extremely delicate. You would not be able to keep up with the intense training at this monastery. Please apply at another training hall.”

There are some forty professional training halls throughout the country, but a monk will be rebuffed wherever he goes. Upon rejection, he takes the envelope, which has been thrust back at him, and retires into a corner, out of the way of passersby. He takes up his post on the step, doubled over, forehead down to the ground in earnest supplication until he is granted permission to enter the monastery.

Bodhidharma, an Indian monk who lived in the sixth century, was the twenty-eighth ancestral teacher in line from Shakyamuni Buddha and the founder of the Zen

school. It is said that when Hui-ko (known in Japanese as Eka), who was eventually to become the successor to Bodhidharma and the second great Zen ancestor, came to seek the teaching, Bodhidharma utterly ignored him. Hui-ko stood at the gate and refused to move until Bodhidharma turned his way. Day after day, Hui-ko stood his ground. Snow began to fall on the ninth day of December, and it piled up around his knees, but still he did not budge. Finally, Bodhidharma turned to look at Hui-ko and demanded, “What are you doing here?”

Upon hearing the long awaited voice of the master, Hui-ko, shedding tears of gratitude, declared his intention to practice. Bodhidharma responded with the words, “The incomparable, marvelous way of the buddhas can be attained only by eternally striving, practicing what cannot be practiced, and bearing the unbearable. How can you, with your meager virtue, little wisdom, and with your shallow and arrogant mind, dare aspire to attain the true teaching?”

Thus, Hui-ko was told that with his little insight and few resources and with his inconstant and conceited mind, he was not capable of carrying out the kind of practice necessary to awaken to truth and real peace of mind. In answer to Bodhidharma’s allegations and in proof that his intention to practice was in no way frivolous, the story goes that Hui-ko drew forth a woodman’s hatchet from its sheath at his hip and cut off his left arm at the elbow. It was only when he placed the severed arm before Bodhidharma that he was at long last granted permission to practice under the master.

Rooted in this tradition, the rites of passage into Zen practice are, even today, some fifteen hundred years later, extremely rigorous. I knew from the beginning that I, too, would have to comply with the rules of the tradition. Thus I first crawled through the gate resigned to undergo the unavoidable ritual.

Yet, even as rituals go, this one was a bit rough. Soon after my initial rejection, another monk emerged, wielding an oaken stick. “Despite the fact that you were just denied entry into this temple, you persist in making a nuisance of yourself by displaying your unsightly form before our entranceway,” he said. “I ask that you immediately leave the premises.”

Up to this point, the language had been polite enough, but even with this new verbal onslaught, I did not withdraw. I maintained my position, not moving a muscle.

“Hey, you! What’s the matter—are you deaf?”

The monk followed up his tongue-lashing with jabs, kicks, thrusts, and all manner of blasphemy, and I soon found myself hurled bodily out the gate. When I peeked up and saw that the monk had disappeared inside and the coast was clear, I skulked back, like a cat out to filch, and resumed my cowering pose on the step. This whole scene was enacted repeatedly.

My patience held out in the beginning because I knew this ritual was one that I had to weather somehow, but gradually, as it went on and on, I began to get irritated: “Weren’t they being unnecessarily rough considering they were dealing with someone who was not putting up the slightest resistance?” By evening, however, these sentiments, too, had vanished, and I was left feeling wretched and pitiful. Then I grew plaintively sorry for myself: “Why am I letting them treat me like a worn-out rag? Why must I hold this miserable posture in front of this blasted doorway? Maybe both of my parents are dead, but I could still go back to Toyama. I have a few relatives left there. I can live without this cruel treatment.”

All of this and much more ran through my mind.

When I was ordained, I had felt some measure of determination to carry on with a strong practice. Later, when Roshi told me, “This is *nirvana* money. It is for the disposal of your corpse,” I had made a resolution that sent a chill through my body. Then, when Roshi tied the strings on my straw sandals and urged, “Do not untie these strings thoughtlessly,” hadn’t I laid resolve upon resolve, hadn’t I again made up my mind to do it? And now here I was, less than a day later, my mind vacillating, wondering why I had to be in this place, in this pitiful state.

I think that the human will is very weak indeed. Without having disciplined oneself, one cannot trust one’s own willpower. It is very easy to waver. When I saw my own wavering, I understood for the first time the significance of being made to keep crawling back into that entrance hall. This repeated crawling back is called “being kept standing in the garden.” Kept standing in the garden, the monk is forced to renew his original resolution, to strengthen that resolution, to resolve again, and to bolster that resolution still further. It is for this reason that he is kept at bay before the entrance hall.

All of my teeth—not so strong to begin with!—felt loose, and the blood surged to

my face. I thought my eyes were going to pop out of my skull, and having been bent so long in prostration, I thought my lower back would break loose at the sockets. It was still cold when I arrived at the meditation hall on the first of March, as winter was particularly bitter in Kyoto that year. The chill commenced at my toes, pierced my feet, which were wrapped in wet sandals, and stole its way above my knees so that all feeling in my legs was lost.

To take the unsettled self in hand, under whatever conditions, and return to the mind with which one set out; to pick oneself up again, after the mind changes, weakens, and breaks down, and stiffen the determination; to carry through the oft-reconstructed original vow—isn't this the true meaning of courage?

What Am I Doing Here?

Waiting outside that entrance, I was forced to revise my definition of courage. When I was young, I would try to demonstrate my bravery by attacking others, but this is not courage. Such aggression is, rather, like that of a puny dog with a loud bark. True bravery is pulling together one's weak mind and holding to one's original purpose. In order to maintain that hold, one must question oneself, "What am I doing here?"

While I was kept standing in the garden, a variety of thoughts drifted through my mind. I reflected that each person who finds his way into this training hall to practice is born different from the others. Each one comes into the world with different abilities, has different experiences and education, thinks different thoughts; no two are alike. If every one of the multifarious individuals who enter the training hall were to assert their own way, to insist that "This is what *I* think, how *I* do it," how on earth could practice go on?

As the saying goes, "Pour new wine into new wineskins." If it is with an eye toward self-transformation through practice that one pours one's body into the training hall, the new vessel, then it is necessary to first throw down all of one's past experiences, knowledge, and social status. One must become completely empty and enter the training hall with a humble and meek heart. In the corner before the entrance hall, the novice monk is forced to think all of this through and prepare to act accordingly.

On the evening of my third day to be held standing in the garden, a monk appeared to deliver a message, “It has been observed that since the day before yesterday, you have remained as you are before the entranceway, even while being subjected to verbal abuse and physical assault, and it has been determined that you do seem to harbor some measure of a desire to practice. For this reason, you are requested to step inside. However, as you have not been formally granted permission to train here, you are advised to remain on your guard.” These were the words with which I finally made it through the front door.

The room I was allowed to enter was composed of a wall on one side and paper doors, left wide open, on the other three sides. I placed the box that I had carried on my back before the wall, and, facing the wall, I began to do *zazen*. I had no way of knowing who might be looking in at me from the other three directions. I could not afford to be careless.

I was served three meals a day and given bedding each night, but I was kept in this room for five more days; thus I was subjected to a total of eight days of intense self-interrogation. I asked myself over and over, “What am I doing here? What is it I am hoping to do?” Under the force of my own questioning, I was compelled to revert always to the starting point, to the heart with which I had set out.

Again and again I returned to this take-off point; over and over I reiterated my original resolve. I believe that courage is upholding what you have once decided to do and enduring all troubles encountered along the way. To sustain and carry out that original intention—just this, in itself—is real courage.

Living Out Belief in Infinite Power

Thus did I enter Daitokuji Monastery, where I was to remain for the next fifteen years. During that period, I did *zazen* practice, and I eventually received the seal of *Dharma* transmission from my master—and I made countless blunders. It was due not to reasoning but to actual personal experience that I was able to persevere with this kind of practice even through all my failures. It was having to live out my belief that made me

break through with desperate concentrated effort, without grumbling. Rather than collapse when I found myself up against a wall, however formidable, I reexamined and reassessed, and then pushed on. I think the courage to persist in this way was the result of those very first lessons I was taught when trying to gain admittance to the monastery.

Hakuin Zenji, who is considered the highest peak in the world of Rinzai Zen Buddhism, asserted that three essential elements are necessary to the realization of practice, or, indeed, to any endeavor: the great roots of belief, great doubt, and great determination.

“Belief” is belief in your own teacher and in the truth for which he or she stands. It is, in the final analysis, belief in the limitless power of buddha-nature, which is by nature within you yourself.

While the next ingredient, doubt, may appear to be the exact opposite of belief, it actually signifies the constant awareness of your own unripeness and the consciousness of a problem that you hold always within yourself. The innate force of humankind, buddha-nature, has given birth to a marvelous tradition of wisdom, and you believe firmly in this wisdom. But reflecting upon your own immaturity and being unable to accept it creates a contradiction that stays with you constantly, as a problem.

You then must proceed with great determination, which means sticking to practice with true courage. In the Japanese language, *determination* is composed of two ideographs that carry the respective meanings “to be angry” and “aspiration.” Your anger is not directed toward someone else. Indignant with yourself over your own weakness and immaturity, you employ the strong whip of aspiration; this is determination.

It was not through books and sermons that I learned about Hakuin Zenji’s three requirements for the fulfillment of any goal. I was, instead, made to actualize these essentials in my day-to-day life. For this I am very grateful. I had only halfheartedly existed for the first twenty years of my life, and had I not been forced to live out these essential components—belief, doubt, and determination—I could never have persevered through anything like Zen training.

To believe in your teacher, in your seniors, in the tradition is, in other words, to believe in yourself. You must puzzle out your own unripeness. What’s more, you must continue, standing firm through any trials that crop up. Regardless of the time, regardless

of the place, without these three components you cannot carry anything through to completion. I firmly believe that no matter what changes occur in the world, these are the three pillars that will support anything we hope to accomplish.

Schoolteachers often see it as their sole duty to entice children to take an interest in studying. Many parents believe the ability to parent lies in rearing children who cry out as seldom as possible, who chafe as little as possible.

I ask you all to consider this carefully, though. Is our society, into which these children will eventually enter, an understanding society? It is a world in which each individual's mind is completely full of their own affairs; it is not a world in which everyone tries to empathize and treat others with care and concern. Quite the opposite, it is a society replete with people who relish the failures of others, who savor the poverty of the next-door neighbor as they savor a tender morsel of duck. Regrettably, our actual society is by no means our ideal society. When children are brought up by teachers who seek always to entertain, to sympathize, and to allow their students to have their own way, and by parents who try in any way they can to prevent their children from knowing pain and inconvenience, what happens to them when they are thrown out into the kind of world we have? Isn't it the case that many sink into a more or less daily round of confusion and frustration and disappointment?

I wonder why it is that parents, teachers, and other adults do not try to provide children earlier with the opportunity and the training to realize for themselves the power inherent within themselves, the power we all possess to stand up and work it out ourselves in times of trouble. Only when we taste frustration does the spirit of intrepidity, the resolution to rally and march on over every obstacle, arise from our innate force, from our inherent power.

And this is exactly what the training of a Zen monk provides.

Routine in the Monastery

The usual day begins at 3:00 a.m. with the sound of a ringing handbell and a voice shouting, "*Kaijo!*" ("Get up!"). The monks jump out of bed and pour from a small

bamboo dipper into their palms the three scoops of water that they are allotted to rinse their mouths and wash their faces. They go to the toilet, put on their robes, and present themselves in the main Buddha hall.

Each action of every person is orchestrated so that the group works together as a whole. When the gong sounds in the main hall signaling the monks to appear, the leader of the *zendo*—the hall where the monks eat, sleep and meditate—rings his small bell and everyone files out in silence. The morning *sutra* chanting in the main hall lasts about one hour.

At four in the afternoon, on the last day of the year, priests make a chanting round throughout the entire temple, beginning in the main Buddha hall and finishing in the kitchen, where the *deva Idaten* is enshrined; it is said that *Idaten* can circle the earth in a flash, and thus he is the god in charge of finding food for those in practice. Years ago, when I was just beginning to learn the *sutras*, I was first set to making this end-of-year round of chanting through the temple. Soon after I had finished, Zuigan Roshi, without warning, inquired, “With what mind did you chant those *sutras*?”

I lost my bearings completely; I was at a loss for what to say that would please the roshi. Then, when I hastened to respond with a good Zen answer, “I chanted with no-mind,” I got a sharp reprimand.

“You fool. Why don’t you chant in gratitude: ‘Thank you for giving me this year to practice in peace?’”

There was still another time when Roshi bellowed at me, “Your voice trembles because you are trying to be good at reading the *sutras*. Just chant the *sutras* with all your might.”

Sutra-chanting is one activity that afforded me countless opportunities to meet my own mistaken notions head-on.

After the morning chanting, the monks return to the *zendo* and the *zazen* period begins. At the clang of a special bell, they set out for *sanzen*, a private meeting with the teacher. One by one, they go in to encounter the roshi face to face. What takes place now is not a convivial meeting between equals but a very pointed question-and-answer session. Each monk has received from his teacher a *koan*, which he must answer at this private meeting. (A *koan* is a brief teaching taken from the words and actions of

Shakyamuni Buddha and his successors in the Dharma and meant to stimulate awakening.) The monk must master the true meaning of the *koan* through earnest *zazen*, not mere cogitation.

When the *sanzen* period is finished, it is breakfast time. For the first four years I lived in the monastery, the food we ate did not appear to be food at all; gradually the diet moved toward what we could call traditional. Even then our gruel consisted of round, unprocessed barley, not the pressure-steamed and dried barley usually used in cooking. Gruel is so much the standard morning fare in Zen monasteries that the very word for breakfast is derived from this dish.

Regardless of how long unprocessed barley is boiled, it does not thicken the water, so that the end result amounts to nothing more than salt water in which grains of barley have settled at the bottom. Along with this gruel, for about three years, we were served nothing but two smelly, brackish slices of what were called “perpetual pickles.” We would carefully suck the saltiness out of those two pickles as we ate, or I should say *drank*, our three bowls of gruel.

It is often said that Zen monks eat pickles without making a sound, but the truth is that the pickles that we have to chew aren’t crunchy! No matter how frugally and gingerly one licks at such a pickle to make it last, before you know it, the pickle has dissolved and slid down the throat.

It is indeed the case, not only with eating pickles, but with every movement in the dining hall—raising and lowering the chopsticks, picking up and setting down one’s bowl, sipping on hot gruel—that absolutely no sound is allowed. Whispering being out of the question, all action is orchestrated with certain designated gestures and the sound of wooden clappers. The dining hall, along with the bath and the toilet, are known as the three halls of silence, where quiet is strictly enforced. It goes without saying, of course, that silence is always maintained in the meditation hall.

All the fledgling monks reside together twenty-four hours a day, each in his assigned space of one tatami mat, in a hall with no partitions, so that there is practically no such thing as private time or private space. Consequently, the only occasion when one is completely alone is in the toilet, and so requiring the monk to maintain silence even there is probably the only way he can be prevailed upon to continue being mindful

uninterruptedly.

