

## STAGES ON THE PATH OF SELF-REALIZATION

WE SEE that in the words of philosophers, mystics, sages, thinkers, and prophets, great importance is given to self-realization. If I were to explain what self-realization is, I would say that the first step to self-realization is God-realization. The one who realizes God in the end realizes self, but the one who realizes self never realizes God. And that is the difficulty today with those who search after spiritual truth intellectually. They read many books about occultism, esotericism, and mysticism. And what they find most emphasized is self-realization. Then they think that what they have to do is to attain that self-realization and that they can just as well omit God. But in reality God is the key to spiritual perfection. God is the stepping-stone to self-realization, God is the way which extends over the knowledge of the whole of creation. And if God is omitted then nothing can be reached. There is a wrong method in use today in many so-called cults, which often proves to be a failure, and which consists in teaching the beginner on the spiritual path to say, 'I am God': a thoughtless phrase, a word of insolence, a thought which has no foundation. It leads him nowhere except to ignorance. To the prophets and thinkers, to the sages who taught their followers the ideal of God, it had a meaning, a purpose. But today people do not recognize these, and being anxious to find a shortcut, they omit the principal thing in order to come to the realization of self.

Once a man went to a Chinese sage and said to him, 'I want to learn the occult laws. Will you teach me?' The sage said, 'You have come to ask me to teach you something, but we have so many missionaries in China who come to teach us.' The man said, 'We know about God, but I have come to you to ask you about occult laws.' The sage said, 'If you know about God you don't need to know anything more. God is all that is to be known. If you know Him you know all.'

In this world of commercialism there is a tendency, an unconscious tendency, even for a person who wants to promote the spiritual truth, to cater for the taste of the people. Either because of a commercial instinct, or with the desire to have a success, there is a tendency to cater for what people want. If people seem to be tired of the God-ideal, those who have that tendency want to give them occultism. They call it that or mysticism, because the God-ideal seems so simple. And as there is a fashion in everything there is even a fashion in belief. Man thinks that the ideal of God is old-fashioned, something of the past. In order to create a new fashion he abandons the method which was the royal road trodden by all the wise and thoughtful of all ages, the method which will surely take men to perfection. Safety and success are sure in that path.

There may be a man of devotion and of simple faith, religious and believing in God, who calls Him the Judge, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Protector, the Master of the Last Day, the Lord, the Forgiver, and so on. And there may be another man, perhaps an intellectual who has studied philosophy, and he says, 'God is all, and all is God. God is abstract and it is the abstract which is God.'

In point of fact the one has a God, even if only in his imagination, but the other has none. He has only the abstract. He calls it God because the others say God, but in his mind he

has only the abstract. For instance when you say 'space,' there is no personality attached to it, no intelligence recognized in it, no form, no distinct individuality or personality. It is the same thing with time. When you speak about time you do not imagine time to be something or somebody. You say it is time, which means a conception, which you have made for your convenience. A man who says that the abstract is God, has no God. By this I do not mean to say that one or the other is right. What I wish to explain is that from a mental point of view the one has a God, even if it is only a God of his imagination, but the other has none, whether he admits it or not. Both are right, and both are wrong. One is at the beginning, and the other is at the end. The one who begins with the end will end at the beginning. And the one who begins with the beginning will end at the end.

We might think, why in this short life should we create for ourselves a kind of illusion, why should we only arrive at the truth at the end? Why not begin with it? But if truth were such that it could be spoken of in words, I would have been the first to give it to you. Truth is a thing that must be discovered; we have to prepare ourselves to realize it, and it is that preparation which is called religion or occultism or mysticism. Whatever we may call it, it is that preparation. We prepare ourselves by one way or the other in order to realize truth in the end. And the best way, which all the thinkers and sages have adopted, is the way of God.

The next question is belief in God. There are four stages of belief in God. Each stage is as essential and important as the other. And if one does not go stage by stage, gradually evolving towards the realization of God, one does not arrive at anything. It must be remembered that belief is a step on the ladder. Belief is the means and not the end. It leads to realization. It is not that we advance towards a belief. If a man's foot is nailed on the ladder, that is not the object. The object is that he should climb upward on the ladder step by step. If he stands still on the ladder he defeats the object for which he journeys on the spiritual path. Those therefore who believe in a particular creed, in a religion, in God, in the hereafter, in the soul, in a certain dogma, are no doubt blessed by their belief and think they have something. But if they remain there, there will be no progress. If the only thing necessary was to have a religious belief, then thousands and millions of people in the world today who have a certain religious belief could have been most advanced people. But they are not. They go on year after year believing something that people have believed perhaps for many generations, and still they continue with it and remain there just like a man standing on a staircase, which is a place not made for him to stand on but to climb up. When he stays there he comes to nothing.

The first belief is the mass-belief. If someone says, 'There is a God,' then everyone repeats after him, 'Yes, there is a God.' One might think that today, at this stage of civilization, people are too advanced to have mass-beliefs, but that would be a great mistake. People are the same today as they were a thousand years ago, perhaps worse if it comes to spiritual questions. Someone who is called 'the man of the day' in a nation, is for the time being supported by the whole nation. Thousands and millions lift him up, hold him high. But for how long? Until some still more powerful person says, 'No, it is not so.' Then the whole country lets him down.

Just before the war I was visiting Russia. In every shop one saw a picture of the Czar and Czarina, held in high esteem. It was a sacred thing for people. There was a religious ideal attached to the emperor, as he was the Head of the Church. And they used to be filled with joy when they saw the Czar and Czarina passing in the street. It was a religious upliftment for them. But not long afterwards they themselves had processions in the streets when at each step they broke the czarist emblems. It did not take them one moment to change their belief. Why? Because it was a mass-belief.

