

## **THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGER**

WHAT IS THE Message? Where does it come from? How is it received by the souls who deliver it? These questions often arise in enquiring minds. And the answer is that the message is like rain, and rain falls where it is needed and when it is needed. But does the rain come from above? It seems to come from above, but it first rises from below. As the vapors rise first from the sea and turn into clouds, so every aspect of knowledge gained by all beings rises upwards like vapor, forming into clouds as ideas, and again falling from above like rain. There are very many names for the seas, rivers, and streams, but they all contain water. And there are various names for religions, but they all contain the wisdom given at different times in different ways. There is lightning, there is thunder, and the rain falls; and there are wars and disasters before the message comes. Storms are very often warnings of what is to follow, and the different kinds of battles and revolutions are often warnings before the coming of peace.

It is sometimes asked why, if God is all-pervading, there is need of the special manifestation of a messenger such as Krishna, Buddha, or Jesus. The answer is given in the words of the Bhagavad-Gita where Shri Krishna says, 'When Dharma is hindered, then I am born.' This means that a manifestation which the people recognize as a savior or messenger, always comes when the necessity arises. In other words, it is necessity, it is the need of the world which causes the Spirit to arise in its true form. Skepticism is the germ that causes decay at the heart of the tree of life. But always when one tree dies, another tree springs up; we see in our own lives, and especially at times when we are sunk in depression and sorrow, that some answer comes to the difficulty of the situation. It may come from a friend, from a brother, from parents, from a beloved; one may even get what is necessary at such a moment from one's enemy. But why should a message only come in time of pain or after a great sorrow? Why should not a message come every day for one's guidance? There are two reasons for this: one is that there is constant guidance from above, but man, so absorbed in his life's activities, does not open his heart to listen to that message and to see where it comes from. And the other reason is that the deeper the sorrow, the higher the voice of the heart rises, until it reaches the throne of God; and that is the time when the answer comes.

In all ages and to all peoples the message of God has been sent. And that message has been kept by those who received it in the form of a scripture, and the name of the messenger and his honor have been held high by those who have followed that particular message. No matter at what time in the history of the world the message came, one thing is sure: that it has always penetrated the heart of man and left its impression and its influence, ever multiplying and spreading, proving it to be the message of God. And there is no better instance of this truth than the coming of Jesus Christ, and the fact that he gave his message to so few, mostly to fishermen. Even though the conditions in which the Master had to deliver his message were difficult, yet the message was God's, and it did not fail to make a lasting impression on the souls of men.

Since it is the message of God, whenever it comes it is from the same source. When it came a thousand years ago it was His message; when it came a hundred years ago it was His message; and if it came today it would be also His message. How ignorant man has been through all the ages ! And he shows his ignorance even today, for whenever the message has come, man has fought and disputed and argued. Man has held fast to one prophet and ignored the others, because although he knew his religion he did not know the message. He has taken the book as his religion without recognizing the

message. If that were not the general tendency, then how could Jesus Christ with His most spiritual message have been crucified? There had been prophecies, and besides prophecies the Master himself was the evidence of his message, as the saying has it: 'What you are, speaks louder than what you say.' And how thickly veiled man's eyes must be by the religion, the faith, the belief he holds, for him to accept only one messenger and to reject the message given by other prophets, not knowing that the message is one and the same!

It is one thing to love and another thing to understand. The one who loves the messenger is a devotee; but the one who knows the messenger is his friend. There is a tendency in the human race which has appeared in all ages: it leads man to accept every expression of the message which has been given him, to be won by it, blessed by it, and yet to fail to recognize who the messenger is. The followers of each form of the message profess devotion to their Lord and Master, by whatever name he had in the past, but they do not necessarily know the Master. What they know is the name and the life of the Master that has come down to them in history or tradition; but beyond that they know very little about him. If the same one came in another form, in a garb adapted to another age, would they know him or accept him? No, they would not even recognize him, because it was not the message but the form that they accepted in the past; a certain name or character; a part but not the whole.

There is a story about a great Sufi in India, whose name was Usman Haruni. He was a murshid to whom came thousands of disciples, among them many of the most learned and philosophical people of the time. He taught them the deepest truths of mysticism, and most of all to worship the nameless and formless God. But there came a time when he said to them, 'So far I have worshipped according to tradition, but now I feel that I must go and prostrate myself before the image of the goddess Kali in all humility.' His pupils were aghast. That he, whose conception of God had been so lofty, should go and bow before the hideous image of Kali, to worship whom was to break the law of their religion, was beyond anything they could conceive, and caused them to fear that their master had lost his reason. Some even thought that he was treading the downward path.