Bath day in a monastery occurs on every date of the month with a four or a nine. The monks not only take baths on this day but wash clothes, mend their robes and kimonos, and take care of any personal affairs that have arisen. At any rate they get a bath only once every five days.

No matter who a person is, if one rises early and goes to bed late, doing *zazen* and manual labor day in and day out, the pleasure of stepping into a bath will be like an ascent to heaven. One's spirits rise to exhilaration despite oneself. For this reason, the bath is one of the three halls of silence.

But let us return to the dining hall. It is important that quiet be the rule here because regardless of how poor one's food is, it is easy for a monk to allow his mind to wander. Indeed, I might even say that the poorer the fare, the more likely it is that the mind will wander.

After breakfast, the monks clean inside and outside the *dojo* before setting out just after 7:00 a.m. on their begging rounds. Days for begging alternate with days on which the master gives a talk, so that if the talks are given on the second, the fifth, the seventh, and the tenth of the month, then the first, the third, the sixth, and the eighth will be begging days. As there are seven training halls in Kyoto, the schedule is set up so that monks from neighboring monasteries do not go out to beg on the same day.

Year-round the mendicant monks weave their way through the city streets, their bare feet wrapped in straw sandals. They are not permitted to stand at the doorways of the houses they pass, but instead they form groups of three and walk single file, some thirty meters apart, chanting "*Ho!*" in loud voices as they move.

The houses in Kyoto are narrow, deep, and close together, like a row of eels. I was taught by an elder monk that we should walk at a great enough distance apart from one another so that the lady of the house who is in the backyard hanging out clothes can hear the "*Ho!*" of the lead monk, wipe her wet hands, prepare some small change or some rice, and make it to the front door at least in time to catch the third monk in line.

We are living now in a time of plenty, a time in which it is not difficult to accept money and goods from others. Almost all of the monks who went out to beg right after our defeat in the War, however, felt in their hearts a deep reluctance to engage in this

practice. I, too, found it very hard to simply hold my head down and, without reserve, accept the small change held out to me.

The red-light districts—euphemistically called the flower districts—were still in existence in those days, and one time, as we were begging in such an area, some loose coins were thrown down to us from a second-story window by a girl of the establishment and her customer. A monk who had only just graduated from the university and entered the monastery grabbed the change without thinking and made to throw it back. Upon returning to the temple, he received a sound scolding from the senior monk, who spelled out in no uncertain terms the twofold meaning of the practice of begging. On the one hand, it is a practice of tolerance or patience for the monk; on the other hand, begging provides others with the opportunity to throw down their covetousness. In the practice of mendicancy, benefit for oneself and benefit for others function together as the two wheels of a cart, and the young monk was told that he had acted thoroughly without prudence.

I overheard this monk being reprimanded, and the words touched me deeply. It occurred to me then that the “*Ho!*” we shouted while begging meant “*Dharma*” and that we were walking our course, spreading the *Dharma* throughout the world. I then proceeded to go begging with the notion that I was purifying the area as far as my “*Ho!*” would reach, as if I were a giant vacuum cleaner. One day when I was visiting Zuigan Roshi, I happened to express these sentiments—thereby earning for myself a thundering roar.

“Fool!” he cried. “Don’t delude yourself. That ‘*Ho!*’ you’re shouting stands for the bowl you are carrying to receive the alms. Just become that bowl. Don’t worry about who is doing what for what reason or about what anyone is receiving or about anything else. Just go out begging without seeking anything, like flowing water, like a cloud blown by the wind.”

It was thus that another of my silly notions met its demise. In the course of spiritual practice one is apt, from time to time, to get sidetracked down various lanes of warped and backward impressions.

When the monks return from begging, after 10:00 a.m., it is time for lunch. This meal consists of barley-rice, miso soup with greens, and two pickles. Approximately one part rice is added to bind nine parts unprocessed barley. After the mixture is boiled to its

softest possible consistency, it is mashed with a ladle so that the crushed barley becomes at least a bit sticky. Unmashed, the barley will remain crunchy and quite inedible. For supper, the leftovers from lunch are thrown together to form a kind of hodgepodge. When the monks eat too much barley rice at lunch, extra water must be added to the hodgepodge at supper, making for an especially watery concoction.

Lunch is followed by a period of manual labor, called *samu*. Tasks might include working in the monastery vegetable garden, pruning shrubs and trees, pulling weeds, and splitting firewood. Work is given special emphasis in monastic life, and the monks are constantly cautioned not to consider the weight of a job in relative terms but to simply drop all analysis and apply themselves wholeheartedly to the task at hand.

Pai-chang, who lived in ancient China from 720-814, is given credit for establishing the standard for regulations followed in Zen temples. This Master Pai-chang continued working even after he had reached the ripe old age of eighty. When his disciples, concerned about his health, hid their master's tools, Pai-chang was forced to quit working. At the same time, however, he also quit eating. When his disciples begged him to take sustenance, he answered them with words that are now famous: "A day without work, a day without food."

Once when I told this story to a student he remarked, "I see. Those who don't work shouldn't eat. Right?"

While the two statements, that of Pai-chang and of the student, may appear to be superficially similar, they are, in fact, completely different. The difference between facing someone else and saying, "Those who don't work shouldn't eat," and saying of oneself, "If I don't work, I don't eat," is the difference between heaven and earth. The former is a seed of aggression and dispute, while the latter is a precept rising from deep within oneself.

After the work period and the "medicinal" supper of hodgepodge (the word for supper is literally written "medicine stone"), the monks enter the *zendo* and do *zazen* until 9:00 p.m. During this period, they have another *sanzen* encounter with the master. At 9:00 p.m., special *sutras* are read before "bedtime," the literal meaning of which is "to lift the rules (for the day)." This does not mean, though, that when the *sutra* is finished and the lights go out, everyone goes right to sleep. Once the *sutra* is chanted, the monk in

charge rings his bell, and the monks quickly take off their robes, take their bedding down from the shelf, and fall in an orderly line into bed—for the time being, that is.

You may not have had a chance to see the inside of a *zendo*, but you can get the picture by imagining an army barracks. I have heard it said that when the Zen sect decided to build a *zendo*, they looked to army barracks for their example. There is a long row of tatami mats on each side of the hall, and each monk is allotted a single mat for doing *zazen*, sleeping, and otherwise conducting his life. The aisle between the two rows of mats is covered with Chinese-style tiles.

Bedding consists of a single futon, which is folded in half and serves as both the mattress and the cover. This is referred to as an “oak leaf futon” because the monk fits inside the futon like the sweet-bean ricecake that is wrapped in a single oak leaf. The monk who is accustomed to such bedding can skillfully wrap himself in like a rolled sea tangle and be quite warm. At any rate, summer and winter, this one layer is the monk’s only bedding.

Just as soon as the monk in charge of the *zendo*, carrying a stick known as a *keisaku*, has finished his inspection of the long rows of rolled sea tangle, the lights are switched off, and the senior monks then leave the *zendo*. This is the cue for the others to simultaneously get out of bed and back into their robes and, carrying their *zazen* mats under their arms, head outside to find a space under the eaves of the main hall or on a tombstone, each to his own choice, and do some nighttime sitting.

I myself used to choose the tombstone with the highest base I could find for nighttime sitting. I had in all sincerity come up with the childish notion that perching atop a high stone—clearly a dangerous place to doze off—would prevent me from growing drowsy.

Until nine o’clock everyone sits together in the *zendo*. Then, after the rules are lifted for the day, everyone voluntarily sits on his own. For the monk new to life in the *dojo*, customs of this sort are nothing but arduous. It gradually dawned on me, though, that the practice of nighttime sitting truly makes sense.

Just as everyone is endowed with his own particular facial features, so is each person’s situation uniquely his own, making for a boundless variety of circumstances. The heart with which each one of us is born is a wonderful thing, but the aftereffects of

accumulated experiences and knowledge vary with each person. For this reason, the time set up for individual sitting after the lights go out is needed.

In order of their seniority, the monks return to the *zendo* to sleep, and this means that the most junior of the monks do not get to bed until around midnight. It follows, then, that even on regular days, they only clock in about three hours of sleep. Weakling that I was, I always had the feeling of fainting rather than of falling asleep. What's more, during the one week of the month devoted to intensive *zazen*, called *sesshin*, sleep is curtailed still further.

To describe *zendo* customs in this way may paint the picture of an inordinately severe lifestyle, but during the period of life when one is most flush with energy and vigor, it is impossible to settle into quiet *zazen* practice if one sleeps whenever the urge to sleep hits and eats just because the urge has hit to eat. By the same token, following a plain vegetarian diet helps to still the mind to some degree and is, I believe, necessary.

In the *zendo* lifestyle, private ownership is strictly limited. The monks carry out their lives in the barest necessities: loincloth, thin cotton undergarment, wide belt, unlined kimono, and light outer robe.

Even in wintertime, there is no thicker or lined kimono. I myself never owned an undershirt until I reached my mid-thirties. There was slightly thicker cotton wear for winter, but still only the thin undergarment, unlined kimono, and robe, so that the only place on the body where the wind did not directly strike was around the middle where the belt was tied. It was as if we were living naked, with most of the body always exposed to the air. Because one feels the cold most acutely upon being roused out of bed in the mornings, in the dead of winter, the monk hurriedly chills his body—because once the skin is thoroughly chilled, one hardly feels the cold. To do *zazen* in the winter, I found, is to intimately know the cold air, as it moves up through the sleeves to be slightly warmed by the body, then up from the chest, and out to the chin in a tepid flow.

Regardless of the season or weather, the monks wear socks only for special ceremonies. Both the straps of the wooden thongs, which are made of braided bamboo bark, and the strings of the straw sandals rub and harden the skin on the feet, so that the hide on a monk's instep is even thicker than the skin on another person's heels.

Living a life of such physical deprivation, sleepiness is like a chronic illness, and

the stomach is hungry year-round. Even the person of considerable desires undergoes a simplification: his craving is limited almost entirely to the desire for food and for sleep.

Elderly ladies, especially, would bow with respect when they saw us out with bare feet in straw sandals, making our begging rounds over icy winter streets. To be frank, though, after the first year or so, most monks become accustomed to monastery life, and the physical rigors cease to be of much consequence. Indeed, the most distressing aspect of training is not the physical suffering but the spiritual agony that invariably accompanies the private dialogues with the teacher. This distress decidedly *does not* disappear after a year.

The heart of the encounter with the teacher is the student's presentation of a *koan*. For illustration, I will use one of the most famous *koans*, "Show your original face before the birth of your mother and father." This *koan* asks, in other words, "What was your true form before your parents gave you birth?"

Some of you will submit that the question is a ridiculous one, but the monk who is given this *koan* knows that he must, without fail, take a solution in to his teacher the following morning. He is compelled to work on it as if for dear life. Going at it in desperation, the first thing he realizes is that, while the physical body is passed on from parent to child, life itself continues infinitely. No child is born after the parent's death. Fascinated by the death of the physical body, we make our divisions—the life of the parent, the life of the child, my life, your life—but in reality, even if we endlessly retrace the past, the life that we are living now is infinite continuity, and we cannot pin down any beginnings for it. We can understand this much through simple reasoning alone.

Furthermore, the great functioning of this life is the functioning of the mind. To think of it in purely logical terms, the question arises: Transcending this thing one calls "myself," what is the substance of the life that continues eternally? Going beyond the self that we distinguish on the basis of small differences—differences in facial features, in personality, in abilities—*what is the original and constant true self?* Everyone at least eventually realizes that this is the question of the *koan*.

Even though the practitioner knows this much, he still has quite a hard way to go before he can say to the roshi, "*This is my real form.*" Almost inevitably, he starts out proffering all manner of empty theories. The teacher, in the beginning, just listens in

silence and rings his bell, indicating that the meeting is over and the next person in line must make his entrance.

In due course, however, the teacher will shout, “I’m not asking for explanations! Get rid of your theories and *show me* your original face!” The monk winds up at his wits’ end.

The monks are not assembled in one hall and then commanded to answer the Zen question one after the other: “All right, you’re next.” Rather, when it is time for the private meetings, the monk on duty brings a small bell out to a location halfway between the *zendo* and the roshi’s interviewing room and leaves it there. The roshi, holding a thick wand called a *shippei*, waits ready in his interview room. When the bell is rung, the monks, who are doing *zazen*, come out of the *zendo*, line up before the bell, and await their turn. At the roshi’s beckoning, the monks, one by one, ring the bell to announce they will enter the room.

Once inside the roshi’s room, master and student, completely alone, carry on the Zen dialogue. No one else is within earshot. When the roshi decides the meeting in the private room is finished, he rings his handbell and the monk bows and departs, brushing past the person next in line to meet the teacher.

This private meeting with the teacher takes place two times each day, morning and evening, on regular days, and three times a day during the week of intensive *zazen*. Additionally, an especially intensive training period, called *Rohatsu O-sesshin*, is held once a year, from December first through the cock’s crow on the morning of December eighth. This week of practice commemorates the great enlightenment that Shakyamuni Buddha experienced upon seeing the morning star on December eighth. During this week, no one may lie down to sleep, and there are four private meetings with the teacher each day.

No amount of theorizing will help the monk to pass his *koan*. And when all his reasoning is exhausted, and the bell is rung to call the monks to meet the roshi, he finds that he cannot leave his *zazen* mat. On regular days, the monk may be permitted to forego the meeting and wholeheartedly continue *zazen*. During the week of intensive practice, however, two or three senior monks with faces like the devil will come to jerk the unwilling monk off his cushion and force him to go to the teacher. The monk cannot

avoid the meeting just because he has no answer to his *koan*.

If one looks at the pillars between the *zendo* and the interview room, one finds numerous scratches. These are the marks of desperation left by those monks who, lacking an answer to their *koan*, tried to cling to the posts when they were being dragged by their seniors to the private interview. Many times the monk who tenaciously refused to be torn from the post had his hands slapped with the *keisaku*. Feeling the sting of pain, he would involuntarily let go and be pulled away to meet the roshi.

The monk who finds himself before the roshi, silent, without an answer, can expect the roshi to bellow, “What are you doing here if you’ve got nothing to say!”—and to strike him with his thick stick. Clobbered from all sides, the monk knows that even if he makes it through this one, there will be another mandatory meeting to face some hours later, in the evening, or first thing in the morning. No matter how lazy or how cunning a monk may be, he is driven into a corner so that he cannot contrive to wiggle his way through with halfhearted or makeshift means. I should mention that this style of training is found particularly in monasteries of the Rinzai sect as opposed to Soto Zen monasteries.

As a result of this experience, I often dreamed of having *satori* when I was in the training hall. Upon awakening I would find, for the most part, that the dreamt realization was trifling and to no advantage. There were times, however, when the experience I had in a dream held up even when I awoke. Two or three times when this happened I went in high spirits to meet my teacher, and I “passed” my *koan*.

Every night, when I finally got the opportunity to roll myself up oak-leaf-style in the futon, rather than falling asleep, I would fall into a sort of unconsciousness, and within an instant I would be roused to start another day. Yet each time I fell into this swoon of a sleep, the very last thing to stay awake was the *koan*. The body sleeps, but the confrontation with the teacher first thing the next morning looms large, the sense of inquiry persisting to the end, and “*Original Face...Original Face...*” takes over even in dreams.