It is a very powerful belief. It changes nations. It throws them down and raises them up. It brings war. But what is it after all? A mad belief. And yet no one will admit it. If you ask an individual, he says, 'I am not one of them.' Yet at the same time all move together when an impulse comes for good or bad.

Then there is a second step towards belief and that is belief in an authority, as with people at the time of a dictatorship. They believe in a leader. They say, 'I will not believe in the ordinary man, in my neighbor, in my colleague. I believe in that man whom I trust.' This belief is one step higher, because it is a belief in somebody in whom one has trust. When a person says, 'I am a Christian,' it means a belief in Jesus Christ and his teaching. It is a belief in someone, not in an abstraction. One might think that people do not believe in authority today, but this is not so. For instance everyone accepts a discovery made by a scientist before having made investigations about it. Investigations come afterwards. When somebody comes forward and says he has discovered something, everyone accepts it. Perhaps another scientist will produce something else one may believe, but the one who says a thing with authority is believed by the multitude.

Then there is a third stage of belief a further stage, and this belief makes man still greater. It is the belief of reason, and it means that one does not believe in any authority, nor in what everybody else believes, but that one has reasoned it out. That one sees reason in it. This belief is stronger still; for of the beliefs I have explained before one cannot give proof, but in this case one can stand up and say, 'Yes, I have reasoned it out.'

This, however, also has its limitation. Since reason is the slave of the mind, reason is as changeable as the weather; reason obeys our impressions. If we have an impulse to insult a person, or to fight with him, we can produce many reasons for it. It may be that afterwards there will be contrary reasons. But at the time, while we have this impulse, right or wrong, there is always a reason which supports it. Have the criminals put in jail committed crimes without a reason? No, they have a reason too. It does not fit in with the law perhaps, it does not satisfy society, but if we ask them, they have a reason. The reason we have today we may perhaps change next week, but nevertheless this third belief makes us stand on our own feet, for that moment if not always; and it gives us a greater power to defend our belief

And then again there is a fourth belief. That belief is a belief of conviction which stands above reason. There is a sense of conviction in man which is not discovered for some time in life. But there comes a time when it is discovered; and that is a blessed day. Then there arises an idea, an idea which no reason can break, a feeling which is not a passing

feeling but is a conviction. However high the idea may be, one seems to be an eyewitness of that idea. One is as strong, as confident, as a person who has seen with his own eyes. One can be convinced of ideas so subtle that they cannot even be expressed in words, and one is more convinced of them than if one had seen them with one's own eyes. It is this belief which is called by the Sufis and Persian mystics Iman, which means conviction.

I remember the blessing my spiritual teacher, my murshid, used to give me every time I parted from him. And that blessing was, 'May your Iman be strengthened.' At that time I had not thought about the word Iman. On the contrary I thought as a young man, is my faith so weak that my teacher requires it to be stronger? I would have preferred it if he had said, may you become illuminated, or may your powers be great, or may your influence spread, or may you rise higher and higher, or become perfect. But this simple thing, may your faith be strengthened, what did it mean? I did not criticize but I pondered and pondered upon the subject. And in the end I came to realize that no blessing is more valuable and important than this. For every blessing is attached to a conviction. Where there is no conviction there is nothing. The secret of healing, the mystery of evolving, the power of all attainments, and the way to spiritual realization, all come from the strengthening of that belief which is a conviction, so that nothing can ever change it.

And now we come again to the question of God. Because this is the important question we must first make it clear in our minds before we take a further step in spiritual progress. Since to analyze God means to dethrone God, the less said on the subject the better. But at the same time, the seekers for truth who want to tread the spiritual path with open eyes and whose intellect is hungering for knowledge, should know something about it.

There is a Hebrew story that once Moses was walking near the bank of a river. And he saw a shepherd boy speaking to himself. Moses was interested and halted there to listen to what he was saying. The shepherd boy was saying, 'O God, I have heard so much of You. You are so beautiful, You are so lovely, You are so kind, that if You ever came to me I would clothe You with my mantle, and I would guard You night and day. I would protect You from the cruel animals of this forest, and bathe You in this river, and bring to You all good things, milk and buttermilk. I would bring You a special bread. I love You so much. I would not let anyone cast his glance upon You. I would be all the time near You. I love You so much! If only I could see You once, God, I would give all I have.' Moses said, 'What are you saying!' The boy looked at Moses and trembled and was afraid. 'Did I say anything wrong?' he asked. Moses said, 'God, the Protector of all beings, you think of protecting Him, of giving Him bread? He gives bread to the whole universe. You say you would bathe Him in the river. He is the purest of all pure things. And how can you say that you will guard Him who guards all beings?' And the boy trembled. He thought, what a terrible thing I have done! He seemed to be lost. But as Moses went a few steps further there came a voice, 'Moses, what did you do! We sent you to bring our friends to Us, and now you have separated one. No matter how he thought of Us, he thought of Us just the same. You should have let him think the way he was thinking about Us. You should not have interfered with him!' Everyone has his own imagination of God. It is best if everyone is left to his own imagination.

In our daily life we may hate someone, yet the same one is loved by someone else. We may criticize, and the same one is praised by someone else. If this is so then the conception of everyone is different. The same person is considered a saint by one and Satan by another. The God we know, or can know, is nothing but our conception, a picture that we have made of God for our own self, our own use. It is the greatest mistake for anyone to interfere with the conception of God held by another, or to think that another should have the same conception of God as he has himself. It is impossible. Many different artists have painted the picture of Christ, yet each one is different. And since we allow every artist to have his own conception of Christ so we should allow every person to have his own conception of God.