So when the teacher went to the temple of Kali, only one of his pupils went with him, a youth whose devotion to his master was very great. As they went, the teacher said to this disciple, 'You should go back. They are many, and are surely in the right; I am perhaps in the wrong.' But the young man still followed. When the temple was reached, the teacher was so greatly moved by the thoughts that the image of the goddess suggested to him that he prostrated himself in humility. And the disciple, standing by, looked on with sympathy at the thought of how many followers his master had had, and of how in one moment all had turned from him. When the teacher arose he said, 'Do you still follow me?' And when the disciple said that he did, the holy man asked him further, 'But perhaps you do not understand why you follow me?' Then the youth said, 'You have taught me the first lesson of the spiritual path: that none exists save God. How then can I exclude this image of Kali, if you choose to bow and prostrate yourself before it?'

The ways in which the message is given are different because the mentality of mankind differs at each period. Every prophet had to speak in the manner of the time in which he lived, and according to the evolution of that time. Also, the custom of each country differs from that of other countries; the manners and life differ. If the messenger is born in one country and has to give his message in another country, surely he has to consider the way in which the people there look at life, and to give his message accordingly. But the message is always from God. This is the reason why the external study

of Buddhism will make one feel that Hinduism is different from Buddhism, and the external study of Christianity and Islam will make one feel that Christianity is different from Islam; but if one saw that underlying thread that connects all religions, one would see that all religion is one, as truth is one, as life is one, as God is one.

Truth is the soul of religion. When Jesus came to earth he did not say, 'I have brought you a new religion never heard of by you or your ancestors.' He said he had not come to give a new law but to fulfill the law; in other words, 'I have come to continue giving you that which you have received before and have not understood.'

There are scriptures that mankind regards as religious scriptures, but imagine how little of that message a book can contain, and how much more must have been given that was never written in a book! If books were sufficient, then the book of Abraham or the earlier books that were kept as scriptures could be sufficient, but it was not the book. The messenger, whenever he came, came to give the life, the living spirit, the divine light that can shine like the sun during the day, so that no soul with the slightest spark of sincerity could ever doubt the truth and unity of the message.

With all the opposition to the Master, at the time when the Jews demanded his crucifixion, did those who were present sincerely think the Master was guilty? No, each one of them was more or less impressed by the truth of the message, yet torn by convention and custom, bound by laws, held fast by the religious authority that was in power. They could not express their sincere feelings, and so law governed instead of love. And this state of things has existed in all ages. Blinded by conventions and by the laws of his time and the customs of his people, man has ignored and opposed the truth. Yet at the same time the truth has never failed to make its impression upon the soul, because the soul of all is one soul, and truth is one truth under whatever religion it is hidden.

In reality there cannot be many religions; there is only one. There cannot be two truths; there cannot be two masters. As there is only one God and one religion, there is one master and there is one truth. And the weakness of man has been that only what he is accustomed to consider as truth he takes to be truth, and anything he has not been accustomed to hear or think frightens him. Just like a person in a strange land, away from home, the soul is a stranger to the nature of things it is not accustomed to. But the journey to perfection means rising above limitations, rising so high that not only the horizon of one country, of one continent, is seen, but that of the whole world. The higher we rise, the wider becomes the horizon of our view.

Many intellectual people, with their various ideas, differ from one another in their opinions and in their way of looking at things, in their speculations, but do the prophets differ from one another? No, they cannot differ. The reason is that it is the various minds which differ, not the souls. The one who lives in his mind, is conscious of his mind; the one who lives in his soul is conscious of the soul. Spiritual means spirit-conscious. There is a line of a song, 'The night has a thousand eyes, the day but one.' When a person is living in his mind, he is living through the darkness of the night. The moment he rises above his mind and awakens in the light of the soul he becomes spiritual. And if a thousand spiritual people speak, they will say the same thing, perhaps in different words but with only one meaning, for they have one and the same vision. This is why spiritual realization is called the truth. There are many facts but only one truth. The facts can be put into words but not the truth, for God is truth, the soul is truth, the real self of man is truth. Since truth is unlimited and incomparable, it alone

knows, enjoys, and realizes its own existence.