Then, every morning the monk comes running through the *zendo*, clanging a bell and announcing, “Get up! Get up!” When one awakens to that sound, even before one is fully conscious, the sense of inquiry, “*Original Face,*” is in action. Awareness of a

problem awakens first, and consciousness comes around at length. Incredible though it may seem, this was my experience training in Daitokuji.

No End to Practice

Even for those who follow a monastic lifestyle, it is never easy to extricate ourselves from the acquired customs that we have hauled along with us for as long as we can remember. We go along relying on self-chosen value judgments, discriminating on the basis of forms we see with our eyes, distinguishing by the sounds we hear with our ears, differentiating according to the smells we pick up with our noses. We discern tastes with our tongues, form fancies by what we feel on our skin, hold prejudiced notions in our consciousness. We compare and contrast everything we encounter. It was not a simple thing for me to emerge from this habitual kind of functioning of the mind and to purely and directly experience self and other as one.

In order to instantly apprehend situations, a phenomenon for which the philosophical term is “pure experience,” I had to pass through the fear of death. I must confess that until I first experienced this in the monastery, life was nothing but continuous physical and spiritual anguish.

Let me relate something very idiotic that occurred on begging rounds one day during the period when, asleep or awake, my *koan* was never out of my head and my only thought was “I want enlightenment... I want enlightenment...” Unaware of what was ahead of me or behind me, I banged into something; I had run right into a cow’s behind! At just the instant that I realized I had hit the cow’s rump, aside from mighty astonishment, the first thing that crossed my mind was, “Oh! *This* is enlightenment!”

The most stubborn of spectators is always right within oneself, always assessing and judging one’s own condition. Even when one has reached the extreme of utter exhaustion, the guardian that discriminates and cannot forget this thing called “self” gets busy whispering all sorts of petty information. In my own case, governed by the tiny knowledge and experience that I had accumulated, the guardian voice would whisper this most unwarranted warning: “*If you go on like this, you might die. You’d better stop*”

here.”

Doing *zazen* and still more *zazen*, I chalked up nothing but distress and fatigue; both my head and my body began to lose their normal functioning. The thought that I would surely meet my death if I continued in this vein arose many times to interrupt my practice. But to give the conclusion before the explanation, I can tell you that matters most definitely did not take the turn that I feared. The extremes of fatigue and anguish did not give way to death, but evolved, quite contrary to expectations, into a curve that led right back to where I had started out. One night I sat, in the middle of the night, a lump of fatigue sitting on a *zazen* cushion, both body and consciousness were in a haze, and I could not have roused the desire for *satori* if I had wanted to when, suddenly, the fog cleared and a world of lucidity opened itself. Clearly seeing, clearly hearing, it was yet a world in which there was no “me”!

I cannot fully explain that time. To venture an explanation would be to err somewhere. The one thing I am sure of is that in this instant, the functioning of the heart with which I was born came into play in its purest form. I could not keep still in my uncontainable joy. Without waiting for the morning wake-up bell, I made an unprecedented call on the roshi and received permission to leave the temple for about two hours to deliver the news of my experience to Zuigan Roshi.

It did not take me an hour to walk through the black darkness to Daishuin. When I arrived, Roshi was still in bed. I crawled right up to his pillow and said very simply, “I finally saw.”

Roshi sprang from his bed, examined me for a time, as if with a glare, and said, “It’s from now on. From now on. Sit strongly.”

This is all he said to me. From then on for the next sixteen years, until my fortieth year and Zuigan Roshi’s death at age eighty-seven, whether in the monastery or back in the temple, I continued *koan* practice. No, really I must say that I continue *still*. It is not just a matter of the sayings of old masters, but the living *koan* of human life that continues without limit.

Awakening to your own original face—“enlightenment”—does not mean being able to explain yourself or the source of yourself. Enlightenment is liberation from the dross of learning and experience that, without one’s being aware of it, has accumulated

and settled like so much sediment—or like cholesterol into one’s arteries! It is the vivid, lively manifestation of the heart with which one is born—the heart that is no-form, no-mind, non-abiding, attached neither to form nor to thought, but in dynamic motion. Consequently, enlightenment is not an end point, but rather a starting point.

I have gone on at great length about life in a Zen monastery, a subject that may seem totally unrelated to your own lives. Yet all people, regardless of how their lives are structured, hold themselves dear. Everyone wants to be happy. And enlightenment is the starting point of happiness. We can use the words “true self-confidence” in place of “enlightenment.” True self-confidence means confidence in the true self, and confidence in the true self is a necessary requisite to happiness.

The power in which you can come to believe in yourself is not gained through training. It is the great power that transcends the self, that gives life to the self. The purpose of Zen practice is to awaken to the original power of which you have lost sight, not to gain some sort of new power. When you have sought and sought and finally exhausted all seeking, you become aware of that with which you have been, from the beginning—before ever beginning to search—abundantly blessed. After you have ceaselessly knocked and knocked, you realize, as I have said, that the door was standing wide open even before you ever started pounding away. That is what practice is all about.

Not only in places especially set up for training, but anytime and anywhere, the person who exerts himself or herself with dignity, without worrying about results and without giving in to disappointment, is a true practitioner, a true person of the Way. I believe that *just this* is the form of true human well-being.

A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-Alawi (1869-1934)

Martin Lings

Seen From Outside

The narrative which follows is by Dr. Marcel Carret. It speaks for itself and needs no introduction; and having read it, the reader will no doubt understand why I have chosen to begin with it rather than with anything else, although at its outset the Shaikh is already fifty years old.

‘I met the Shaikh Al-‘Alawī for the first time in the spring of 1920. It was not a chance meeting, for I had been called in to him in my capacity as doctor. It was then only a few months since I had started a practice at Mostaganem.

‘What could have prompted the Shaikh to consult a doctor, seeing that he attached so little importance to the petty misfortunes of the flesh? And why had he chosen me, a newcomer, from among so many others?

‘It was from him himself that I eventually learned the answers to these questions: not long after my arrival at Mostaganem, I had set up a clinic in the Arab town of Tigitt exclusively for the use of Moslems, and three times a week I gave consultations there for a minimum fee. Moslems have an instinctive repugnance for State-organized dispensaries, and my clinic, which was set up in their very midst and arranged to suit their tastes and customs, was a success. Echoes of this came to the ears of the Shaikh.

‘His attention was attracted by this initiative on the part of a newly arrived French doctor who, unlike most Europeans, apparently did not look down on Moslems from the heights of a disdainful pride. Without my knowing it, and without the least attempt at investigation on his part, he was benevolently informed by his disciples as to how I looked, what I did, my movements, my way of treating the sick and my sympathetic attitude towards Moslems. As a result, the Shaikh Al-‘Alawī already knew me quite well when I was still ignorant of his very existence. A rather serious attack of influenza which he had during the Spring of 1920 made him decide to send for me.

‘From my first contact with him I had the impression of being in the presence of

no ordinary personality. The room I was shown into, like all rooms in Moslem houses, was without furniture. There were simply two chests which, as I found out later, were full of books and manuscripts. But the floor was covered from end to end with carpets and rush mats. In one corner was a rug-covered mattress, and here, with some cushions at his back, sitting straight upright, cross-legged, with his hands on his knees, was the Shaikh, in a motionless hieratic attitude which seemed at the same time perfectly natural.

‘The first thing that struck me was his likeness to the usual representations of Christ. His clothes, so nearly if not exactly the same as those which Jesus must have worn, the fine lawn head-cloth which framed his face, his whole attitude—everything conspired to reinforce the likeness. It occurred to me that such must have been the appearance of Christ when he received his disciples at the time when he was staying with Martha and Mary.

‘My surprise stopped me for a moment on the threshold. He too fixed his eyes on *my* face, but with a far-away look, and then broke the silence by asking me to come in, with the usual words of welcome. His nephew, Sidi Muhammad, acted as his interpreter, for although the Shaikh understood French well he had some difficulty in speaking it, and in the presence of a stranger he made as if he did not know it at all.

‘I asked for some sandals to cover my shoes, so as not to defile the carpets and the mats, but he said that this was quite unnecessary. A chair was brought for me, but it seemed so ridiculous in such surroundings that I declined it, saying I would rather sit on a cushion. The Shaikh smiled almost imperceptibly, and I felt that by this simple gesture I had already gained his sympathy.

‘His voice was gentle, somewhat subdued. He spoke little, in short sentences, and those about him obeyed in silence, waiting on his least word or gesture. One felt that he was surrounded by the deepest reverence.

‘I already knew something of Moslem ways, and realizing that I had to do with someone who was not just “anyone”, I was careful not to broach too abruptly the subject for which I had been called in. I let the Shaikh question me, through Sidi Muhammad, about my stay in Mostaganem, what had brought me there, the difficulties I had met with, and how far I was satisfied.

‘During this conversation a young disciple had brought in a large brass tray with

some mint-flavoured tea and some cakes. The Shaikh took nothing, but invited me to drink when the tea had been served, and himself pronounced the “Bismillah” (in the Name of God) for me as I raised the cup to my lips.

‘It was only after all this usual ceremonial was over that the Shaikh decided to talk to me about his health. He said that he had not sent for me to prescribe medicines for him; certainly, he would take medicine, if I thought it absolutely necessary and even if I thought it would help him, but he had no desire to do so. He simply wanted to know if the illness he had contracted a few days previously was a serious one. He relied on me to tell him quite frankly, and without keeping anything back, what I thought of his condition. The rest was of little or no importance.

‘I felt more and more interested and intrigued: a sick man who has not the cult of medicines is rare enough as it is, but a sick man who has no particular desire to get better and who simply wants to know where he stands is a still greater rarity.

‘I proceeded to make a most thorough medical examination, to which the patient docilely submitted. The more circumspect I showed myself during this examination, the more confidently he put himself into my hands. He was amazingly thin, so much so that one had the impression of an organism in which life was only working at a reduced speed. But he had nothing seriously wrong with him. The only other person present at this examination was Sidi Muhammad who, with his back towards us and eyes cast down, stood sadly and respectfully in the middle of the room, translating the questions and answers in a low voice, but seeing nothing of what took place.

‘When I had finished, the Shaikh resumed his hieratic attitude on the cushions, Sidi Muhammad clapped his hands, and the young man brought in some more tea.

‘I then explained to the Shaikh that he had a fairly bad attack of influenza, but that there was nothing seriously wrong with him, that his chief organs were working quite normally and that probably all his troubles would disappear of their own accord after a few days. But although it was unlikely there would be any complications, there was always a certain risk of them in such cases, so that his illness must be closely watched, and I would have to come and see him again by way of precaution. I added that I found his thinness somewhat alarming, and that he ought to eat a little more. I had in fact learnt, in answer to my questions, that his daily diet consisted of no more than one litre of milk,

a few dried dates, one or two bananas, and some tea.

‘The Shaikh seemed very satisfied with the result of my examination. He thanked me with dignity, apologized for having troubled me, and told me I could come to see him again whenever I thought it necessary. As to the question of food, his point of view was somewhat different from mine: for him eating was an obligation, but he was in the habit of reducing his diet to a minimum.

‘I pointed out that if he did not have enough to eat he would grow weaker and weaker and would have less resistance against future illnesses. I understood very well that he attached no importance to this, but on the other hand if he felt at all bound to prolong his life or simply to keep himself alive, it was indispensable for him to bow to the demands of nature, however annoying they might be.

‘This argument evidently impressed him, for he remained silent for quite a time. Then, with an evasive waive of the hand and a slight smile he said gently: “God will provide.”

‘He was now sitting just as he had been at my entry, and there was a far-away look in his eyes. I retired discreetly, carrying with me an impression which, after more than 20 years, remains as clearly engraved on my memory as if it was barely yesterday since all this took place.

‘I have described this first visit to the Shaikh Al-‘Alawī in all its detail because I thought that the best way to bring out his personality was to start by transmitting the impression he made on me at our first meeting. This impression is all the more reliable for my having known nothing about him before I set eyes on him.

‘I tried to find out something about this unusual person, but no one seemed able to tell me anything in particular. North African Europeans live as a rule in such ignorance of the inner workings of Islam, that for them a Shaikh or a Marabout is a kind of wizard, without any importance except for what political influence he may have; and as this Shaikh had no such influence, they knew nothing about him.

‘Moreover, on second thoughts, I began to wonder whether I had not been rather the victim of my imagination. That Christ-like face, that gentle voice, so full of peace,

those courteous manners, might have influenced me into supposing a spirituality which was in fact non-existent. His attitude might have been a calculated “pose”, and beneath this promising surface there might be nothing at all.

‘None the less he had seemed so simple and natural that my first impression persisted, and it was duly confirmed by what followed.

‘The next day I went to see him again, and also for several days after that, until he had quite recovered. Each time I found him just the same, motionless, in the same position, in the same place, with the far-away look in his eyes and the faint smile on his lips, as if he had not moved an inch since the day before, like a statue for which time does not count.

‘At each visit he was more cordial and more confiding. Although our conversations were fairly limited and altogether general in topic, apart from medical questions, my impression grew stronger and stronger that the man in front of me was no impostor. We were soon on friendly terms, and when I told him that I considered my visits as doctor no longer necessary, he said that he had been very pleased to make my acquaintance and that he would be glad if I would come to see him now and then, whenever I had time.

‘This was the beginning of a friendship which was to last until the death of the Shaikh in 1934. During these fourteen years I was able to see him at least once a week. Sometimes I went for the pleasure of talking to him when I had a few spare moments, sometimes it was because he had had me sent for on account of some member of his family, and often also because his own precarious health needed my attention.

‘Little by little my wife and I became intimates of the house. After a certain time they made us feel altogether at home there, and eventually they came to consider us almost as members of the family. But this took place gradually and imperceptibly.

‘When I first met the Shaikh the present *zāwiyah* [Sufi place of prayer] had not yet been built. A group of *fuqarā* [Sufi disciples] had bought the ground and made a present of it to the Shaikh, and the foundations had already been laid, but the troubles of 1914 had interrupted the work, which was not resumed until 1920.

‘The way in which this *zāwiyah* was built is both eloquent and typical: there was

neither architect—at least, not in the ordinary sense—nor master-builder, and all the workmen were volunteers. The architect was the Shaikh himself—not that he ever drew up a plan or manipulated a set-square. He simply said what he wanted, and his conception was understood by the builders. They were by no means all from that part of the country. Many had come from Morocco, especially from the Riff, and some from Tunis, all without any kind of enlistment. The news had gone round that work on the *zāwiyah* could be started once more, and that was all that was needed. Among the Shaikh's North African disciples there began an exodus in relays: masons some, carpenters others, stone-cutters, workers on the roads, or even ordinary manual labourers, they knotted a few meagre provisions in a handkerchief and set out for the far-off town where the Master lived to put at his disposal the work of their hands. They received no wages. They were fed, that was all; and they camped out in tents. But every evening, an hour before the prayer, the Shaikh brought them together and gave them spiritual instruction. That was their reward.