We need not blame the ancient Chinese and Greeks and Indians who believed in many gods. Many gods is too small a number. In reality every single person has his own God. Besides all the different conceptions are really nothing but covers over one God. Let them call God by any name, or think of Him with whatever imagination they have: it is after all the highest ideal. And the ideal of each one is as high as his imagination can make it. Urging upon someone that God is abstract and formless and pure, and that God is nameless, all these things do not help that person to evolve. For the first step on the path of God is to make a conception of God. It is simply to help the seekers after God that the wise in all ages have sometimes made a small statue and called it a god or goddess. They said, 'Here is God. Here is a shrine. Come there.' And to the one who was not satisfied with this, they said, 'Walk two hundred times round the shrine before you enter, then you will be blessed.' When the worshipper got tired he naturally felt exaltation because he walked in the path of God.

But, one might ask, if we leave everyone with his particular imagination or ideal of God, will he then progress and one day come to the realization of the self which is the highest attainment taught by all great teachers of humanity? The answer is yes. There are three stages on the way to spiritual perfection. Those who are unaware of the possibility of spiritual perfection are greatly mistaken when they say that man is imperfect and cannot be perfect. They are mistaken for the reason that they have seen only man in man. They have not seen God in man. Christ has said, 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.' This shows that there is the possibility of perfection. It is also true that man cannot be perfect. But man is not man alone. In man there is also God. Therefore though man remains imperfect the God part in man seeks for perfection. That is what the world was created for. Man is here on earth for this one purpose, that he may bring forth that spirit of God in him and thus discover his own perfection.

The three stages towards this perfection are the following. The first stage is to make God as great and as perfect as your imagination can. It is in order to help man to perfect God in himself that the teachers gave various prayers, the prayers to God, calling Him the Judge, the Forgiver, most Compassionate, most Faithful, most Beautiful, most Loving. All these attributes are our limited conceptions. God is greater than what we can say about Him. And when by all these conceptions and by our imagination we make God as great as we are able to, it must still be understood that God cannot be made greater than

He is. We cannot give God pleasure by making Him great, but by making God great we ourselves arrive at a certain greatness; our vision widens, our spirit deepens, our ideal reaches higher. We create a greater vision, a wider horizon, for our own expansion. We should, therefore, by way of prayer, by praise, by contemplation, try to make God as great as we can possibly imagine.

The truth behind this is, that a person who sees good points in others and wants to add what is lacking in others, becomes nobler every day. By making others noble, by thinking good of others, he himself becomes nobler and better than those of whom he thinks good. And the one who thinks evil of others in time becomes wicked, for he covers up the good in him and produces thus the vision of evil. Therefore the first stage and the first duty of every seeker after truth is to make God as great as possible, for his own good, because he is making an ideal within himself. He is building within himself that which will make him great.

The second stage is the work of the heart. The first is of the head. To make God great intellectually, with thought and imagination, is really the painter's work, but still more important is the work of the heart.

In our everyday life we see the phenomenon of love. The first lesson that love teaches us is: 'I am not. Thou art.' The first thing to think of is to erase ourselves from our minds and to think of the one we love. As long as we do not arrive at this idea, so long the word love remains only in the dictionary. Many speak about love but very few know it. Is love a pastime, an amusement, a drama; is it a performance? The first lesson of love is sacrifice, service, self-effacement.

There is a little story of a peasant girl who was passing through a field where a Muslim was offering his prayers. And the law was that no one should pass by a place where somebody was praying. After a time this girl returned by the same way, and the man said, 'O girl, what a terrible thing you have done today.' She was shocked and asked, 'What did I do?' He said, 'You passed by this way! It is a great sin. I was praying, thinking of God!' She said, 'Were you thinking of God? I was going to see my young man! I did not see you; how did you see me when you were thinking of God?'

To close the eyes for prayer is one thing, and to produce the love of God is another thing. That is the second stage in spiritual realization. Where in the thought of God one begins to lose oneself, in the same way that the lover loses the thought of self in the thought of the beloved.

And the third stage is different again. In the third stage the beloved becomes the self, and the self is there no more. For then the self, as we think it to be, no longer remains; the self becomes what it really is. It is that realization which is called self-realization.

THE GOD-IDEAL

God and the God-ideal may be explained as the sun and the light. As there are times when the sun becomes covered by clouds, so there are times when the God-ideal becomes covered by materialism. But if for a moment the cloud covers the sun, that does not mean that the sun is lost; and so the God-ideal may seem to have disappeared in the reign of materialism, yet God is there just the same. The condition of the world is like the ever rising and falling of waves. Sometimes it seems to rise and sometimes to fall, but as with every rising and falling wave the sea is the same, so with all its changes, life is the same.

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In this age of science on the one side and materialism on the other and commercialism on the top, man seems to have blinded himself in acquiring wealth and power, and sees nothing else. It is not that there is no search for the light. It is the nature of every soul to search for light, but the great question is, how can the light come when nation is against nation, race against race; the followers of one religion against the followers of another. How can there be peace and how can there be light?

... When a man thirsts for the blood of his fellow man, how can we say that there is light? If a man can eat joyfully at his table when his neighbor is dying of hunger, where is the light? That is the condition of humanity today. And what is the cause? It is that the light, the God-ideal, is not there.