The key to the secret of the messenger is given in the Bible, but very few will ponder upon it and reason it out for themselves. The key is in the words, 'I am Alpha and Omega', 'I am the first and the last.' Can that mean, 'I came only for a time, and then I was called Jesus, and only then did I give a message: I spoke neither before nor after that time'? Alpha and Omega means First and Last; always, continually present; never absent from the beginning of creation to the end.

A question arises in the enquiring mind: who may this Alpha and Omega be? What was he before Jesus Christ? What would he be after the time of Jesus Christ? For those who put the water of the ocean in a pitcher, that water is from the ocean; but really only the ocean is the ocean. When those of various creeds, who have different dogmas and forms of worship, say that only this or that is the teaching of Christ, it may be partly true; but it is not all the teaching of Christ. It is as true as saying, 'This is the ocean', if one brought some water from the ocean in a pitcher.

This shows that there was a personality called Jesus Christ who brought the message; it was the personality that was Jesus. This is the secret of that Alpha and Omega spirit of Christ. If one could only see that spirit hidden behind different personalities one would be constantly in the vision of Christ.

As many souls as there are in the world, so many are their fancies and their fantasies. Many look favorably at a certain teacher, but as many do not. And there has never been one teacher in the world whom everyone regarded with favor. Praise cannot exist without blame, for nothing has existence without its opposite, just as pleasure cannot exist without pain. No one can be great and not small; no one can be loved and not hated. There is no one who is hated by all and not loved by some-one; there is always someone to love him.

If one would realize that the world of God, His splendor and magnificence, are to be seen in the wise and the foolish, in the good and the bad, then one would think tolerantly and reverently of all mankind, knowing that it represents the messenger, as the messenger represents God. For no one has seen God at any time, but if there is anyone who represents God, it is the man who speaks His word. God is seen in the one who glorifies Him. But if our hearts are closed, even if we wait for a thousand years for the messenger to show himself, we shall never find him. For he who is always there has said, 'I am Alpha and Omega. I exist every moment. When you call me, I am there. Knock at the door, and I will answer you.' And those whose eyes are open do not need to go to a church and look at a picture or statue of the Lord. In the eyes of every infant, in the smile of every innocent child, they receive the blessing of Christ.

It only means changing one's outlook on life, and recognizing the divine in man. But man has ignored the divine spirit that manifests in humanity, and always prefers an idol, a painting, a picture, to the living God, who is constantly before him. For the sage, the seer, the saint, and the yogi who begin to see the master, and see him living, there is no place where he cannot be seen. Then everywhere the beloved master is ready to answer the cry of the soul coming from friend, father or teacher. And if we go a little further forward, we will find that the teacher speaks aloud, not only through living beings, but through nature. If the eyes and ears are open, the leaves of the trees become as pages of the Bible. If the heart is alive, the whole life becomes one single vision of His sublime beauty, speaking to us at every moment.

There is also the metaphysical side of this, for it is metaphysics which makes things distinct and intelligible to those whose reason asks questions; man and the study of man is the study of the whole universe. As Ali says, 'Know thyself, if thou wouldst know God.' The secret of this is the knowledge that when man comes to earth, he is both soul and body, or as others would say, spirit and body, and that the action and reaction of soul and body produce what we call mind. And in the same way it is the action and reaction of God and His creation which have produced the Spirit of Guidance, and it is that spirit which is the soul of Christ.

One may understand this better by an example: in the case of an individual, the affairs of his everyday life bring him to a realization and understanding of what his actions have brought about, and it is this understanding of life which becomes his spirit of guidance which is called Buddhi in Vedantic terms. Again, the Prime Minister of a country stands between his country and the world; his experience guides him to direct the affairs of the nation.

The medium between soul and body is called spirit. In the collective spirit it is that spirit of the messenger; and that is why the divine message brings an answer to every soul. It is not necessarily a law for the multitude or a religion for the world, but it brings an answer to every existing soul; and before the soul has expressed its cry it has reached the heart of the messenger. Can anyone claim the message falsely? How could anyone ever dare to do such a thing! If it is already so difficult for the true messenger of God to stand steadfast in all the winds of destruction, how could falsehood ever withstand such a wind? Only the true messenger can stand firm whenever the message is given to the world. Truth alone is victorious.