‘They worked in this way for two months, sometimes three, and then went away once more, glad to have contributed to the work, and satisfied in spirit. Others took their place and after a certain time went off in their turn, to be immediately replaced by new arrivals, eager to start work. More always came, and there was never any lack of hands. This went on for two years, by the end of which the building was finished. This manifestation of simple and outspoken devotion gave me a deep sense of inward happiness. The world evidently still contained some individuals disinterested enough to put themselves, without any recompense, at the service of an ideal. Here, in mid-twentieth century, was the same fervour that had built the cathedrals in the Middle Ages, and no doubt the actual building itself had taken place along somewhat the same lines. I was happy to have been an astonished eye-witness.

‘As soon as the *zāwiyah* was finished, the *fuqarā* said that they would like to have a big festival to celebrate its inauguration, and the Shaikh gave his consent, feeling that he could scarcely do otherwise.

‘By that time I had known him long enough to be able to tell him exactly what I thought, and I expressed my surprise that he should consent to a manifestation which

accorded so ill with his habits and which was so contrary to his taste for solitude and self-effacement.

‘He had already given up using his nephew as interpreter during our conversations. None the less, Sidi Muhammad was nearly always present at our meetings. We spoke as a rule in French, and he only intervened when the Shaikh felt himself unable to give exact expression in our language to some particular thought.

‘At my expression of surprise he gave an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, and said more or less—I cannot remember his exact words: “You are right. Such things are superfluous. But one must take men as they are. Not all can find complete satisfaction in pure intelligence and contemplation. They have a need now and then to gather together and to feel that their own ideas are shared by a great many others. That is all they are asking for now. Besides, there is no question of the sort of festivity that you must have seen at some of the Moslem places of pilgrimage, with pistol shots, displays of riding, various games and far too much food. For my disciples a festival means spiritual rejoicing. It is simply a reunion for the exchange of ideas and for communal prayer.”

‘When looked at in this light, the idea of a festival no longer jarred on me. To judge by the number of disciples who came, it was a success. They came from all directions and from all classes of society. According to what the Shaikh had told me, I had expected that this reunion would be no more than a sort of congress where the academically minded hope to shine in discussing knotty questions of doctrine and displaying their talent for pin-point hair-splitting quibbles.

‘As far as I could gather from certain passages of inaugural speeches which Sidi Muhammad roughly translated for me, it was in fact something of the sort, especially among the younger disciples. It was not there, however, that the interest lay, but with the older disciples who did not talk and who were rapt in deep meditation. I was specially struck by the most humble of them all, the Riff mountaineers, who had been travelling for a whole month, going on foot from hamlet to hamlet, with their spirits kept up by the inward fire that burned in their simple souls.

‘They had set out full of enthusiasm, like the pioneers of the gold-rush, but it was no temporal riches that they had come in search of. Their quest was purely spiritual, and they knew that they would not be deceived. I watched them, motionless, silent, drinking

in the atmosphere as if plunged in a kind of beatitude through the very fact of being there, penetrated by the holiness of the place, with their chief aspiration realized. They were happy, in complete accord with themselves, in the Presence of God...

‘At other times, after remaining motionless and silent for hours at a time, the disciples would softly start up a lingering chant. Then they would divide up into circular groups, and holding hands would begin to sway forwards and then backwards, slowly and rhythmically, pronouncing clearly, in time to each movement, the Name “*Allāh*”. This began to a fairly slow rhythm which was given by a sort of choir leader at the centre of each circle, whose voice could be heard above the others. Meantime some of them went on with the chant, which grew progressively louder and more vigorous. Little by little the speed of the rhythm increased. The slow swaying to and fro gave place to an up-and-down movement with knees bent and then suddenly straightened. Soon, in each circle of rhythmic movement (the feet remained stationary), they began to gasp and the voices became hoarse. But the time went on growing quicker and quicker; the up-and-down movements became more and more violent, jerky and almost convulsive. The Name of God was now no more than a breath, and so it went on, always quicker and quicker, until the breathing itself was no longer heard. Some of them would fall to the ground in a state of exhaustion.

‘This exercise, which is analogous to those of the whirling dervishes, is evidently intended to produce a particular state of soul. But I wondered what could be the spiritual link between such rough and crude practices as these and the nobility and refinement of the Shaikh.

‘And how had the Shaikh’s fame spread so far? There was never any organized propaganda. The disciples made not the slightest attempt to proselytize. In any town or village that happened to contain some of their number they had, and they still have today, their own little secluded *zāwiyahs*, each under the guidance of a *muqaddam*, that is, one who is invested with the confidence and authority of the Shaikh. These little brotherhoods refrain on principle from all outward action, as if they were jealously bent on letting no one share their secrets. None the less, the influence spreads, and would-be novices are always coming forward to ask for initiation. They come from all walks of life.

‘One day I voiced my surprise to the Shaikh. He said:

“All those come here who feel troubled by the thought of God.”

‘And he added these words, worthy of the Gospels:

“They come to seek inward Peace.”

‘That day I did not dare to question him any further for fear of seeming too inquisitive. But I realized that there was a connection between what he had said and the incantations which I had sometimes heard and which had intrigued me. Fairly often, in fact, while I was talking quietly with the Shaikh, the Name “*Allāh*” had come to us from some remote corner of the *zāwiyah*, uttered on one long drawn out, vibrant note:

“*A...l...lā...h!*”

‘It was like a cry of despair, a distraught supplication, and it came from some solitary cell-bound disciple, bent on meditation. The cry was usually repeated several times, and then all was silence once more.

“Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord” (Psalm 130:1).

“From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Psalm 61:2).

‘These verses from the Psalms came to my mind. The supplication was really just the same, the supreme cry to God of a soul in distress.

‘I was not wrong, for later, when I asked the Shaikh what was the meaning of the cry which we had just heard, he answered:

“It is a disciple asking God to help him in his meditation.”

“May I ask what is the purpose of his meditation?”

“To achieve self-realization in God.”

“Do all the disciples succeed in doing this?”

“No, it is seldom that anyone does. It is only possible for a very few.”

“Then what happens to those who do not? Are they not desperate?”

“No: they always rise high enough to have at least inward Peace.”

‘Inward Peace. That was the point he came back to most often, and there lay, no doubt, the reason for his great influence. For what man does not aspire, in some way or other, to inward Peace? . . .

‘When he was relatively well, the Shaikh always received me, except in winter, on a sort of verandah at the bottom of a little garden surrounded by high walls,

reminiscent of certain paintings in Persian manuscripts. It was in these peaceful surroundings, far from the noise of the world, amid the rustling of leaves and the song of birds that we exchanged remarks sometimes interspersed with long silences.

‘As happens with those who understand each other and have reached a certain degree of intimacy, we did not mind being silent; and silence was sometimes imposed on us by a remark that called for reflection. Moreover the Shaikh never wasted words, and we felt no need to talk except when we really had something to say.

‘He had been surprised at first to find that I knew a little about the Moslem religion, at least as regards its essence and principles, that I knew something about the life of the Prophet, in its outlines at any rate, and the history of the first Caliphs, and that I was not altogether uninformed about the Kaaba and the Well of Zamzam and the flight of Ishmael in the desert with his mother Hagar. All this was very little, but the average European is generally so ignorant about these things that the Shaikh could not hide his surprise.

‘For my part, I was surprised by his broad-mindedness and tolerance. I had always heard that every Moslem is a fanatic and could never have anything but the greatest contempt for non-Moslem foreigners.

‘The Shaikh said that God had inspired three Prophets, first Moses, then Jesus, then Muhammad. He concluded that Islam was the best in that it was based on the most recent message of God, but said that Judaism and Christianity were none the less divinely revealed religions.

‘His conception of Islam was equally broad. He only insisted on the essential. He used to say:

“‘To be an orthodox Moslem it is enough to observe five points: to believe in God and to recognize Muhammad as His last Prophet, to pray the five daily prayers, to give the prescribed alms to the poor, to keep the fast, and to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.”

‘What I appreciated especially in him was his complete lack of proselytism. He expressed his views when I questioned him, but seemed to care very little whether they did me any good. Not only did he never make the least attempt to convert me, but for a long time he seemed totally indifferent to what my religious beliefs might be. That was, moreover, altogether characteristic of him. He used to say:

“Those who have need of me come to me, Why seek to attract the others? They care little for the only things that matter, and they go their own way.”

‘Our conversations were thus not unlike what might take place between two neighbours on good terms with each other who exchange remarks from time to time over the hedge that separates their gardens.

‘But one day my own ideas happened to come up for discussion and this led him to sound me a little. Perhaps he had already thought of doing so, without knowing how to broach this delicate question, and was simply waiting for the opportunity.

‘It came in connexion with those Negro Moslems who have brought some Sudanese practices into Islam. They go through the streets at certain times leading a bull garlanded with flowers and ribbons, to the sound of drums and tambourines accompanied by dances, shouts, songs, and the clapping of metal castanets. It was now one of these occasions, and beneath the verandah, at the end of the peaceful garden, the distant and muffled sounds of one of these processions came to our ears. I do not know why, but I gave vent to a comparison between these manifestations and certain Catholic processions, which, I added, seemed to me pure idolatry, just as the Eucharist was nothing more or less than sorcery, unless one considered it symbolically.

“It is none the less your religion,” he said.

“In a sense”, I replied. “I was baptized when I was still at my mother’s breast. Apart from that there is nothing that binds me to it.”

“What is your religion then?”

“I have none.”

There was a silence. Then the Shaikh said:

“That is strange.”

“Why strange?”

“Because usually those who, like yourself, have no religion are hostile to religions. And you do not seem to be so.”

‘What you say is true, but the people you refer to have kept the intolerant religious mentality. They have remained restive. They have not found, in the loss of their beliefs, the inward Peace that you speak of. On the contrary.’

“And you? Have you found it?”

“Yes. Because I have followed things to their furthest conclusions and I look at everything according to its true value and in its proper place.”

‘He thought for some time, and then he said:

“That also is strange.”

“What?”

“That you should have arrived at this conception by means other than those of the doctrine.”

“What doctrine?”

‘He made a vague gesture and sank into a state of meditation. I understood that he was unwilling to say any more about it, and I withdrew.

‘From this day I had the impression that I interested him more. Until then our relationship, always very cordial, with every appearance of intimacy, had not gone beyond the limits of a casual friendship. He had found me a pleasant enough acquaintance and he liked me, but none the less I was a foreigner and somewhat remote. Several years had passed during which I had been for him no more than a fleeting distraction, probably of very little importance in his eyes, the passer-by that one meets on life’s journey, a momentary companion that one accepts for part of the road because he is polite and not tedious, and then forgets.

‘After this, whenever we were alone together, the conversation took an abstract turn... I regret with all my heart that I did not write down then and there those wonderful conversations which implied far more even than was actually said, and which I now realize would have made a document that was precious not only for me but also for others. But at that time I did not attach the importance to them that they have acquired in my memory with the lapse of the years.

‘I can only therefore give a general glimpse of these meetings, simply noting down one or two striking points which have remained fixed in my mind. Sometimes the dialogue was limited to a few remarks interspersed between long silences; sometimes it consisted of an exposition of my point of view, asked for by him. For now it was he who was the questioner. We never argued, that is we never had anything in the nature of those controversies in which each party tries to convince the other that he is right. It was just an exchange of ideas, no more.

‘That was how I came to explain to him my attitude towards religion. I said that since everyone is troubled by the enigma of his existence and his future, we each seek some explanation that will satisfy us and set our minds at rest. The religions provide an answer which satisfies most people. What right have I to trouble those who have found spiritual tranquillity in religion? Besides, whatever means are used, whatever path is chosen, anyone who is bent on gaining peace of mind is always obliged to take some belief as his starting point. Even the path of science, which is the one I have followed, is based on a certain number of assumptions, that is, affirmations which are considered as self-evident truths but which none the less cannot be proved. Along whatever line one looks, there is always some element of belief, whether it be great or small. The only truth is what one believes to be true. Everyone follows the course which suits him best. If he finds what he is looking for, then for him this course is the right one. They are all equal.

‘Here he stopped me, saying:

“‘No, they are not all equal.’”

‘I said nothing, waiting for an explanation, which came.

“‘They are all equal if you only consider the question of being set at rest. But there are different degrees. Some people are set at rest by very little; others find their satisfaction in religion; some require more; it is not only peace of mind that they must have, but the Great Peace, which brings with it the plenitude of the Spirit.’”

“‘What about religion?’”

“‘For these last religion is only a starting point.’”

“‘Then is there anything above religion?’”

“‘Above the religion there is the doctrine.’”

‘I had already heard him use this word: the doctrine. But when I had asked what he meant by it he had been unwilling to answer. Timidly I tried again:

“‘What doctrine?’”

‘This time he answered:

“‘The means of attaining to God Himself.’”

“‘And what are these means?’”

‘He gave me a smile tinged with pity.

“‘Why should I tell you, since you are not disposed to make use of them. If you

came to me as my disciple I could give you an answer. But what would be the good of satisfying an idle curiosity?"

'On another occasion it so happened that we were talking about prayer, which I considered as a piece of inconsequence on the part of those who believe in the Sovereign Wisdom of the Divinity.

"What is the point of prayer?" I had asked.

"I see what you have in mind", he said. "In principle you are right. Prayer is superfluous when one is in direct communication with God. For then one has direct knowledge. But it helps those who aspire to this communication and have not yet reached it. None the less, even in this case, prayer is not indispensable. There are other means of reaching God."

"What means?"

"The study of the doctrine and meditation or intellectual contemplation are among the best and most effective means. But they are not within the scope of everyone."

'What surprised him the most was that I should be able to go on living quite serenely in the conviction that I was destined to total annihilation, for he saw beyond doubt that I was deeply sincere. Little by little, when, at various intervals, he came back to this question, I brought him to understand that my serenity was due to humility rather than to pride. Man's anxieties spring from his wanting at all costs to survive his own death. Calm is obtained when one has altogether rid oneself of this desire for immortality. The world existed before me and would continue to exist without me... It was no more than an entertainment to which I had been invited without knowing why or how, and the meaning of which I could not grasp, if indeed it had one. But this entertainment was none the less not without its interest. That is why I turned my eyes towards nature rather than towards abstract ideas. When I had to leave the entertainment I would do so regretfully, because I found it interesting. But in time it would no doubt end by boring me. Besides, in any case, I had no choice. And what did it matter? When one crushes an ant the world goes on just the same.

"What you say is true of the body no doubt", he said. "But what of the Spirit?"

“True, there is also the spirit. The consciousness we have of ourselves. But we did not have it at birth. It was developed slowly together with our bodily sensations. We only acquired it progressively, little by little, as our knowledge increased. It developed alongside of the body, grew up with it, came to full strength with it, like a sum total of acquired ideas, and I fail to convince myself that it could survive this body to which it really owes its existence.”

‘There was a long silence. Then, coming out of his meditation, the Shaikh said:

“Do you want to know what is lacking in you?”

“Yes, what?”