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The word of Christ is that God is love; and if God is love, then we, every one of us, can prove God in us by expressing God in our life. According to the external customs of the different religions, one goes to church, one to the mosque, one to the synagogue, and another to the temple. The inner church however, is none of these, but in the heart of man, where God abides and which is the habitation of Christ. With this divine element lighted in man's heart he will go to the house of prayer, and then his prayer will be heard.

The idea, therefore, is that prayer becomes living if it is offered from a living heart; coming from a dead heart prayer has no meaning and is dead. There is a story of an Arab who was running to a mosque where the prayer of God was being offered, but before he arrived the prayers were finished. On his way he met a man coming from the mosque, and asked him, 'Are the prayers finished?', the man replied that they were finished, and the other sighed deeply and said, 'Alas!' Then the man asked, 'Will you give me the virtue of your sigh in exchange for the virtue of my prayers?' And the other agreed. Next day the simple man saw the Prophet in a dream, who told him that he had made a bad bargain, for that one sigh was worth all the prayers of a lifetime because it was from the heart.

There is a great difference between the stages of evolution of various human beings, and it is natural that every human being, according to his particular stage of evolution, should imagine God before him when he prays. Has anyone else a right to judge the one who

prays, and to say, 'God is not this or that'? People who force their beliefs on others often put them against that belief even if it is a true belief. It requires a great deal of tact, thought, and consideration to explain one's beliefs, or to correct the belief of another. In the first place it is insolent on the part of man to wish to explain God, although man today would like not only to explain God, but also even to examine whether the Spirit of God exists. The other day I was much amused to hear that there are people who not only want to take photographs of the spirits, but even to weigh the soul! In ancient times it was a good thing when the State had respect for the God-ideal and religion, and taught that respect to humanity. Today man wishes to use what he calls freedom in religion, even in the basis of all religions, the God-ideal. But it should be remembered that it is not the path of freedom that leads to the goal of freedom, but the path of the God-ideal that leads to the goal of truth.

Man has respect for his mother or father or wife, or for his superiors; but all these have limited personalities. To whom then shall he give most respect? Only to one being: to God. Man can love another human being, but by the very fact of his loving another human being he has not got the full scope. To express all the love that is there, he must love the unlimited God. One admires all that is beautiful in color, tone, or form; but everything beautiful has its limitations; it is only when one rises above limitations that one finds that perfection which is God alone. One may say, 'Yes, the perfection of all things, of love, harmony, and beauty, is God; but where is the personality of God?' This is the difficulty, which some people experience when trying to find something to adore or worship, something different from all they see. In all ages men have worshipped idols or the sun or fire or some other form as God, because they were not able to see further than their eyes could see. Of course, it is easy to criticize this or to look at it with contempt, but in fact it only shows that every soul has a desire to admire, to adore, and to worship someone.

Although no trace of the personality of God can be found on the surface, yet one can see that there is a source from which all personality comes, and a goal to which all must return. And if there is one source, what a great Personality that one source must be! It cannot be understood by great intellect, nor even by the study of metaphysics or comparative religion, but only by a pure and innocent heart full of love.

The great personalities who have descended on earth from time to time to awaken in man that love, which is his divine inheritance, have always found an echo in innocent souls rather than in great intellects. Man often confuses wisdom with cleverness, but a man can be clever and not wise, and by cleverness a person may strive and strive, and yet not reach God. It is a stream, the stream of love, which leads towards God.

ii

There are two points of view from which one sees the God-ideal. One is the point of view of the imaginative person, and the other the point of view of the God-conscious. The



former is the minor, and the latter is the major point of view. One person thinks that there is a God, and the other sees God. The believer, who adorns his God with all that imagination can supply, sees God as all beauty, all goodness, and as the most merciful and compassionate God, and recognizes Him as the Almighty, the Supreme Being. He sees in God the true Judge, and he expects one day to receive justice from Him. He knows that in God he will find at last the perfect love on which he can rely entirely. He sees in God the Friend to whom he can turn in sorrow and in joy. He calls him his Lord, his Father, his Mother; and all that is good and beautiful he recognizes as coming from God. In point of fact he makes an intelligible form of God, that being the only means by which he can see God. And the believer who has imagined God as high as his imagination permits adores Him, asks His forgiveness, looks for His help, and hopes one day to attain to Him. He feels that there is someone nearer to him than anyone else in life, whose mercy is always with him.

It is this point of view that is called monotheism: believing in the personality of God, a personality which man imagines to the best of his ability. Therefore the God of the monotheist is within him, made by his mind, though it is only the form of God that he makes; the spirit is always the same, hidden behind the form that man has made because he needs a form. But there is no doubt that at this stage the God of the believer is the form made by him, the form of a human being; God is behind that form, and He answers His worshippers through it. Someone once said to a Brahmin, 'O ignorant man, you have worshipped this idol for years. Do you think it can ever answer you?' 'Yes,' said the Brahmin, 'even from this idol of stone the answer will come if your faith is real. But if you have no real faith, you will get no answer even from the God in heaven.' It is natural that man, who knows and sees all things through his senses and his feelings, and who tries to picture everything through his imagination, things that he has neither seen nor known, such as spirits, angels, and fairies, should make God intelligible to himself by means of his imagination.