There is great expectation all over the world just now that the teacher is coming again. And the expectation seems to be as if the teacher will come direct from the sky, and as if the whole world will accept and expect him, that the lawyers, scientists, materialists, and teachers of the different sects will fall on their knees before him when he comes. But if we only think of the coming of Jesus Christ in that humble garb, and how no one accepted him during his life! In his unassuming life, preaching to simple men, was he accepted as Christ, or is he not Christ today? If we look at the lives of different prophets and teachers, were they ever accepted at once? Muhammad was three times chased out of Mecca, his own city, and had to flee in the night; and during the long life struggle of Moses, in the end he could only work because of the permission of Pharaoh. Krishna passed his whole life unknown, until, in the war described in the Mahabharata, Arjuna asked for his blessing and fought; it was only then that the moment of his message came.

In order to recognize a world-message, people in all ages have pointed out and predicted a messenger coming from this or that corner of the world. But can man ever authorize a messenger of God? Has he the power to authorize a man, and say: this will be the Messenger of God, or: this is the Messenger of God? God alone can send His messenger. Things are happening now such as have never happened before; people talking so freely about the messenger and the message. They discuss the most sacred things, things that if one really knew them would keep one's lips sealed. There could not be a worse degeneration of religion than this. Has the messenger ever been advertised? Can any man come forward in the world and make a claim of this kind, and also be true? No, the message is like a spring of water: it rises and falls and makes its way by itself, so that no one can make an imitation of it. If the message is true, it will always make its way to the end of the world. It is always so with the message

of God.

But those who wait, may wait. It is their destiny to wait, and one cannot help them. They waited while Jesus Christ came and went, and they still wait and will wait for ever. And yet he has always come; to the individual, to the multitude, to the nation, to the race. He came, and spoke to the whole world; but did he come with drums and trumpets? No, he came in the humblest guise, in the most unassuming manner; as our brother, our servant, our friend, our equal. Man, because of his devotion, has called him Lord; but he said, 'Call me not good. I am like unto you.' It is not his absence that keeps man in ignorance; it is man's own closed eyes. The Master has always been present, but man knew him not.

As to the instrument of the message, in reality the whole universe is an instrument, and every object and every being in it is an instrument. Through whichever instrument He chooses, God gives His message. There is a saying of Jalaluddin Rumi, 'Fire, water, air, and earth are God's servants, and whenever He wishes them to work for Him, they are ready to obey his command.' If the elements are the obedient servants of God, cannot man be a greater and better instrument?

In point of fact God Himself is the messenger. In the aspect of God He is God, but, in the form of the messenger, He is the messenger. The tide of the sea surges, and when the sea has that motion it is called tide, but in reality the tide is the sea itself.

It is not solid wood that can become a flute, but the empty reed. It is the perfection of that passiveness in the heart of the messenger which gives scope for the message from above; for the messenger is the reed, the instrument. The difference between his life and the life of the average man is that the latter is full of self. It is the blessed soul whose heart is empty of self, who is filled with the light of God.

The messenger has five aspects to his being: the divine, the ideal, the prophet, the message-bearer, and the teacher. Four of these aspects have already been mentioned, so there remains only the last, which is the aspect of the teacher.

The claim of Risalat in man's lifetime is a great burden, heavier than earth and larger than heaven. It is the fulfillment of the message which must identify his name with the Spirit of Guidance. Man, however great, should never claim perfection, for the limitation of his external being limits him in the eyes of men. The claimant of Christhood, living on earth, must be searched by numberless searchlights constantly falling upon him. Most men can only see the limitations of his human life, and can never probe the heights of his divinity; comparatively few can do this.

The claim of Christhood seemed to the people too great for Jesus; that is why he was crucified by the intolerant world. Christ was not crucified because the people of his time were unevolved, but because it is always difficult to live among people above whose standard of goodness one has risen. If Christ appeared today with the claim of Christhood, even today he would be crucified. Christ cannot be without the cross, nor can the cross be without Christ. Christ and cross both stand together.

What is asked of a messenger is to be as fine as a silken thread, that he may tune his lute as high as he chooses; and yet to be as strong as the gut string, so that he may endure the wear and tear of life in the world. To be so tender as to respond to every call for sympathy, and to be so firm as to bear all things. To be in the world and yet not of the world. To live and not to live, for the Lord God alone lives.