“To be one of us and to see the Truth, you lack the desire to raise your Spirit above yourself. And that is irremediable,”

‘One day he asked me point-blank:

“Do you believe in God?”

‘I replied:

“Yes, if you mean by that an indefinable principle on which all depends and which no doubt gives a meaning to the Universe.”

‘He seemed satisfied by my reply. I added:

“But I consider this principle as being beyond our reach and our understanding. What surprises me, however, is to see that so many people who claim to be religious and even believe that they are so, and who are convinced of their immortality in God, should be able to go on attaching importance to their earthly existence. They are neither logical, nor honest with themselves... It seems to me that if I were certain of life after death, the scene of this earthly life would become devoid of all interest for me and I should be utterly indifferent to it. I would live entirely in expectation of the true life yonder, and like your *fuqarā* I would devote myself altogether to meditation.”

‘He looked at me for a while as if he were reading my thoughts. Then his eyes met mine with a piercing glance which went far beyond them, and he said slowly:

“It is a pity that you will not let your Spirit rise above yourself. But whatever you may say and whatever you may imagine, you are nearer to God than you think.”

“You are nearer to God than you think.”

‘When he spoke these words, the Shaikh Al-‘Alawī had not much longer to live. The pilgrimage to Mecca which he had been bent on making before his death and to which he had added a journey to Syria and Palestine, had exhausted him. He was extremely weak, but his mind was still alert.

‘Meantime Sidi Muhammad, his nephew, who had fulfilled the function of *muqaddam*, had died, and his place had been taken by another of the Shaikh’s nephews of whom he was particularly fond, Sidi Addah Bin-Tūnis.

‘Sidi Addah did not hide his anxiety from me. Through him I learnt that the Shaikh was becoming more and more given to deep meditation, from which he seemed to emerge only against his will. He ate practically nothing, and although I both scolded and entreated him, he simply gave me the shadow of a smile and said gently:

“What is the use? The hour is drawing near.”

‘There was nothing I could answer.

‘The *fuqarā* began to look at me in a special way. I realized that they were trying to make out what I thought of the Shaikh’s health. Usually I saw little of them. They knew who I was, and the friendship that the Shaikh showed me was enough to make them well disposed towards me. But none the less, they generally remained somewhat aloof. The feeling that their Master was in danger brought them nearer to me. I reassured them with a smile. I was in fact convinced that the Shaikh would go on living to the very last flicker of his strength—not that he would fight to live, but that he had accustomed his body to do with so little that his organism went on working at a reduced speed. I knew that he would continue like this, with a minimum of strength which would have long since proved insufficient for anyone else. He would use up the very last drop of oil in the lamp of life, which he had turned so low that it was now no more than a night-light. And he knew this as well as I did.

The Shaikh scarcely ever introduced me to any of the *fuqarā* except those who were of Western origin. Westerners did in fact come to him now and then. But my relationship with them was always rather limited. Not being an initiate, I did not speak

their language, and I felt it would have been inquisitive to question them as to what had brought them to this path.

‘Some of them were real personalities—for example, a well-known artist, whose acquaintance I would never have expected to make in this way. On joining the tradition this artist had taken to wearing Moslem dress, which suited him so well that he might himself have passed for a Shaikh. He spent eight days in the *zāwiyah*, and was accompanied by a member of the Tribunal of Tunis and by a lady, both initiates, as he was, and extremely likeable.

‘There was also an American, more or less without means, who had arrived no one knew how, but who fell ill after a few days, and had to be sent to hospital, and eventually repatriated....

‘Despite his increasing weakness, the Shaikh continued to talk to his disciples, but was obliged to make his sessions with them shorter. His heart was growing feeble, and its beat became irregular, and I had much trouble to make him take the stimulants which were necessary to restore its defective rhythm. Fortunately, infinitesimal doses were enough to act on an organism that had never been contaminated by the action of medicines.

‘In 1932 we were badly shaken by his having a partial heart attack. I was summoned in all haste, and when I arrived his pulse was imperceptible and he seemed to have lost all consciousness. An intra-veinous injection brought him round. He opened his eyes, and looked at me reproachfully.

“‘Why did you do that?’ he said. ‘You should have let me go. There is no point in keeping me back. What is the good?’”

“‘If I am at your side’, I answered, ‘it is because God willed it so. And if He willed it so, it was in order that I might do my duty by you as your doctor.’”

“‘Very well’, he said. “*In shā’Allāh.*”

‘I stayed with him for some time so as to watch his pulse, fearing that he might have a relapse, and I only left him when he seemed to me to be out of immediate danger.

‘After this warning there were others. None the less the Shaikh lived on, with ups and downs, for nearly another two years. When he was relatively well he resumed his normal life as if nothing had happened. He seemed however to be waiting, eagerly but

patiently, for the end. His intense inward life only showed itself in his expression. His body seemed no more than a worn-out prop which at any moment was going to crumble to powder.

‘One morning he sent for me. His condition, to all appearances, was no more serious than it had been the day before or the day before that, but he said:

“It will be today. Promise me to do nothing, and to let things take their course.”

‘I said that he seemed to be no worse, but he insisted.

“I know it will be today. And I must be allowed to return to God.”

‘I left him, impressed by what he had said, but none the less a little sceptical. I had seen him so often with his life hanging by a thread without the thread having broken, and so, I thought, it would be again that day.

‘But when I came back in the afternoon, the picture had changed. He was scarcely breathing, and I could not count his pulse. He opened his eyes when he felt my fingers on his wrist, and recognized me. His lips murmured:

“I am going at last to take my rest in the Presence of God.”

‘He clasped my hand feebly and closed his eyes. It was a last farewell. My place was no longer there. He belonged from then on to his *fuqarā*, who were waiting in the background. I withdrew, telling Sidi Addah that I had seen the Shaikh for the last time,

‘I learnt that evening that two hours after I had left he had gently passed away, almost imperceptibly, reverently surrounded by all those disciples who lived at the *zāwiyah* or were staying there.

‘The last drop of oil had been used up.

‘I have tried to give here an idea of what the Shaikh Al-‘Alawī was like. I am well aware that this account leaves much to be desired, but I was bent on relating nothing except what I was absolutely sure of. Some of the remarks I have quoted are exactly, word for word, those that were used by the Shaikh himself. As regards others, I cannot be sure that he used exactly the same expressions that I have ascribed to him, but I can guarantee the general sense as being his.

‘It would have been easy to embroider such a theme, but I preferred to keep to the dry sobriety of the memories of which I was certain, and I feel that the Shaikh stands out

all the clearer and truer to life. My portrayal of him has moreover the special characteristic of having been made impartially and objectively, without needless panegyrics and without the halo that a disciple would no doubt have been tempted to put in. It is enough in itself, and perhaps gains for having been sketched by one of “the profane”.

‘I have avoided any personal appreciation of the Shaikh’s doctrine. My opinion about such questions would have been in any case irrelevant, because my intention was simply to give an impression of the Shaikh as I had known him, and not to discuss his ideas. I know that the doctrine in question was an esoteric one, and since I am not an initiate my ideas are inevitably very vague about it.

‘Perhaps the initiates will smile when they read some of my impressions, but they will thank me for my sincerity and for having been as simple and straightforward as I could. They will notice also that never in any place have I used the word “faith”... I remember once having said to him that what prevented me from trying to “raise my spirit above myself” was no doubt lack of faith.

‘He answered:

“Faith is necessary for religions, but it ceases to be so for those who go further and who achieve self-realization in God. Then one no longer believes, because one sees. There is no longer any need to believe, when one *sees* the Truth.”

Seen From Within

The Shaikh was born at Mostaganem in 1869. His name, as given on the title-pages of most of his books, was Abu ’l-‘Abbās Ahmad ibn Mustafā ’l-‘Alawī, and he was an only son, with two sisters. A little less than a year before his birth his mother Fātimah ‘saw in her sleep the Prophet with a jonquil in his hand. He looked her full in the face and smiled at her and threw the flower to her, whereupon she took it up with humble modesty. When she woke, she told her husband of the vision, and he interpreted it as meaning that they would be blessed with a pious son, and he had in fact been importuning God not to leave

him without an heir.... After a few weeks God confirmed her dream, and she conceived her son.’

After the Shaikh’s death in 1934, the following autobiographical extract was found among his papers. He had evidently dictated it some years previously to one of his disciples:

‘As to learning how to write, I never made much effort in that direction, and I never went to school, not even for a single day. My only schooling was what I learned from my father at home during the Koran lessons which he used to give me, and my handwriting is still quite unproficient. My learning by heart the Book of God went as far as the *Sūrah ar-Rahmān*, and there I came to a standstill owing to the various occupations which I was forced to turn to through sheer necessity. The family had not enough to live on—although you would never have thought it, for my father was proud and reserved to the point of never showing on his face what was in his mind, so that nobody could have concluded from outward signs that he was in need of anything. I hesitated between several different crafts, and finally took to cobbling and became quite good at it, and our situation improved in consequence. I remained a cobbler for a few years, and then went into trade, and I lost my father when I was just sixteen. Although I was so young I had been doing all sorts of things for him and I was bent on nothing so much as giving him pleasure. He was exceedingly fond of me, and I do not remember him ever blaming me for anything or beating me, except when he was giving me lessons, and then it was because I was lazy in learning the Koran. As to my mother, she was even more lavish in her affection, and she worried more about me than he had done. In fact after his death she did all she could in the way of harsh words and blows and locking the door and so on to prevent me from going out at night. I wanted very much to humour her, but I could not bring myself to give up attending lessons at night and gatherings for *dhikr* [Sufi sessions of Invocation]. What made her so anxious was that our house was outside the town on a road which one might well fear to go along alone at night; and she continued in her attempts to stop me, and I for my part continued to attend those gatherings, until by the Grace of God she gave her full consent, and there was nothing to mar our love for each other, which remained unclouded until the day of her death in 1332 [1914], when I was

46.

‘As to my attendance at lessons, it did not amount to much, as it was only possible now and then, in between work, and if I had not had a certain natural aptitude and understanding I should not have gained anything worth speaking of. But I was very much addicted to learning, and would sometimes steep myself in books the whole night long; and I was helped in these nocturnal studies by a Shaikh whom I used to bring back to our house. After this had been going on for several months, my wife took offence and claimed divorce from me on the grounds of my not giving her her rights, and she had in fact some cause to complain. My attendance at lessons, such as it was, did not go on for as much as two years; it none the less enabled me to grasp some points of doctrine in addition to what I gained in the way of mental discipline. But it was not until I had busied myself with the doctrine of the Folk, and had come to know its Masters, that my mind opened and I began to have a certain breadth of knowledge and understanding.’

(At this point the scribe to whom this was dictated asked him about how he first came into contact with those who follow the path of the mystics.)

‘My first leaning in that direction was marked by my attachment to one of the Masters of the ‘Īsāwī Tarīqah, who impressed me by his unworldliness and evident piety. I made every effort to comply with the requisites of that order, and this came quite easily to me on account of my youth and the instinctive attraction for wonders and marvels which is part of human nature. I became proficient in these practices, and was well thought of by the men of the order, and I believed in my ignorance that what we did was purely and simply a means of drawing near to God. On the day when God willed that I should be inspired with the truth we were at one of our gatherings, and I looked up and saw a paper that was on one of the walls of the house we were in, and my eye lit on a saying that was traced back to the Prophet. What I learned from it caused me to give up what I had been doing in the way of working wonders, and I determined to limit myself in that order to the litanies and invocations and recitations of the Koran. From that time I began to extricate myself and to make excuses to my brethren until I finally gave up those other practices altogether. I wanted to drag the entire brotherhood away from them also, but that was not easy. As for myself, I broke away as I had intended, and only retained from that contact the practice of snake-charming. I continued to charm snakes by myself

or with some of my friends until I met Shaikh Sidi Muhammad Al-Būzīdī.

‘As to my meeting with this Shaikh, whichever way I look at it, it seems to me to have been a pure Grace from God; for although we—that is, I and my friend Sidi al-Hājj Bin-‘Awdah who shared my business with me—were longing to find someone who could take us by the hand and guide us, we did not go to the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī and seek him out where he was, but it was he who came to us, quite unexpectedly. My friend had already told me about him. He said: “I used to know a Shaikh called Sidi Hamū of the family of the Prophet. He left his home and went for several years to Morocco, and when he returned many people attached themselves to him. He used to speak with authority about the path of the mystics, but to try him God sent against him a man who did him much harm so that he found himself faced with all sorts of opposition, and now he is as subdued as any disciple, without a trace of his former spiritual activity. However, I think that he is one who could be relied on for guidance upon the path. No true spiritual guide has ever appeared whom God did not try with someone who wronged him either openly or behind his back.”

‘This was the gist of what he said, and immediately I determined to go to this Shaikh on my friend’s recommendation. I myself knew nothing about him except that once, when a boy, I had heard his name in connection with an illness which I had. They brought me an amulet and said: “This is from Sidi Hamū Shaikh Būzīdī”, and I used it and was cured.

‘My friend and I were at work together some days after this conversation, when suddenly he said: “Look, there is that Shaikh going down the road.” Then he went up to him and asked him to come in, which he did. They talked for a while, but I was too busy with my work to be able to notice what they were talking about. When the Shaikh got up to go, my friend begged him not to stop visiting us. He said good-bye and went, and I asked my friend what impression he had had, and he said: “His talk is far above what one finds in books.” He came to see us from time to time, and it was my friend who talked to him and plied him copiously with questions, whereas I was more or less tongue-tied, partly out of reverence for him and partly because my work left me no time to talk.

‘One day, when he was with us in our shop, the Shaikh said to me: “I have heard that you can charm snakes, and that you are not afraid of being bitten.” I admitted this.

Then he said: “Can you bring me one now and charm it here in front of us?” I said that I could, and going outside the town, I searched for half the day, but only found a small one, about half an arm’s length. This I brought back with me and putting it in front of him, I began to handle it according to my custom, while he sat and watched me. “Could you charm a bigger snake than this?” he asked. I replied that the size made no difference to me. Then he said: “I will show you one that is bigger than this and far more venomous, and if you can take hold of it you are a real sage.” I asked him to show me where it was, and he said: “I mean your soul which is between the two sides of your body. Its poison is more deadly than a snake’s, and if you can take hold of it and do what you please with it, you are, as I have said, a sage indeed.” Then he said: “Go and do with that little snake whatever you usually do with them, and never go back to such practices again”, and I went out, wondering about the soul and how its poison could be more deadly than a snake’s.

‘Another day, during this period when the Shaikh used to call on us, he fixed his eyes on me and then said to my friend. “The lad is qualified to receive instruction” or “He would be receptive to instruction”, or some such remark; and on another occasion he found a paper in my hand on which was written something in praise of Shaikh Sidi Muhammad ibn ‘Īsā, and after looking at it he said to me: “If you live long enough you will be, God willing, like Shaikh Sidi Muhammad ibn ‘Īsā”, or “You will attain to his spiritual rank”—I forget his exact words. This seemed to me a very remote possibility but I said: “God willing”; and it was not long before I was attached to his order and took him as a guiding light in the path of God. My friend had already been received into the order about two months previously, though he had kept this from me, and only told me after I myself had been received. I did not understand at that time the reason for this secrecy.