The other, the major point of view is perhaps less interesting to some and more interesting to others; however, this is the true point of view. When a person begins to see all goodness as being the goodness of God, all the beauty that surrounds him as the divine beauty, he begins by worshipping a visible God, and as his heart constantly loves and admires the divine beauty in all that he sees, he begins to see in all that is visible one single vision; all becomes for him the vision of the beauty of God. His love of beauty increases his capacity to such a degree that great virtues such as tolerance and forgiveness spring naturally from his heart. Even things that people mostly look upon with contempt, he views with tolerance. The brotherhood of humanity he does not need to learn, for he does not see humanity, he sees only God. And as this vision develops, it becomes a divine vision, which occupies every moment of his life. In nature he sees God, in man he sees His image, and in art and poetry he sees the dance of God. The waves of the sea bring him the message from above, and the swaying of the branches in the breeze seems to him a prayer. For him there is a constant contact with his God. He knows neither horror nor terror, nor any fear. Birth and death to him are only insignificant changes in life. Life for him is a moving picture, which he loves and admires, and yet he is free from

it all. He is one among all the world. He himself is happy, and he makes others happy. This point of view is the pantheistic point of view.

In reality these two points of view are the natural consequences of human evolution, and one cannot really separate them. No one reaches old age without having passed through youth, and no one attains to the pantheistic point of view without having held the monotheistic. And if anyone arrived at the pantheistic point of view at once, without having held the monotheistic one, it would be like a person becoming a man without having been a child, which would be devoid of beauty.

There are certainly two possibilities of error. One is that made by the monotheist when he continues to adore the God he has made, without allowing himself to see the point of view of the pantheist. In order to love God he limits his own God, which does not mean that God is really limited, but that He is limited for that person. The ways of childhood are charming in a child, but a grown-up person with the characteristics of a child is absurd. When man begins his belief in God by monotheism, it is the best way, but when he ends his life without having made any progress, he has lost the greatest opportunity of his life. The man who makes this mistake, separates man from God, when, in reality, they cannot be divided. For God and man are like the two ends of one line. When a believer in God conceives of God as a separate entity and of man as a being separate from Him, he makes himself an exile, an exile from the kingdom of God. He holds fast to the form of God created by himself, and he does not reach the Spirit of God. However good and virtuous he has been in life, however religious in his actions, he has not fulfilled the purpose of his life.

The pantheist makes a mistake when he believes that only that which he can conceive of and which answers to his five senses exists. For by this mistake he holds on to the form of God and loses His spirit. All that we can comprehend in man is not all that there is to be comprehended. There is something which is beyond our comprehension. And if the depths of a human being are too profound to be touched by man, how can he hope to reach the depths of God? All that is visible is in reality one body; a body that may be called the body of God; but behind it there is the spirit of God. What is behind this body is the source and goal of all beings. And, of course, the part, which is the spirit, is the most important part. The pantheist who only recognizes the divinity of that which is comprehensible to him, although pantheism may be to him a great ideal, is yet like one groping in the dark. All that is subject to change, all that is not constant, all that passes through birth and death, may also someday be destroyed. The man who limits the divine Being to something that is subject to destruction, the man who cannot feel the trace of the divine Being in something that is beyond his comprehension, has gone astray. True pantheism means that God is all, and all is God; the known and the unknown; all that exists within and without; God is all that exists, and nothing exists save He.

The beginning of monotheism may be called deism, a belief in Someone higher than oneself. And for the souls who have reached this stage of evolution, many lessons have been given by the sages. The sages have taught them to adore the sun, fire, water, certain trees, and many idols. And no doubt behind all these teachings there is always the

wisdom of the masters. The lessons given to certain peoples were not meant for others, as what is suitable for one period is not suitable for another. And in teaching pantheism elementary lessons were also given, such as the idea of many gods, as amongst the ancient Greeks and Hindus and Egyptians. All these peoples believed in many gods, and this lesson was given to them to help them see in different things the same spirit of God. Every god had among his characteristics certain human traits, and by this means man was taught how to recognize God in his fellow man, and to become tolerant and forgiving; also he was led to concentrate and meditate on certain human characteristics, considering them as something divine. Consideration and respect for humanity were taught by meditation on certain traits.

A man who is without knowledge of these two different points of view, and who is strongly impressed by materialistic ideas, often looks upon God as a force or an energy, but he emphatically denies that God can have a personality. No doubt it would be a great mistake to say that God is only a personality, but it is a still greater mistake when man denies the personality of God. And if one asks such a person, 'What is your source? What is your goal? Are you yourself a personality? Is it possible that you should be a personality yourself when the goal and the source, from which you come, is not a personality?' he has no answer. The seed, which is the origin of the flower and the fruit, is also the result of the flower and the fruit. Therefore man is the miniature of the personality of God; God is the seed from which the personality comes. Man, in the flowering of his personality, expresses the personality of God. It is a subject that can hardly be discussed, because one is only able to distinguish anything by comparison, and since God is the only Being He cannot be compared; even to use the word personality in speaking of God would be a mistake. There cannot be a better way of looking at the God-ideal, than to consider Him as being perfection in the widest and fullest meaning of the word.

iii

The God-ideal has been regarded by different men in different ways. Some have idealized God as the King of earth and heaven, some have a conception of God as a person. Others think of God as an abstraction. Some believe in God, others do not, some raise the idea of the Deity to the highest heaven. Others bring it down to the lowest depths of the earth. Some picture God in paradise, while others make an idol and worship it. There are many ideas and many beliefs, and many different names, such as pantheism, idolatry, belief in a formless God, or belief in many gods and goddesses; but all are striving after the same thing in one way or another.