What does the prophet bring? Does he bring new doctrines, new teachings, and new laws? He does, and yet he does not; for there is nothing new under the sun, and it is ever the same law which he

comes to fulfill. When the need is there, the prophet cries aloud that which has always been whispered gently by the lips of the wise of all ages. Beyond and above the words, he brings the light which clears things, making them simple and as if they had always been known to the soul on earth; he brings life, revivifying the hearts and souls which otherwise are like dry bones in the grave of the human body. Yes, the prophet brings a religion, but that is not all: what he really brings to earth is the living God, who is otherwise hidden in the heavens.

And who is the Master? He is seen by all, and yet not really seen. He is known to many, and yet recognized by few. He speaks to all; yet his silence quickens every soul. Most attached is he, and yet detached; most interested, and yet indifferent. Sad of disposition, and yet most joyful; poor as man can be, and yet so rich. King in his soul, he yet walks with the bowl of the beggar in his hand from door to door. Warning of danger and consoling the broken-hearted; comrade of the youthful and friend of the aged. Master of life within and without, yet the servant of all. Such is the being of the Master. He is man in the sight of man, but God in the Being of God.

The message is the answer to the cry of individual and collective souls. The voice of God is speaking all the time, but no one listens; therefore God has manifested as man, that He might speak with a yet louder voice. But even then man does not listen. In the time of Christ the inspiration was there, the voice was there and the divine power; but how few were those who listened and understood! It has always been so, and it always will be so. It is no wonder that Jesus had so few disciples, and even among them perhaps not one who had a true understanding of the Master. At the hour when Muhammad was passing away, when hundreds of his disciples were there, he pointed out one and said, 'I am wisdom and Ali is the door.' Great perplexity has arisen as to why this was so when the Master had the power to make everyone understand. But it was not meant to be so. Each has his own puzzle to solve. How uninteresting the world would be if all men were perfect; it would be like a piano in which all the notes were the same.

Whenever the spirit of God has come forth in its true form, the world has been against it. Why has this been so? It is because man has two sides to his nature, one false and the other real; and before the true messenger can penetrate to the reality of a man's being, he first touches the false or unreal part, and that revolts. And in the case of a man who does not revolt, even though the light reaches him his heart is covered, and it only touches the cover. Such a man is attracted, yet he doubts.

There are egos who are not willing and ready to accept all that attracts them. The more something attracts them, the more they rebel against it, suspecting it of being a temptation. Even if they see the reality of something that attracts them they consider the tendency of being attracted to be a weakness.

There are egos who refuse to accept what their friend has accepted, and refuse to admire fully what that friend has admired. And even if they really wish to accept something that their friend has accepted, they will refuse to do so. For the tendency of that ego is to swim against the tide; it is the strength of that ego. Against this strength Christ has said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' It is mostly this same strength of mentality which has stood out against the messengers, building a fortified wall between the messenger and the souls who long for guidance. There are, however, those who are like lighted candles: they can light other candles and they can inspire others. But the other candles must be of wax; if they are of steel they cannot be lighted. The heart must be like wax; it must melt; if it is like steel, it cannot be illumined.

It is easier for the idealistic devotee to enhance his ideal when the ideal is not present; its presence often hinders the devotee in strengthening his ideal. For the ideal which grows and expands in the imagination of the devotee will always excel the ideal personality who is living the life of limitations on earth.

The souls who believe in a messenger because of his miraculous powers, or because they see the belief of his adherents, are followers; but the souls to whom the presence of the messenger is the evidence, to whom his words are a proof, and to whom their own belief is a conviction, are the foundation of the world's new temple.

His disciples are to the teacher as all the objects of heaven and earth are to the sun. Some are responsive to the light of the sun, and become hot or cold. Some grow and thrive, and bring out their color and fragrance. Some close their eyes or become blind in the light of the sun. Some begin their life's activities as the sun rises; and some await the rising of the sun during the dark, depressing night in pain and suffering. Some look forward to the clearing of the clouds and the smiles of the sun. But the stars and planets in heaven are still more responsive and more closely connected with the special current of the sun; and so are the disciples who are close to the spirit of the teacher. They are his special apostles; they give out the light of the sun that is reflected in their heart.

There are three stages of action which the sincere followers of the message have to pass through, and the difficulty is that each stage has a tendency to hinder them from going on to the next stage. And the reason is that there is no end of interest and happiness at every stage that they have to go through in their lives. Another reason is that one stage is quite different from another, and therefore each stage has a kind of contrary action to the previous one.