‘After the Shaikh had transmitted to me the litanies for morning and evening recitation, he told me not to speak about them to anyone—“until I tell you”, he said. Then in less than a week he called me to him and began to talk to me about the Supreme Name (*Allāh*) and the method of invoking it. He told me to devote myself to *dhikr Allāh* [Invocation of the Name *Allāh*] in the way generally practised in our order at that time; and since he had no special cell of retreat for *dhikr*, I was unable to find a place where I could be alone undisturbed. When I complained of this to him, he said: “There is no place

better for being alone than the cemetery.” So I went there alone at nights, but it was not easy for me. I was so overcome with fear that I could not concentrate on the *dhikr*, although for many nights I tried to do so.

‘I complained again to the Shaikh, and he said: “I did not give you a binding order. I merely said there was no place better for being alone than the cemetery.” Then he told me to limit my *dhikr* to the last third of the night, and so I invoked at night and made contact with him during the day. Either he would come to me, or else I would go to him, although his house was not always a good place for meeting on account of the children and for other reasons. In addition to this, at midday, I went on attending the lessons in theology which I had attended previously. One day he asked me: “What lessons are those that I see you attending?” I said: “They are on the Doctrine of Unity (*at-tawhīd*) and I am now at “the realization of proofs”. He said: “Sidi So-and-so used to call it ‘the doctrine of turbidity’ (*at-tawhīl*)”. Then he added: “You had better busy yourself now with purifying your innermost soul until the Lights of your Lord dawn in it and you come to know the real meaning of Unity. But as for scholastic theology, it will only serve to increase your doubts and pile up illusion upon illusion.” Finally he said: “You had better leave the rest of those lessons until you are through with your present task, for it is an obligation to put what is more important before what is of lesser importance.”

‘No order that he ever gave me was so hard to obey as this. I had grown very fond of those lessons and had come to rely on them so much for my understanding of the doctrine that I was on the point of disobeying him. But God put into my Heart this question: How do you know that what you are receiving from the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī is not the kind of knowledge that you are really seeking, or something even higher than it? Secondly, I comforted myself with the thought that the prohibition was not a permanent one; thirdly, I remembered that I had taken an oath of allegiance to obey him; and fourthly I told myself that perhaps he wanted to put me to trial, as is the way of Shaikhs. But all these arguments did not stop the ache of sorrow that I felt within me. What sent that away was my spending in solitary invocation the hours which I had previously devoted to reading, especially after I had begun to feel the results of this invocation.

‘As to his way of guiding his disciples, stage by stage, it varied. He would talk to some about the form in which Adam was created and to others about the cardinal virtues

and to others about the Divine Actions, each instruction being especially suited to the disciple in question. But the course which he most often followed, and which I also followed after him, was to enjoin upon the disciple the invocation of the single Name with distinct visualization of its letters until they were written in his imagination. Then he would tell him to spread them out and enlarge them until they filled all the horizon. The *dhikr* would continue in this form until the letters became like light. Then the Shaikh would show the way out of this standpoint—it is impossible to express in words how he did so—and by means of this indication the Spirit of the disciple would quickly reach beyond the created universe provided that he had sufficient preparation and aptitude—otherwise there would be need for purification and other spiritual training. At the abovementioned indication the disciple would find himself able to distinguish between the Absolute and the relative, and he would see the universe as a ball or a lamp suspended in a beginning-less, endless void. Then it would grow dimmer in his sight as he persevered in the invocation to the accompaniment of meditation, until it seemed no longer a definite object but a mere trace. Then it would become not even a trace, until at length the disciple was submerged in the World of the Absolute and his certainty was strengthened by Its Pure Light. In all this the Shaikh would watch over him and ask him about his states and strengthen him in the *dhikr* degree by degree until he finally reached a point of being conscious of what he perceived through his own power. The Shaikh would not be satisfied until this point was reached, and he used to quote the words of God which refer to: *One whom his Lord hath made certain, and whose certainty He hath then followed up with direct evidence* [Koran 11:17].

‘When the disciple had reached this degree of independent perception, which was strong or weak according to his capability, the Shaikh would bring him back again to the world of outward forms after he had left it, and it would seem to him the inverse of what it had been before, simply because the light of his inward eye had dawned, He would see it as *Light upon Light*, and so it had been before in reality.

‘In this degree the disciple may mistake the bowstring for the arrow as has happened to many of those who are journeying to God, and he may say as more than one has said: “I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I”, and the like—enough to make anyone who has no knowledge of the attainments of the mystics and is unfamiliar with

their ejaculations throw at him the first thing that he can lay hands on. But the master of this degree comes before long to distinguish between the spiritual points of view, and to give to each of the different degrees of existence its due and to each of the spiritual stations what rightly belongs to it. This station took hold of me, and it has been my home for many years, and I have become as it were expert in it, and made known its obligations, and my followers have had what I wrote about it when I was first in its grip, and some of them now have knowledge of its obligations, and some of them fall short of this knowledge. The acuteness of this state still comes back to me sometimes, but it does not compel me to write about it. True, it prompts me to speak about it, but it is easier to live with than it was, something that I feel rather than something that I am submerged in.

‘This path which I have just described as being that of my Master is the one that I have followed in my own spiritual guidance, leading my own followers along it, for I have found it the nearest of the paths which lead to God.’

Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Chief

Thomas Yellowtail (1903-93)

Early Years and Traditional Values

I was born on March 7, 1903, just south of Lodge Grass, Montana. My father's name was Yellowtail, which was the shortened white man's name given to him that has become our family name. The full meaning of his Indian name was "Hawk with the Yellow Tail Feathers."

In my younger days, the old, great warriors who participated in the Plains wars were still living, and many of the traditional ways still lived, even though we were already on the reservation. I still remember seeing the old warriors around the camp fires and at all the traditional ceremonies. When they danced in the warrior's way and then gave their war whoops and shot their rifles into the air, we children were certain that we had seen the end of our days, and—whoosh—did we run for cover! We would hide under the blankets or behind something and just peek out to see these tremendous leaders, until another shot came out—and we dove for cover again!

The Lodge Grass Valley was called the "Valley of the Chiefs" because of all the great war chiefs who were living there in my early years. I only wish I remembered more about all of their stories. I never participated in any of the traditional life of the Indians who roamed over the plains, but when I was a youngster all of my teachers had lived that life, before Indians were forced onto the reservations. These elders took great care to explain and show to us by their example the values by which all men should live. It is their spiritual values and attitudes toward which we must center our lives.

So in my time, I did learn about our traditional ways, and Grandma and I have tried to practice those ways during all our years up to this day. Grandma and I were married on April 27, 1929, and the changes that we have seen on the reservation and in this world have been greater than I could have imagined. The world we see now is very different from the one our ancestors knew, and even the one we knew as children. Almost all of the changes I have seen take place make me sad, and I will speak about them. My hope is to tell about our traditional ways, and how those values and the sacred rites that

remain with us are even more important to our people today, because without them we cannot live. You have also asked many questions about my own life and I will answer them, not because my life has been important, but because young people nowadays should see the differences between their lives and those of us older folks.

I hear people today talk about “traditional Indians” and “modern Indians.” They say, “Get rid of those old, traditional ideas and start to think like a modern Indian; it is the only way you can get ahead.” Many people seem to think that we have to make progress away from the old values and beliefs, toward some new types of ideas that are supposed to be better for us. They are mistaken. It would be better for them if they progressed from their new, modern ideas back to the old, traditional beliefs. They do not understand anything about the traditional ways.

When I hear someone speak of our traditional life or of traditional Indians, I always think about the values of the people who lived in the olden days—values which were established in order to walk a sacred path through life. It is hard to speak about the attitudes that a person has toward the world in which he lives, and most people today don’t even consider who they are in relation to the world around them, or in relation to Acbadadea, the Maker of All Things Above. The life of the traditional Indian was rooted in the sacred; he saw the natural world around him as a miracle created by Acbadadea. The traditional ways allowed the Indians to reflect on the mystery of life, and they were always aware of their place in creation.

The traditional American Indian is an individual who has self-esteem in his sacred way of life, a person who is trying to follow the straight path in everything. He tries to do things right and not be greedy. He doesn’t try to invent things in order to possess them; he is not that way. He is a person who is willing to help others. He will want enough to live on, but that is all the Indian cares for. He shares whatever he has been given with his fellow man and does not try to get ahead of the others. He knows the meaning of poverty and of gratitude. He also knows about religion; he knew long before the white man came and brought all kinds of religions. Indians are ready to help others and do not require much of anything. In my case, when I make medicine and doctor people with my prayers, I don’t ask for anything. It is up to the individual that I pray for. If he offers me something, I am ready to accept. It is that way among the people of all Indian nations.

Anyone who follows the sacred ways can help others live. That is why the Indian is not rich in possessing wealth and money. We Indian people are rich in spiritual wealth, which is more important.

The Indian people have recreational doings such as dances. At our powwows we enjoy a little fun. Even during the dancing and celebrating, our traditional ways are present. At every powwow, the Indians will have a big giveaway. They will give away what they have on hand, even if they are not rich. Even being poor, the traditional Indian is ready to help and give what he has. He would take his shirt off and give it to one that needs it and he would go without. That is the way of life of the Indian. I think it is a very good thing. We may be poor in one way, but we are rich in spiritual things, and it is great to have spiritual possessions that can help others. In the Indian way, whenever someone does something good, they have a giveaway. It is just the opposite for white people. The Indians show humility by giving something away. When someone has a giveaway, they give because they are thankful for what they have. If they have done something well, it is really God, Acbadadea, who has given them the ability to do it. Praising songs are sung for people who are being honored. I have my personal praising songs that I sing for such people. I would gather them in front of me, if I were there, and sing my praise song, march around the floor, praising them up. Then I would say words for them. "These are my children now and they have done a great thing." Then I would pray for them. All the relatives would come forward and give the man who praises and prays for people a lot of gifts. That is separate from the main giveaway. I hardly ever use my praise song on anybody, because people might think I am expecting too much, too many free gifts. Of course, I pray for the people anyway.

When a traditional Indian possessed spiritual powers, he did not try to come out and make a show of what he had. Indians are always private in protecting holy things. It is very difficult to talk about some holy matters, and they are not advertised. Some spiritual matters that pertain to the tribe as a whole are of course public. But individual spiritual matters pertain only to that person, and no one should boast about the gifts he has been given.

The person who possesses spiritual powers must respect them; he must be afraid of them. Fear is a part of the respect of sacred things. Once you know about these things,

you will also love them, because you will see that without a sense of the sacred you are less than a man. Man must realize that his importance is nothing compared to Nature and that the sacred realities are even much greater than Nature. A medicine man is required to refrain from many things; in my case, for instance, there are things that I am required not to do and to stay away from. There are general rules that must be observed by all people, and there are special rules that are given to some men as a condition for their medicine powers.

If a man violates these rules, it may bring harm to himself and also to other people. Many of these rules are secret things that each holy man knows about, and it is important for him to observe these rules so that the sacred things will not be lost. It is not just how you act, but how you are in your heart that is considered by the Medicine Fathers. If you think that you deserve more than another man or that you are better than everyone else, you may not be given any help. But if you follow the sacred path, then you will probably be allowed to keep what you have been given.

When one of us has been entrusted with sacred things, we should try to pass them on so that the spiritual path will always be present for those who choose to follow it. At such time when a man is getting old, getting close to the time of retirement from the world, he can pass on what he has to a younger person who may carry on the work with the medicine things. He should select someone worthy so that his people may live. After this knowledge and the spiritual gifts have been received by the younger person, then the older man is ready to pass away. He has fulfilled his final responsibility, and the spiritual tradition will not be lost. This is good, and the next one can carry it down the line on to the next generation.

As I explain more about our traditional life, these things will become clearer. Spiritual matters are difficult to explain because you must live with them in order to fully understand them. I have lived with these all my life, and I am still learning. Now it is time for me to talk about things which apply to all people of the tribe. We have talked about many of these things over the last three years, and soon our work with this book will be finished. We have discussed private matters about my dreams and visions that do not concern our tribal, sacred way, and those will not be part of the book. When my stories are told, one part of my responsibility to pass on my sacred knowledge will be

fulfilled; I will then only need to select and instruct my successor in the duties of the medicine man. I have been blessed with medicine powers that I never expected, and, as chief medicine man of the Crow, my duties will only be done when my successor is ready to carry on. I may be around for many years yet, but we must always be ready to meet our Maker. In 1981, I suffered a heart attack after the Sun Dance, so this may be an indication that I am to carry on for only a few more years in my duties as Sun Dance chief.

After the dancers come out of the Sun Dance, many of them go to the river to bathe. This refreshes the dancers, and reminds them of the ordeal they have just completed. During those three days that you spend in the Sun Dance, your body is burning. When you come out you want to go to the river. Last year, I worked pretty hard in the Sun Dance; it was very hot working on people and doctoring. After we finished the dance and came out that afternoon, I wanted to go bathe and purify myself. My head was strange, I felt different, and I thought that maybe I had a sunstroke. I went swimming in the river; it was lukewarm to others, but to me it was like getting into ice water. This was in July, when even the water in the river would not feel cold, but it was like ice water for me, and something was wrong with me. I got out and back into my clothes and when I came back that evening, I was shivering, I was freezing. Then they took me in to the hospital and found out it was a heart attack. I was lucky that I recovered from that and came out of it, and now I am back again. I regained my strength, and I am back to work again and today I feel all right. We don't know how or what is going to take us. It is the same for every individual in this world, so everyone should be prepared each day to pass on and meet his Maker.

I intend to continue in the Sun Dance.

I will continue in my efforts to preserve our spiritual ways, and when I am called to leave this world and journey on, when Acbadadea, the Maker of All Things Above, calls me to Him, I will go, knowing in my heart that I have done everything I can to purify myself and help carry on our sacred traditions so that my people may live.

We should understand well that all things are the work of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and all the four-legged animals, and the winged peoples; and even more important, we should understand that He is also

above all these things and peoples. When we do understand all this deeply in our hearts, then we will fear, and love, and know the Great Spirit, and then we will be and act and live as He intends.

—Black Elk, Oglala Sioux

The Vision Quest

One of the main rites of the Sun Dance religion is the vision quest. It is a period set aside for solitary prayer at a remote place.

A person will usually spend three or four days of fasting on the vision quest, saying his prayers during all that time. He goes away up in the hills, gets away from people, and goes off by himself, and there he fasts and prays for either the three- or four-day period he selected before he began his quest.

There are many intentions that a person may have when he prepares to make a vision quest. He may want medicine, some kind of power to help him in battle or in all of his life. Strong medicine powers would protect the man so that he would not be wounded and could not be hit by an enemy's arrow. That kind of medicine would make a man successful in battle with the enemy. A lot of men seek those kinds of powers, and that is what they have in mind when they start out on the vision quest.