If I were asked how many conceptions there are of God, I would say, as many as there are souls; for all, whether wise or foolish have some conception of God. Everyone knows God in some way and has his own picture of Him, either as a man, as the absolute, as goodness, or as something beautiful or illuminating. Everyone has some conception, and even for the one who does not believe in God, the name of God exists.

Very often the unbeliever is an unbeliever because of his own vanity, though this is not always so. He says that only simple people believe in God; he sees that there are millions of simple souls who worship God, and yet this worship does not raise them higher, and so he finds no virtue in the worship of God. Others believe in the God-ideal so long as they are happy, but when condition change when sorrow and trouble come, they begin to doubt whether there really is a God. I have often met people who had had great belief in God, but having lost a dear one after having vainly prayed and implored God that they might keep him, they had lost their belief. I once met a most unhappy mother who had given up her belief in God after the death of her only child. It grieved me to think that a soul so religious, tender, and fine, had given up her faith because of that one great sorrow in life. I told her that while I sympathized with her most deeply, yet in giving up her faith she had brought upon herself a much greater loss, a loss for which nothing could make up.

In the Bible and also in other scriptures we read that we should glorify the Name of God. But is God raised higher by man's worship of Him, or is He made greater by man's belief in Him? The answer is that God is independent of all that man can do for Him. If man worships God, believes in Him, and glorifies Him, it is for man's own good; for belief in God serves the greatest and only purpose in life. That purpose is the attainment of divine perfection, and it is for its fulfillment that man was born.

There is a question often asked by the metaphysician or the philosopher, when he reads that all is God and God is all. He says, 'If God is goodness, what is then the opposite of goodness? Is it outside God? If so, God is limited and something else exists as well as God. Are there two powers, rival powers? What is the power called evil?' It is true that God is all, but we would not call a man's shadow the man; evil is only a shadow, just like illness, which is another illusion. In reality there is only life, real existence, and illness is lack of life.

The Being of God is recognized by His attributes. Therefore man speaks of God as the just God. He sees all power, all goodness in God; but when the situation is changed, when he sees God as injustice, he begins to think that God is powerless, and to judge the action of God. But one must look at this from a different point of view. Human beings are limited, imperfect, and yet we try to judge the perfect Being, or His perfect action, from our own imperfect standpoint. In order to judge, our vision must become as wide as the universe; then we might have a slight glimpse of the justice, which is perfect in itself. But when we try to judge every action by limiting God and by holding God responsible for every action, we confuse our faith, and through our own fault we begin to disbelieve.

The error is in man's nature; from childhood we think that all we do and say is just and fair, and so when man thinks of God, he has his own conception of justice, and by that conception he tries to judge God and His justice. If he is forgiving, he tries to overlook God's apparent injustice, and to find goodness in God and to see the limitation of man. This is better; but in the end man will realize that every movement is controlled and directed from one source, and that source is the perfection of love, justice, and wisdom, a

source where nothing is lacking. But it is most difficult for man to have a perfect conception of the God-ideal, and he cannot begin in a first lesson to conceive of God as perfect. So the wise are tolerant of all the forms in which souls picture their God.

There is a story told of Moses. One day he was passing through a farm, and he saw a peasant boy sitting quietly and talking to himself, saying, 'O God, I love you so; if I saw you here in these fields I would bring you soft bedding and delicious dishes to eat, I would take care that no wild animals could come near you. You are so dear to me, and I so long to see you; if you only knew how I love you I am sure you would appear to me!'

Moses heard this, and said, 'Young man, how dare you speak of God in this way? He is the formless God, and no wild beast or bird could injure Him who guards and protects all.' The young man bent his head sorrowfully and wept. Something was lost to him, and he felt most unhappy. And then a revelation came to Moses as a voice from within which said, 'Moses, what have you done? You have separated a sincere lover from Me. What does it matter what I am called or how I am spoken to? Am I not in all forms?'

This story throws a great light on this question, and teaches that it is only the ignorant who accuse one another of a wrong conception of God. It teaches us how gentle we ought to be with the faith of another; as long as he has the spark of the love of God, this spark should be slowly blown upon so that the flame may rise; if not, that spark will be extinguished. How much the spiritual development of mankind in general depends upon a religious man! He can either spread the light or diminish it by forcing his belief on others.

Very often a person thinks that other people should believe in and worship his God. But everyone has his own conception of God, and this conception becomes the stepping-stone to the true ideal of God. Then there are others who believe in God, but do not show their belief in any outward religious tendency. People often misunderstand them, and yet there is something very beautiful hidden in their heart, not understood and not even known. There is a story told in the East of a man who used to avoid going to the house of prayer. He showed no outward sign of being religious, so that his wife often wondered if he had any belief in God; she thought a great deal about this and was very anxious about it. One day she said to her husband, 'I am very happy today.' The man was surprised, and asked what made her happy, and she said, 'I was under a false impression, but now that I have found out the truth, I am glad.' He asked, 'What has made you glad?' And she replied, 'I heard you saying the name of God in your sleep.' He said, 'I am very sorry.' It was too precious, too great for him to speak of, and he felt it as a great shock, after having kept this secret in the deepest part of his being because it was too sacred to speak of. He could not bear it, and he died.

We cannot say from outward appearances who believes and who does not believe. One person may be pious and orthodox and it may mean nothing; another may have a profound love for God and a great knowledge of Him, and no one may know of it.

What benefit does man receive from believing in the kingship of God? How does he derive real help from his belief? He must begin by realizing the nobility of human nature.