These three stages may be called receiving the message, assimilating the message, and representing the message. For a sincere mureed the first stage can be so interesting that he may think he can never have enough of it, the receiving of that endless knowledge; and the heart of the seeker after truth which is never full may receive it for ages and yet it is never enough. When the receiver of the message is at that stage, then the activity of the further stages remains unaccomplished.

The next stage, which is the stage of assimilation, is most necessary, and very few can imagine how long it takes for the spirit to assimilate knowledge of truth. One assimilates it by the power of contemplation. It is by pondering over the subjects that one has heard, by practicing the teachings in one's life, by looking at the world from the point of view which one has been taught, by observing one thing in its thousand different aspects, that one assimilates. Many people before assimilating the know-ledge wish to reason about it, wish to discuss it, wish to justify it and see how it fits in with their own preconceived ideas. In this way they disturb the digestive fire of the spirit, for just as the mechanism of the body is always working to help to assimilate food, so the spirit is constantly working to assimilate all that one learns throughout life. Therefore it is a matter of patience, of taking life easily without troubling the mind too much over things, and of allowing the knowledge which one has received as a food of the spirit to have time to be assimilated. By trying to assimilate knowledge too soon, man loses his normal health; it is just like taking drugs to help to digest food, which is not beneficial in the end.



But the third process is also necessary, and those who care little for this stage, the one of representing, miss a great deal in life. A person who, alone, has seen something beautiful, who has heard something harmonious, who has tasted something delicious, who has smelt something fragrant, may have enjoyed it, but not completely. The complete joy is in sharing one's joy with others. For the selfish one who enjoys himself and does not care for others, whether he enjoys things of the earth or things of heaven, his enjoyment is not complete. So it is only in this third stage that the following of the message is fulfilled, when a soul has heard and has pondered upon it, and has passed the same blessing on to others.

## Four Kinds of Discipleship

There are four kinds of disciples, of whom only one can be described as a real disciple. One kind is the disciple of modern times, who comes and says to his teacher, "We will study this book together," or, "Have you read that book? It is most interesting," or, "I have learned from someone else before, and now I would like to learn what I can from you, and then I will pass on to something which is still more interesting." Such a person may be called a student, but not yet a disciple. His spirit is not that of a disciple; it is the spirit of a student who goes from one university, from one college, to another, from one professor he passes into the hands of another. He may be well-suited for such intellectual pursuits, but the spirit of the disciple is different.

Then there is another type who thinks, "What I can get out of him I will get. And when I have collected it, then I shall use it in the way I think best." Well, his way is that of a thief who says, "I will take what I can from the purse of this person, and then I shall spend it for my own purpose." This is a wrong attitude because spiritual inspiration and power cannot be stolen. A thief cannot take them. If he has this attitude, such a disciple may remain with a teacher for a hundred years and still leave empty-handed. There are many in this world today who make intellectual theft their occupation; anything intellectual they find, they take it and use it. But they do not know what harm they do by this attitude. They paralyze their minds and they close their own spirit.

Then there is a third wrong tendency of a disciple — to hold back something which is most essential, namely, confidence. He will say, "Tell me all you can teach me, all I can learn, give me all that you have." However, in his mind he says, "I will not give you my confidence, for I do not yet know if this road is right or wrong for me. When you have taught me, I shall judge; then I shall see what it is; but until then, I do not give you my confidence, though my ears are tuned to your words." This is a third wrong tendency. As long as a disciple will not give his confidence to his spiritual guide, he will not get the full benefit of his teaching.

The fourth kind is the right kind of discipleship. This does not come by just thinking that one would like to go on the spiritual path, or that one would like to be a disciple, a mureed, a chela. There comes a time in every person's life when circumstances have tried him so much that he begins to feel the wish to find a word of enlightenment, some counsel, some guidance, a direction on the path of truth. When the values of all things and beings are changing in his eyes, that is the time he begins to feel hungry for spiritual guidance. Bread is meant for the hungry, not for those who are quite satisfied.

If a person like this goes in search of a teacher, then he takes the right step. However, there is a difficulty. If he wants to test the teacher first, then there is no end to the testing. He can go from one teacher to another, from the earthly being to the heavenly being, testing everyone, and in the end, what will he find? Imperfection. He is looking for it, and he will find it. Man is an imperfect being, a human being, a limited being. If he wants to find perfection in a limited being, he

will always end up being disappointed with whoever he meets, whether it is an angel or a human being. If he were simple enough to accept any teacher that came his way and said, "I will be your mureed," then it would be easier, although this is perhaps not always practicable.