Some men might seek different kinds of medicine power or understanding. They may want to be able to heal or doctor people. They may seek the answer to a question or a problem that is bothering them or their family or tribe. And above all, a man may want to pray in this way because this is a way to come closer to Acbadadea. In this rite each man may awaken in his heart the knowledge of the Maker of All Things Above. A man may pray for any of those things because they would be helpful to him, his family, and his tribe, but a man also must pray for virtue and the correct understanding with which to face life.

In olden days, all young men had those kinds of feelings, and that was why they would go on the vision quests. Sometimes a few of them would go out together. Maybe four or five of them would take a sweat bath together and start out together. When they got out to the hills, each one would go on his solitary way. Each one had to face the

medicine powers alone. One would take that pointed hill over there; another one would take the next hill. They would scatter, each by himself, putting in his days. Some would stay four days, some less. Some of them might have received something by the time they came back; some may have come back without anything. Some of them would have been successful and might have had a vision, have been visited by an animal, or have had a dream or something to bring back, and that is good—that meant something. Another would come back and say that he did not receive anything. It means that he would have to try again later, and usually he would. He would try again later on and try again and again. Many of them ended their days by saying, “I tried not once, but a number of times, and finally I was visited by a bird or animal that gave me medicine, and I finally have some medicine, some kind of power or understanding.” And that was the way in those days.

They would have kept trying until they got something. Some of the most sincere ones would probably receive something the first time they went on a vision quest. It depended on the sincerity of the person. If they had a good, strong intention, then they may have been the ones who were successful in their dream or vision right away. They would have been told afterwards what to do to preserve the medicine power given by the bird or the animal, and they would have done what they were told. Perhaps they might have been told to make a medicine bundle or carry part of the animal with them when they went on their raiding party against the enemy or when they needed to make their medicine.

Before a man would go out on a vision quest, he would first consult with a medicine man. It was the duty of the person who asked for instruction to bring a pipe or a smoke to the instructor. If the medicine man accepted the responsibility to instruct the younger man, then they would first offer the smoke with a prayer. Then the medicine man would tell the young man what to do to prepare—how to go through purification before going up and all the other necessary information. He would explain to the young man how he should pray and fast. Not all young men wanted to seek war medicine. Some would have had a different purpose. The instructions for the prayer depended on the young man’s intention.

In those days when people wanted to go fasting, they first prepared themselves by taking a sweat bath to purify themselves. This is still my practice because it is very

important to undergo a purification before and after every major undertaking. Right after he was through with the sweat bath, the vision seeker would get up to where he wanted to spend three or four days upon the hill or high mountains. According to his own choosing, he would select a place where he wanted to fast. Many would sacrifice a finger when they got up there. They would chop off the top of their finger and offer it to the Great Spirit or to an animal. If a bird came and took that piece of finger, then the bird would probably come back after a while and adopt that person, give him medicine, and tell him to go home. This could happen in one or two days' time, although the person's intention may have been to spend four days. If he was visited by an animal of some kind who felt sorry for him sitting there torturing himself, then the medicine power would say, "I have come to see you; you are torturing yourself; you had better stop that and go home, and I will give you some kind of power and tell you what to do." After the man would get home, that bird or animal—it might be a hawk, or a crow, or a meadowlark, or any kind of bird or animal—would come to visit that person and tell him what to do. The person would end the fast right then and there and go home; he would have received something already.

People on the Crow reservation today still use the vision quest. Young men and women go out on vision quests. Some come to me, and we pray, and then I take them into a sweat bath. I have to go to work and cut some wood and build a fire and heat up some rocks and sweat with them in there and pray for them; then they purify themselves and set out afterwards. We take the sweat bath during the day so that they will still have daylight to go up to the place of the fast, right after they are through with the sweat bath. If they don't have a place in mind, then I recommend a good place, take them there, and I say, "Now this is where you should stay for the fast," and then I go away. The person should then stay in exactly the same place. We carry wood along with us which we gather as we go to the spot. They do not have fire all the time, just in the morning and evening. One in the morning, just as the sun rises, and one as it sets in the evening. They build little fires and put some sweet cedar or sweet grass on the fire to purify themselves and their pipe. They say their prayers, and they retire when the dark comes. Even when the vision seeker sleeps, he or she should face the east.

In the olden days, the man going out to seek his vision would wear a buffalo robe, moccasins, and sometimes a loincloth. When he reached the area of the retreat, he

removed all of his clothing and almost always was exposed to Nature unless he covered himself with his robe while he slept. I instruct those who ask my advice to follow the traditional way of the old-timers. Plenty-Coups and all the great Absaroke warriors sometimes went into battle without clothing, and so it is also in spiritual warfare. We will speak again of different clothing for each of the rites of the Sun Dance religion, and you will see that in almost all cases the person participating in the ceremony must first humble himself before Creation, both outwardly and inwardly, before he can receive something of value.

I tell them all these things, and many more: “Watch out if you are visited by an eagle; watch him; he may talk to you and drop a feather to you. If so, go and get that feather; it was given to you by the bird; it means something great.”

Yes, I have been consulted by certain people who want to go on vision quests; they come to me, and I take a sweat bath with them, and then they start out. If they don't know where to go, I go with them and get them to the right place. I sometimes give them special advice on what they might say in their prayers. All of this keeps me busy, but that is what I am supposed to do if an Indian youth comes wanting to go on a vision quest. I give them some sweet cedar for incense to be put on the fire, and on the way to the place where they will fast, we stop and gather quite a bit of sweet sage for their bedding. When we arrive, we lay sweet sage in a circle over the entire area where they will fast. This includes the place where they will sleep. At the edge of the bed of sweet grass we make the area where they will build the fire in the morning and evening. This is done toward the east. Light and knowledge come from the east, and this is the main orientation of the prayer.

When a person is on a vision quest, he must have certain attitudes and intentions for his prayers to be sincere, and then he must carry these over into his daily life. It is easy to forget what you learned during this trial; unless you remember to carry on your prayer continually during every day of your life, you will not have learned one of the most important purposes of the vision quest. Each time we talk about one of our sacred rites, you will hear me talk about the spiritual attitudes which a person must possess as that person participates in any rite. It is possible to learn the outer steps that must be accomplished in a rite without learning the inner meanings that are the keys to the sacred

traditions. Each seeker must therefore open his heart to the Great Mystery as he tries to follow the sacred way, because the perfect accomplishment of the outer steps of a rite will be worth nothing without the knowledge of the inner meanings. If the intention of a person is to achieve outward glory and superiority over other people, then that person will never be given great medicine, because that person's intention and attitudes are not in harmony with the correct spiritual purpose. If the reason you participate in a rite is wrong, then you will receive no reward. If you participate because you know the purpose of the rites and you want to express your gratitude and love of the sacred ways, then you may eventually receive a great reward.

It will not be the extent of the outward achievement that determines spiritual rewards. Those individuals who possess great physical strength may be asked to give much more in order to show their sincerity. All men are not given the same physical gifts, and when you remember that it is the interior values that make the real worth of a man or woman, you can see that some individuals must sacrifice much more in order to express the same degree of sincerity than another person who has less to give. Everyone should keep these thoughts in mind as they try to understand the Sun Dance way and the meaning of the spiritual tradition that it represents.

For those who have been sincere in the solitary invocation, Acbadadea will send a reward in the form of some medicine power. There are many different medicines a person can receive in different ways: different animals, different birds, maybe the little people, or one of the powers of the universe. When a person returns to the world after a vision quest, he does these things: first, when he gets home, he takes care to say prayers; he must take a sweat bath using sage, and so forth, to purify himself again before he gets back among his people. Then the meaning of the vision must be explained by the medicine man at home. After the instructor hears the whole story of the vision, he can help explain things to the young man which may not be clear. The medicine man knows what must be done by the recipient of the medicine in order for the recipient to protect the medicine. So after the young man tells his story, we take a smoke and say prayers; then the medicine man tells the young man what he has been given and what he must do. The recipient of the medicine usually is instructed to make a medicine bundle that will preserve and protect the medicine power. I have spoken of the bundle which protects the

medicine rock of Chief Medicine Crow and the great care which is exercised to protect the medicine in a sacred manner. In the same way, many men and women will make medicine bundles for their own medicines in accordance with the instructions of a vision or a medicine man. These bundles serve as a constant reminder of the spiritual gifts we have been given and the corresponding attitudes which must always be present in order to safeguard our spiritual blessings. The medicine man will instruct the young people in both the outward procedures and the inward attitudes to be remembered by the successful vision seeker.

Young people may think they know enough, that they don't need help or instruction, but that is not so. It is necessary to consult a man who has had experience in the sacred ways in order to help a younger man follow the straight path. Some men may need less help than others, and some men are given great gifts without great effort. You never can tell, because some men will work hard for years and years and they may never receive great rewards that we can see. But all men should seek the help of a man who has learned the spiritual ways before they try to do something by themselves. You can better understand spiritual matters after years of following a sacred path. There is always more that can be done, and you cannot keep your power or understanding unless you continue your walk through life in accordance with the rules regarding spiritual matters. A man must be humble before the great mysteries will grant him anything. A humble man will ask for guidance from a spiritual man.

This is the explanation of one of the four major rites of the Sun Dance way. The sweat bath, the Sun Dance, and the use of the pipe or smoke with prayer are the other main rites. There are many other rites which were important in the sacred lifeway of the olden days, and some of these other rites are even carried on to some extent today. While these other rites should not be neglected, it is important to remember that the four main rites make up the center of our spiritual heritage, and without them we would be lost. In our modern world today, we may seem like drowning men because of the loss of much of our spiritual tradition. As drowning men we should cling to these four rites as our lifeline and never let go, because this lifeline can save us.

The Sun Dance

The preparations for the Sun Dance and the lodge itself take a great deal of time to organize. People will set up their camps in a large circle around the place where the Sun Dance lodge is to be constructed. No tents are set up to the east. The camp of the sponsor and the medicine man are always set up in the same line with the sunrise, the Center Pole, and the fire for the outdoor sings. As others come, they camp to form the circle of all the tents. It makes a sacred circle of everyone who comes to share his prayers at the Sun Dance, even if some of the campers are not to participate in the dance itself. There is the outside circle of all the tribal camps that surrounds the inner circle of the Sun Dance lodge. Prayers flow from the tribal circle to the Sun Dance lodge, and blessings flow from the Center Pole of the lodge to the tribal circle, and then to all of the created world.

Sometime during the week before the lodge is set up, the people are told, "Tomorrow we'll go up to the mountain after the long rafter poles." These are the long rafter poles that will go from the outside of the lodge up to the Center Pole. We will also need some shorter poles, forked posts that are to be set up vertically around the outside of the lodge. These should be from cottonwood trees. They are furnished by different individuals, who will donate them.

After the donated poles are brought forth, we go up to the mountain. That is the hardest chore to do; it takes a whole day. We leave early in the morning, cut all of the necessary poles, and bring them back down. In this way, both the forked, upright posts and the rafter poles used to put up the lodge are there at least one day before the erection of the lodge. The distance from the outside of the lodge to the Center Pole is twelve to fourteen paces. We used to have twelve paces, but now with so many dancers, we try to have fourteen paces. This means each rafter pole must be at least seventeen paces long or almost fifty feet in height. It is hard to find good, straight pine trees of this length, but we try our best.

After the twelve rafter poles are cut, we clean off all the branches except for the very top. Then we are ready to transport them to the Sun Dance camp. This can be very difficult. The pine rafter poles are only found way up on the mountain, so we travel far to find our materials. While we are on the mountain, we will also cut smaller pines that will

connect the rafter poles on the perimeter of the lodge so that our sacred lodge circle will be complete.

If not enough upright poles have been donated, we must go and cut them on another day. They are from cottonwood trees; they must stand about eight feet long above ground, underneath the fork that will support the rafter poles. They should be at least two to two and a half feet in the ground, so the post will be over ten feet, not including the fork. These are to be found along the river, and we do not have to travel so far to accomplish our work.

The center tree is picked by the sponsor early during the winter. It is always a cottonwood tree. The sponsor will go into the woods and look for the forked tree and locate one. On the day before the lodge is to be erected, we go to bring in the Center Pole. We gather all the men who are going to help to get the tree. It's heavy; quite a lot of men will go. We come to it, and we have a ceremony before we cut it. We say one special prayer before we cut the poles on the mountain, and now we have another ceremony just for the Center Pole. I use a pipe and my feathers; I'm the one to do that. After I smoke my Indian pipe and offer a prayer, I sing the song of the Center Pole, and when I am through, I use my feathers. I smudge the feathers with incense, and then I pray while I touch the tree with my eagle feathers. "Now we're going to use you; at our Sun Dance we are going to use you. You are going to be the center tree. On you will be the bird; the eagle will be there and the buffalo will be up there, placed on you. We want you to give us power, transmit the power that is going to be on you when the dance has started and is going on. You will be the staff of this dance that is coming up; it is you who will join us to all of the powers of the universe, to Acbadadea. People will come to you; markings will be put on you indicating our three days that we will spend with you. The power will be placed on you. The Medicine Fathers, Seven Arrows, will be there on the center tree, and the sun dancers will put their hands on you and say their prayers, and we want you to help us. We want you to have moisture that you will provide us, for we are not drinking, we are not eating, we'll be suffering. We'll come to you and put our hands on you and give prayers to all of the Medicine Fathers who are going to be on you watching all of the dancers to see who is sincere. When the sun dancers are through with their smoke and prayer, they will put the ashes of their smoke at your base on the ground where you are to

be set up; that is for you. Through you we will send our prayers and from you we will receive all of the blessings from above. Help us.” I say all these kinds of words, and the men who are there hear this prayer.

We sometimes have about thirty men or so to participate in cutting the tree and in taking it to the site of the Sun Dance. When I am through with my prayers, the tree is ready for the men who are going to cut it with an axe. When it’s down, we all go to the stump where it has been cut. Generally, sap will come up, and everybody wants to bless himself with the sap that is from the tree wherever it is cut. There will usually be plenty of sap there, so people can put their hands on the stump and bless themselves with the sap. “*Aho*, we are going to have our dance and it is not going to be too dry for the dancers. It will be a good Sun Dance.” You can tell by the sap on that tree what the dance is going to be like. If it is a dry one with no sap, we know it is going to be a dry dance with a lot of suffering. So when it’s full of sap, they all say, “*Aho, aho.*” All the men that are there will listen and pray.

When we are through with our prayers, they will trim the tree while it is lying there. They will trim off the branches that we don’t want so it is clean up to the fork. If there are any big limbs above the fork, we may cut some of those off, but we leave the fork and the tiny limbs at the top of each side of the fork. Now here is the tree, and it is ready to be taken out of the woods. It is brought out by all of these men who will bring it to where the lodge is going to be. We try to bring in the Center Pole on the day before we will set it up and erect the lodge. Sometimes we will cut it on the morning of the day the lodge is to be built, but this is not so good.

Finally it is time to erect the lodge. The Sun Dance itself will start that night at dusk, and we have work to do. When we’re ready, the butt, the end of the tree, is placed right next to the hole that has been dug for it. It is a big hole in the ground, about two feet across and four feet deep. We need about thirty-five or forty men; the more the better, for the tree is a good size and heavy. It is put up by manpower, so it requires a good number of men to lift it.