Not that one should expect everything to be good and beautiful, and, if one's expectation is not realized, think there is no hope of progress; for man is limited, his goodness is limited. No one has ever proved to be our ideal; but we may make an ideal in our imagination, and, whenever we see that goodness is lacking, we may add to it from our own heart and so complete the nobility of human nature. This is done by patience, tolerance, kindness, forgiveness. The lover of goodness loves every little sign of goodness. He overlooks the faults and fills up the gaps by pouring out love and supplying that which is lacking. This is real nobility of soul. Religion, prayer, and worship, are all intended to ennoble the soul, not to make it narrow, sectarian or bigoted. One cannot arrive at true nobility of spirit if one is not prepared to forgive the imperfections of human nature. For all men, whether worthy or unworthy, require forgiveness, and only in this way can one rise above the lack of harmony and beauty, until at last one arrives at the stage when one begins to reflect all that one has collected.

All these riches of love, kindness, tolerance, and good manners a man then reflects, and he throws this light on to the other person and brings out those virtues in him, just as watering a plant makes the leaves and buds open and the flowers blossom. This brings one nearer to the perfection of God, in whom alone one sees all that is perfect, all that is divine. As it is said in the Bible, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.'

iv

The pursuit of the impossible is inherent in man's nature. What man has he does not care for; what he has not he wishes to obtain. Certain things may have a greater or a lesser value, but man attaches most value to something which he cannot get. And of what he can get, however valuable it may be, the value becomes less. Since that is the nature of man, the wise have called the ideal of his pursuit, which can never be attained, God, by which they meant the Source.

Everything is naturally attracted to its source: earth to earth, water to water, fire to fire, and air to air: and thus man's soul is attracted to its source. While the body is in pursuit of all that belongs to it and of everything that attracts its physical nature, the soul is continually in pursuit of its own origin. Rumi, in a lovely poem, tells us that when a person who has left his homeland and been away a long time, awakens, then even though he is absorbed in his new life, a yearning begins to make itself felt. He longs for his origin, the home from whence he came. And so it is with human nature. The earth supplies all the things that man's nature demands except one, and that is his source; and therefore man remains dissatisfied all through life in spite of everything that he may obtain in answer to his desires: pleasure, comfort, rank, or wealth. He may obtain them all, but still the longing of his soul will remain because it is for home. Home is the source, which the wise have called God.

There is another simile: that of a man who went into a dark room to search for some object that he had lost. While he was searching he began to feel that he was melting in some way or other, and the moment he found the object he melted completely. He could no longer find anything of himself; the only thing he saw was that object. To his great sorrow and disappointment, though he found the object he did not find himself.

That is the condition of man on earth. The innermost being of man is that which may be called the source itself, and the outer being of man is what we call 'man.' Being absorbed in things of the world he loses, so to speak, the sense of the inner being. What he knows of himself is only that yearning and searching. He may have found what he was searching for, and yet he has lost himself. He can only be pleased with what he has found for a certain time, and then his longing will be to find himself.

In answer to this continual yearning of every soul, the wise have given to humanity the God-ideal. And when we consider the past and present attitudes towards the God-ideal, we see a great difference. The former was that man believed in God; and if one among twenty thousand persons did not believe in the God-ideal, he dared not say so before others, as everyone else believed in God. So he could not help saying that he believed in God also. Today it is quite the contrary. Unbelief has become the pride of modern man. He thinks that it is intellectual to disbelieve and that it is simple to believe; that the believers in God are simple people. And if they are intellectual and believe, they do not admit it fearing that other intellectual friends will laugh at them. Very few know what a loss it is to humanity that the education which in the past made it easier for a man to reach the fulfillment of his life's purpose has now been taken away from him.

There have always been many different conceptions of God. It is for this reason that there are so many different religions and sects, each sect having its own idea of God. There were people who believed in offering their worship to the sun. There were others who offered prayers to fire or water or earth, and some to trees. Others considered animals sacred or looked upon certain birds as sacred. Some made different forms and characters in marble or stone or metal, perhaps with the head of an animal, the wings of a bird, or the body of a fish. And these they have called their particular God.

The reason why animal worship was taught in the ancient religions was to point out to humanity some traits in certain animals, which it would be beneficial for man to notice. Take for instance the cow-worship of the Hindus. The nature of the cow is harmlessness, usefulness; the cowherd takes her into the fields, she lives on the grass and herbs and comes home, recognizing the place where she belongs. In spite of her two horns she is harmless; harmless to man although he takes the larger share of her milk which was meant for her calf, without ever thinking about it, without ever appreciating it. He has many delicious dishes made from the milk, but he never thinks of her. She gives him the essence of her life without any bitterness, enmity, or selfishness. She returns after a whole day in the forest, coming back in the evening to the place where the best of her life is taken from her.

There are morals one can learn by looking at a tree, by looking at an animal, by looking at a bird. In ancient times, when there was no printing press or any other means of giving philosophy or morals in the form of books, the teachers gave them in this way; and by it one can see God. Indeed, one sees God in all forms, especially in the things which teach lessons, which can inspire man and help him in his life; things that are pointed out by teachers to be looked at and worshipped. In fact they did not say, 'Worship the cow.' They said, 'To learn how to worship, look at the cow.' Those who only see the surface say that they are worshipping the cow, but in reality they are worshipping God.

Then there is the idea that if a person has not lived rightly in life he will go backward to the animal life. But life grows, and man goes forward. After becoming wise, man will hardly become foolish; and when it seems that he has become foolish it is perhaps that he has gone one step backward, but it does not mean a hundred steps. True, there are hindrances on the path which may set him back two or three steps; but then he takes two or three steps forward again. In those ancient times, however, the priesthood would speak to the people as to children, 'If you are not good you will be punished!' And the threat was that they would be turned into a cow or a dog or a cat.