Someone asked a Brahmin, "Why do you worship a god of rock, an idol of stone? Look, here I am, a worshipper of the God who is in heaven. This rock does not listen to you, it has no ears." And the Brahmin said, "If you have no faith, even the God in heaven will not hear you; and if you have faith, this rock will have ears to hear."

The middle way and the best way is to consult one's own intuition and inspiration. One's intuition may say, "I will seek guidance from this teacher, whether he is raised high by the whole of humanity, or whether he is looked at with contempt and prejudice by thousands, I do not care." Then one follows the principle of constancy in adhering to that one teacher. But if a person is not constant on the spiritual path, he will naturally have difficulty in the end. For what is constancy? Constancy is the reflection of eternity. And what is truth? Truth is eternity; and so in seeking for truth, one must learn the principle of constancy.

The disciple has to have full confidence in the teacher's guidance, in the direction that is given to him by the teacher. The Buddhists who regard a spiritual teacher with great reverence say, "We do not care whether he is well-known or not. Even if he is, we do not know if he will accept our reverence. If he receives it, we are not sure he needs it." Worship can only be given to those whose presence we are conscious of; and it is especially intended for the spiritual teacher, for he shows us the only path that frees us from all the pains of this life. That is why amongst all other obligations involving earthly gain and benefit, the obligation to the spiritual teacher is the greatest, for it is concerned with the liberation of the soul on its journey towards Nirvana, which is the only desire of every soul.

The teacher does not always teach in plain words. The spiritual teacher has a thousand ways. It may be that by his prayers, he can guide his disciple. It may be that by his thought, his feeling, or his sympathy, even at a distance, he may guide him. Therefore, when a disciple thinks that he can be taught only by words or teachings, by practices or exercises, it is a great mistake.

In order to get the right disciples and the right people to come to him, a Sufi who lived in Hyderabad made a wonderful arrangement. He got a grumpy woman to sit just near his house; and to anyone who came to see the great teacher, she would say all kinds of things against the teacher about how unkind he was, how cruel, how neglectful, how lazy. There was nothing she would leave unsaid. As a result, out of 100, 95 would turn back, they would not dare to come near him. Perhaps only five would come wanting to form their own opinion about him. The teacher was very pleased that the 95 went away, for what they had come to find was not there, it was somewhere else.

There is another side to this question. The first thing the teacher does is to find out what the pressing need of his disciple is. Certainly, the disciple has come to seek after truth and to be guided to the path of God; but at the same time, it is the psychological task of the teacher to give his thought first to the pressing need of his disciple, whether the disciple speaks of it or not. The teacher's effort is directed towards removing that first difficulty because he knows it to be an obstacle in the disciple's way. It is easy for a soul to tread the spiritual path because it is the spiritual path that the soul is looking for. God is the seeking of every soul, and every soul will make its way naturally, providing that there is nothing to obstruct it. So, the most pressing need is the removal of any obstruction. Thus, a desire can be fulfilled, it can be conquered, or it can be removed. If it is fulfilled, so much the better. If it is not right to fulfill it, then it should be conquered or removed in order to clear the way. The teacher never thinks that he is concerned with his disciple only in his spiritual progress, in his attainment of God. For, if there is something blocking the way of the disciple, it will not be easy for the teacher to help him.

There are three faculties which the teacher considers essential to develop in the disciple: deepening the sympathy, showing the way to harmony and awakening the spirit of beauty. One often sees that without being taught any particular formula or receiving any particular lesson on these three subjects, the soul of a sincere disciple will grow under the guidance of the right teacher, like a plant that is carefully reared and watered every day, every month, and every year. Without knowing it himself, he will begin to show these three qualities: the ever-growing sympathy; the harmonizing quality increasing every day more and more; and the expression, understanding and appreciation of beauty in all of its forms.

One may ask, is there no going backwards? Well, sometimes there is a sensation of going backwards, just as when one is at sea and the ship may move in such a way that one sometimes has the feeling that one is going backwards, although one is really going forwards. One can have the same sensation when riding on an elephant or a camel. When in the lives of some disciples this sensation is felt, it is nothing but a proof of life. Nevertheless, a disciple will often feel that since he became a disciple he finds many more faults in himself than he had ever seen before. This may be so, but it does not mean that his faults have increased; it only means that now his eyes have opened wider so that every day he sees many more faults than before.