Before we set it up, there is another ceremony. While the tree is still on the ground, a man is selected again—a veteran who has been in a war—to tell his story and offer a prayer. After his prayer, he ties the flags onto each branch of the fork of the center

tree near the top. There are two flags: one is a blue one, the other is a white one. The white one represents the earth; the blue one represents the skies, the heavens. After this prayer and after he ties the flags, he receives a little present from the sponsor. A bundle of tobacco will also be tied next to each flag to represent the prayers that are being raised to the Medicine Fathers when the tree is lifted. The tobacco can be tied just above or below where the flag is tied, but the flag and tobacco should be tied very close together. The flags and the tobacco can be furnished by someone who wants to offer a prayer for the coming Sun Dance. After the tree is raised, the flags will be seen flying about forty feet up from the ground. Probably no one even sees the tobacco bundle after the tree is raised, because it is up so high that something that small is almost invisible. But we know that the offering is there, and all of the Medicine Fathers know that the offering is there and that we have taken great care to prepare everything correctly.

While the tree is still on the ground, the same man will paint three rings on the tree before it is set up. These three rings are about four or five feet above the ground and are made by using charcoal from the fire where the outdoor sings were held and water. This mixture makes a dark-colored paste, and the veteran uses his hands to paint the rings. The three circles represent the three days the Sun Dance is going to last. If it is to be a four-day Sun Dance, then four dark rings will be made. All the people can see these marks. The number three also has other meanings for the Indians. The first meaning of the three rings is the number of days of the dance, but the three rings also represent the sacred circles of progression from the physical world, to the world where the Medicine Fathers dwell, and then to the pure world of Acbadadea above and beyond all other creation. All three worlds are connected in the Center Pole.

The last thing to do before raising the pole is to sing the "Tree Song." The Center Pole is still lying on the ground. A number of men will get on each side of it, and we are ready to lift it. We face each other and clap our hands without using a drum; we use our hands to take the place of a drum. Now we sing the song, repeating it four times, and then we whoop and holler and reach down and grasp the tree and lift it about four feet off the ground. Then we put it down and sing the same song again, four times. After we repeat the sacred song four times, we lift the tree up a second time, then lay it down again. A third time we repeat the song four times, then lift the tree up again and lay it back down

again. The next time, the fourth time, is the last; after we sing the song four times, we reach down, pick the tree up and hold it up. We don't lay it down anymore; we come right along with it, on, on, on, and on up, until it is set up right. The more men to do this, the easier it is. There are long ropes that have been placed running around the fork of the tree. The ropes will be pulled from the east side when the top of the tree gets beyond our reach. The men with the ropes will start pulling, keeping the tree from swaying to one side and trying to keep it going straight. Besides that, some large poles about twenty feet long are being used to help. A rope is tied between each set of two poles, and these sets are used to push the tree up from the west, while others pull on the ropes from the east.

Up and up the tree goes, until the butt of the tree drops into the hole that has been dug for it, and now it stands there. We then put dirt around the base and tamp it in tight so that the pole is straight and the opening of the fork faces east. I will be at the outside edge of the circle and direct the raising of the tree. If it is too much one way or the other, the fork will be straightened. I tell them which way to turn, until the fork is just right from the sponsor's position towards the rising sun. As I stand in the position of the sunrise, I can sight a line from the doorway of the lodge to the Center Pole, the chief's pole where the medicine man and sponsor will sit inside the lodge, the sacred fire for the outdoor sings, and on to the camp of the sponsor and the medicine man in the larger camp circle. We know where the sun is going to be coming up in the morning, on the horizon in the east, so we orient the lodge and the camp circle in harmony with the sun. It is the responsibility of the Sun Dance chief to line everything up and run everything properly. Green willows are brought and tied crosswise with the fork of the tree; one bundle goes on the east side, the other on the west side. Then the twelve upright poles that mark the outside of the lodge are set up. The outside ring of the Sun Dance is made by the upright cottonwood trees, each of which has a forked top facing the Center Pole. Each of the twelve pine rafter poles that meet at the Center Pole is placed into one of the upright cottonwood forks. The chief's pole is the first rafter pole that is placed from the upright cottonwood where the sponsor and medicine man are located to the Center Pole. The chief's pole goes up first; the next rafter poles to be placed into the crotch of the Center Pole are opposite the chief's pole from each side of the doorway. Then comes one from the south side and then one from the north side, and then the others can be placed

according to where they fit best.

People always ask, “What is the significance of the twelve poles; what do they mean?” Well, I tell them this makes the sacred circle of the lodge. The upright poles form the sacred circle representing the spiritual reality of our tribe. The rafter poles link the sacred circle to the Center Pole, which is the sacred point where all three worlds are connected: the physical world of the tribe, the spiritual world of our Medicine Fathers, and the pure world of Acbadadea. There are other meanings also; the lodge is round, and that represents the earth, which is round. The twelve poles, leading from each forked pole to the center, represent the twelve months of the year. The twelve months represent another circle, because in it we are brought back to a new beginning. Each of the twelve poles represents a month of the year when we must have our monthly prayer meeting, when the moon is full and up in the air, and we should continue prayers each day between the twelve appointed monthly Sun Dance prayer meetings. The drum which we use to help carry our songs to Acbadadea is also round. All things in Nature’s way are round.

So you see that the Sun Dance lodge itself contains and represents the world and the time from one Sun Dance to the next. It brings man into direct contact with all of the powers of the universe, with the Maker of All Things Above. The Sun Dance lodge contains all of the dancers and all of the spectators who share their prayers there. Everyone who has been to the Sun Dance should remember all this and carry it with him always.

So, after the center tree is set up, we’ll keep on working until everything is done. We start this in the morning, and we may be through by about three or four in the afternoon. Sometimes we are through about one or two o’clock, and that is fortunate because some of the dancers will want to have a sweat bath that afternoon to purify themselves before going into the Sun Dance. When they come back from the sweat ceremony, the sun may be setting, and it will soon be time to go into the lodge. They will have what dinner they want before going in.

After all of the rafter poles are set up and each of the upright forked poles into which the rafter poles sit are connected to each other to form a complete circle, then brush is placed around the outside of the lodge to enclose it. Many of our helpers have retired to their camps because the heavy work is done, but this final work must be

completed. Pine or cottonwoods can be used for the purpose. Only the doorway to the east is left open. The sacred circle is complete.

Now it is for me to place the buffalo and eagle at the center. Before I fix the buffalo head to the Center Pole, its face is painted with a special white clay that we mix with a little water so that the paint will not blow off with the wind. When the buffalo is roaming out in the prairies, he decorates himself with dirt. It is a medicine the buffalo creates by rolling in the dust and whipping it up. He always does this before a battle. You will see him breathe strongly and snort through his nostrils as he breaks the ground with his front feet, sending up a cloud of dust to paint himself with this medicine before his charge into battle. He is going to war, and he prepares himself by making medicine and painting. He concentrates completely on the task before him.

In the same way, we prepare for our sacred warfare by painting and making special prayers and medicine on the second day of the Sun Dance and by painting the buffalo head before we place it on the tree. You can see now that everything in the Sun Dance has a meaning; if you think about it, you will understand.

After the buffalo is painted, we place him on the west side of the Center Pole, right under the chief's rafter pole. The buffalo will face the sponsor and the Sun Dance chief during the dance. We place a bundle of sweet sage in each nostril of the buffalo and tie the sage so it will stay there for the three days. We use sweet sage to offer a prayer to Acbadadea in many of our ceremonies, and we use the sweet sage in each nostril of the buffalo to represent the buffalo's breath. In the same manner a sincere person's breath can carry a prayer. When we blow our eagle bone whistles during the Sun Dance, our breath does carry a continual prayer. While the singers are beating on the drum and singing, the dancers are blowing on the eagle bone whistles. The drumming is the heartbeat of the Sun Dance, and the heartbeat and the breath of the eagle bone whistles send a prayer to all of the Medicine Powers in the universe and to Acbadadea.

The eagle and the buffalo that we use in the Sun Dance are no longer living but are stuffed. The sponsor may have one or the other that he would like to use, but I have both: I have a buffalo head and an eagle that we generally use. One year when the dance was very, very hot, the buffalo started to cry. All the dancers could see the real tears that the buffalo shed. Then in the heat of the afternoon of the second day, water came forth

from the neck of the buffalo. It was a miracle, and all of the dancers came to touch the sacred water and then rubbed their hands on their heart. Everyone got up and danced in thanksgiving for the great blessing that the buffalo was giving to the entire tribe through the Sun Dance. Everyone felt that his suffering was recognized, and all of the dancers knew that their prayers were being heard.

I have had my own eagle for only about five years now. The eagle wanted to give himself to me for the Sun Dance, I imagine, because this great bird came down from the sky into a coyote trap on my brother's ranch. He was found in perfect condition. I had quite a time getting him stuffed, though, because no one wanted to have anything to do with it. It is unlawful for anyone to possess eagles except for those Indians who use them in their sacred ceremonies. Sun dancers need the eagle feathers and the stuffed eagle as part of their religion, and this is allowed. Government men have come to watch our ceremonies to see how we use the eagles. They have asked me many questions, and they were well satisfied that we use them in a sacred manner; therefore they allow us to use them and don't bother us. I was told we could even ask the Forest Service for the feathers from eagles that have been killed in Nature and found by the government. I know they have many birds, but I have never had success in any of my requests when I write or go to their office.

For this reason, no one would help me preserve my bird, but a friend offered to try his hand. He bought a book and read it and then said, "I'll try and we can see how it works." It did work out well, and today I have a fine bird thanks to this young man who stuffed the bird. It is good that I have both the buffalo and the eagle to use at the Sun Dance. They are very important and bring blessings to us all.

The last thing to do before the lodge is complete is to put the eagle on the rafter poles. Of course we purify the eagle with incense before he is tied onto the poles. When the eagle is in place, the lodge is complete. Now I have fulfilled my responsibilities in preparing the lodge, and I may retire for purification with either a sweat bath that has already been prepared nearby or at least with a plunge into the river. Then I have my dinner, and after I take my last drink, I put on my Sun Dance skirt and prepare for the Sun Dance to begin.

The Sun Dance lodge is like the white man's church; it is our place to pray to

Acbadadea. The Indians do not need a church to capture the presence of God, because He is all around us in Nature. We carry out all of our sacred ceremonies in Nature, without the aid of any permanent building. When the dance is over, we leave the lodge standing, and over the years it naturally returns to the earth. In the same way, everything returns to the earth in its own time.

As each sun dancer approaches the lodge, ready to begin the ordeal, he should be aware of the sacred character of the lodge. It represents the earth and all creation as well as the circle of seasons that travel through time. The center tree is the staff of life, and on it are these medicines and the representatives of the Maker of All Things. It is through the Center Pole that we meet God, so we must go to the center of the circle and understand the responsibility of being placed at the center of creation. Spiritual realities are more than you can imagine, but if you follow the Sun Dance religion correctly, then you can begin to understand this, and the responsibility of participation in the Sun Dance will become clear.

You can see that it takes a great deal of preparation to construct the Sun Dance lodge, but after we have completed the lodge, all of the medicine powers of the universe are present on the Center Pole. Seven Arrows and all the rest are there representing Acbadadea, even though we do not see them. Throughout the Sun Dance, the Medicine Fathers will be carefully watching the dancers. They will see who is sincere. They listen to all the prayers; they see who is continually dancing and who is concentrating on his prayers.

The dancers will have their gaze fixed on the eagle or on the buffalo or on some spot on the tree. All the time they are dancing, they will concentrate on that spot. Oftentimes dancers will see the buffalo or the eagle just as if he were alive. If the dancer has concentrated on the buffalo and has been sincere in his prayers, then the buffalo will know. For those sincere dancers, the buffalo will be alive. To everyone else the buffalo will just be up there mounted, but to that dancer, he will be alive. It is the same for those dancers who watch the eagle. They see him alive up there. The bird or the buffalo may dance with the sacred songs, and it will be a great comfort to the dancers.

The most sincere dancers will dance almost continually for the three days, even though they have no food or water for this entire time. They will always be up, going

forward to the center tree and dancing back to their place while always facing the tree and concentrating on their spot. These dancers will be given something by the Medicine Fathers, especially by the buffalo. A wild buffalo will charge a person, hook him with his horns, and throw him in the air and let him fall. The same thing will happen to the dancer in the lodge. It generally does not happen early in the dance, but on the second day. Each dancer is beginning to get dry and to suffer, and those who keep going continually, even after they start suffering, will be rewarded by the buffalo. The buffalo will charge and catch the dancer, hook him up and throw him up in the air, and the dancer will “take a fall,” as we say. Before the dancer takes a fall, the spectators see the dancer staggering around as he comes forward to the tree, and he may weave out of his own trail on the way back to his place. Each dancer has his own trail to the Center Pole from his position on the outside of the lodge. The dancers on either side of the man who is ready to take a fall will notice that the staggering dancer can’t come back to his post on his own trail and that he may weave into another dancer’s trail. So the other dancers will stand stationary at their posts on the periphery of the lodge and blow their eagle bone whistles to give support. The singers also will notice that the man is almost ready to fall, and they’ll say, “Don’t quit singing. A man is about ready to receive something; he’s going to fall, so don’t quit.” Until the man falls, the singers will keep singing; sing, sing, sing while this man is dancing, wobbling all over the ground. Finally he will take a hard fall. When that happens, it is the buffalo that throws him up in the air; the man hits the ground and he lies there, unconscious.

When that happens, we hurriedly go and cover him up with cattails and sweet sage. Then we pray for him. He is gone into a vision, so nobody bothers him. We will keep the dance going; he lies there. That reward is medicine coming from the Sun Dance, given to him by the buffalo. He will give the dancer something, probably tell him what to do, what kind of feathers, colors, or medicine to make. Different persons will receive different things. The person who has gone into a deep sleep will probably lie there for twenty minutes. After he has received his reward, he will wake up, he will probably hear the singing, and then he is ready to get up and dance again.

A person should not be afraid when this thing happens. It is good for a person to continue dancing until he falls. It could be that some of the other animals that are not

visible, but present in spirit, will knock the dancer down and then they will give him something. He may receive some power or message of some kind, and so he may be of some service to his people afterwards, all year round.

That person, by attending later prayer meetings, will be advancing a little toward the understanding of the Sun Dance religion, toward the nature of God. The more a person participates in all of our monthly and daily prayers, the more understanding he will have of all of the things that are to be learned in the Sun Dance religion. It is the way that was given to us long ago, and has always been, and is still continuing today.

I should explain to you here that in setting up the Sun Dance lodge, we are really making the universe in a likeness; for, you see, each of the posts around the lodge represents some particular object of creation, so that the whole circle is the entire creation, and the one tree at the center, upon which the twenty-eight poles rest, is *Wakan-Tanka*, who is the center of everything. Everything comes from Him, and sooner or later everything returns to Him.

—Black Elk, Oglala Sioux