There is always a great danger on the spiritual path that the disciple has to overcome — he may develop a feeling of being exalted, of knowing more than other people, of being better than other people. As soon as a person thinks, "I am more," the doors of knowledge are closed. He will no more be able to widen his knowledge because automatically, the doors of his heart are closed the moment he says, "I know." Spiritual knowledge, the knowledge of life, is so intoxicating, so exalting, it gives such a great joy, that one begins to pour out one's knowledge before anyone who comes along as soon as this knowledge springs up. But if at that time the disciple could realize that he should conserve that kindling of the light, reserve it, keep it within himself and let it deepen, then his words would not be necessary and his presence would enlighten people. As soon as the spring rises and he pours forth what comes out of that spring in words, although on the one side his vanity will be satisfied, on the other side his energy will be exhausted. The little spring that had risen, he has poured out before others and he remains without power. This is why reserve is taught to the true disciple, the conserving of inspiration and power. The one who speaks is not always wise; it is the one who listens who is wise.

During discipleship, the first period may be called the period of observation. In this, the disciple, with a respectful attitude, observes everything good and bad, right and wrong, without expressing any opinion about them. Every day this reveals to the disciple a new idea on the subject. Today he thinks it is wrong, but does not say so; tomorrow he wonders how it can be wrong. The day after tomorrow he thinks, "But can this really be wrong?" On the fourth day, he may think that it is not wrong, and on the fifth day he may think that it is right. He may follow the same process with what is right, if only he does not express himself on the first day. It is the foolish who always readily express their opinions; the wise hold their opinions to themselves. By holding their opinions back, they become wiser every day; by expressing their opinions, they continually become less wise.

The second thing that is most important for the disciple is learning. How is he to learn? Every word the disciple hears coming from the lips of the teacher is a whole sacred book. Instead of reading a sacred book of any religion from beginning to end, he has taken in one word of the teacher, and that is the same. By meditating upon it, by thinking about it, by pondering upon it, he makes that word a plant from which fruit and flowers come. A book is one thing, and a living word is another. Perhaps a whole book could be written by the inspiration of one living word of the teacher. Besides, the disciple practices all the meditations given to him, and by these exercises, he develops within him that inspiration, that power which is meant to be developed in the disciple.

The third step forward for the disciple lies in testing the inspiration, the power that he has received. One might ask, how can one test it? Life can give a thousand examples of every idea that one has thought about. If one has learned from within that a certain idea is wrong or right, then life itself is an example that shows why it is wrong or why it is right.

If a person does not become enlightened, then one can find the explanation by watching the rain. It falls upon all trees, but it is according to the response of those trees that they grow and bear fruit. The sun shines upon all the trees, it makes no distinction between them. However, it is according to the response that the trees give to the sun that they profit by its sunshine. At the same time, a mureed is very often an inspiration to the murshid. It is not the murshid who teaches, it is God who teaches. The murshid is only a medium, and as high as the response of the mureed reaches, so strongly does it attract the message of God.

The mureed can be inspired, but he can also cease to inspire. If there is no response on his side, or if there is antagonism or lack of interest, then the inspiration of the murshid is shut off; just like the clouds which cannot produce a shower when they are above the desert. The desert affects them; but when the same clouds are above the forest, the trees attract them and the rain falls.

The attributes of the disciple are reserve, thoughtfulness, consideration, balance and sincerity. Special care should be taken that during the time of discipleship, one does not become a teacher; for very often, a growing soul is so eager to become a teacher that before he has finished the period of discipleship he becomes impatient. It should be remembered that all the great teachers of humanity, such as Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mohammad and Zarathushtra, have been great pupils; they have learned from the innocent child, they have learned from everyone, from every person that came near them. They have learned from every situation and every condition of the world. They have understood and they have learned. It is the desire to learn continually that makes one a teacher, and not the desire to become a teacher. As soon as a person thinks, "I am something of a teacher," he has lost ground. For there is only one teacher — God, alone, is the Teacher, and all others are His pupils. We all learn from life what life teaches us. When a soul begins to think that he has learned all he had to learn and that now he is a teacher, he is very much mistaken. The greatest teachers of humanity have learned from humanity more than they have taught.