At the same time, when man comes to the real essence of truth, when he touches the ultimate truth, he realizes that there is nothing which is not in man. There is the animal kingdom in him, the mineral kingdom, the angelic kingdom, and the divine kingdom. All that is low, all that is high, all that exists in man. Every man is a miniature of God, and God's constituents are all there, both in and outside his being.

How did idolatry come about? There were communities, people who could not understand the incomprehensible and were not even ready to accept something which was within their reach. And therefore the wise teacher said, 'Here is God. Here is a stone image and this is a certain god.' They thought, 'This is better: a god what does not move, that does not run away; when we long for Him at night, in the morning we can open the shrine and bow before him.' It was a lesson for them. Some came to the wise men and said they wanted to seek for God. 'Yes,' said the wise ones, 'come to the temple; but first walk fifty or a hundred times round it, and then you may come in.' Man does not value that for which he has not worked. That which is nearest he does not want.

Zarathushtra taught men to see the beauty of God, and to worship Him by looking at the water, at the sky, at nature. It was wise advice. When we look at the immensity of nature our mind naturally becomes keen, our heart larger, and we begin to see the signs of God there more than in the midst of worldly activity. Everyone who has had any experience of being surrounded by nature will accept this, whether he believes in God or not, and he will notice that nature is whispering, exalting, uplifting. Being face to face with nature gives a feeling of expansion of the heart, and nature causes the soul to awaken.

One might ask where then is unity, if different teachers and wise men have given different ideas of God, which means dividing the God-ideal; but the answer is that as many souls as there are, so many different conceptions of God are there. And it cannot be otherwise. God apart, we individual beings have some who look upon us as friends and



others as enemies. Some look upon us favorably and some unfavorably. Some praise us; others blame us. Some love us; others hate us. Therefore each individual is either a friend or an enemy, foolish or wise, great or small; to every person each one is different. The mother of the thief does not look upon him as a thief, but as her wonderful son who toils to serve and help her.

And what is God? God is a conception; and we each make a conception according to our capacity, according to what we have heard and what we think. One says, 'I do not wish to imagine God as the Beloved, as the Lover, as the Lord of Compassion.' Another says, 'I wish to imagine God as full of power, without whose command nothing can move, or as the wisest Being who weighs the action of everyone as the Lord of Justice.' A third says, 'I look upon God as the perfection of Beauty; all the beauty and harmony there is, is in God.' And again another says, 'I wish to imagine God to be the Friend, the friend in need and trouble and difficulty.' Everyone imagines God in his own way, and as not everyone in the world has the same idea of his friend, so it is natural that every person in the world has his particular idea of God, his own conception of what is his God at that time. Therefore one need not be surprised at the Chinese, the ancient Greeks, and the Egyptians who had thousands of Gods. I should say that is few; there should be millions of Gods, for one cannot have a God without a personal conception. But the source is the same, the source is one, and therefore God is One.

One might ask if God realized His oneness before man appeared on earth. But who can say how many times man appeared on earth and disappeared again? We know only of one history of our planet, but how many planets existed, how many millions of years? How many creatures were created, and how many withdrawn? We cannot speak of God's past, present, and future; we can only give an idea of this by saying that God is the only Being, who existed, who exists, and who will exist. All else that we see is His phenomenon.

God realizes His oneness as His own nature. Since God is one, He always realizes His oneness through all things, but through man He realizes it fully. On a tree there are many leaves, and though they differ from one another the difference is not very great. Worms and birds and animals differ more, but one finds the greatest variety in man. There are numberless human forms, and yet there are none exactly alike; this itself is a living proof of the oneness of God. God's unity keeps itself intact even in this world of variety.

There have been missions of prophets who came time after time to give man this conception in order to lift him up to the idea of the incomprehensible God, while at the same time they have tried to give him the idea of one God. They gave to humanity whatever was the best conception that could be given at the time. When we read the Quran, the picture of God is different from the picture of God that the Hindus have made. A Buddhist statue in India is Indian, in China it is Chinese, and in Japan it is Japanese. This is natural. When man pictures angels he draws them like human beings; he only adds wings to them. Man cannot imagine God's personality as being different from man's personality; that is why he attaches to God his ideal of the perfect man. These different

conceptions of God very often caused disputes and differences, and different sects were formed, each fighting for their God.

This is also the reason why it was necessary for the prophets to teach humanity the ideal of one God; yet it was most difficult for them to do so. Man is born with two eyes. He sees everything in twos; he is accustomed to see twos. Once when I was speaking of an Indian musical instrument I was asked, 'What does it look like? Does it look like a banjo?' Man can not conceive of anything that is not like something else. If someone hears that a person has a notion of religious philosophy, he asks if it is something like New Thought or Theosophy or Christian Science. Man wants to compare, to see with two eyes; but that which is without comparison cannot be shown in the same way as things of this world are shown. That is why the prophets who came to teach the one God, told their followers to think of Him as Lord or Master or Friend or Beloved, in order to give them a certain conception of God. But when someone does not see the beauty of another person's conception he makes a great mistake, for the other also has a conception, and perhaps an even better conception than his own.

Man always has a tendency to give his conception to others or to force his belief on them as being the only right belief; he thinks the other person is an unbeliever or that his belief is wrong. But we do not know. Sometimes those who do not seem to have a proper belief, have a belief that is better than our own. Perhaps that person is more spiritual than we ourselves. We do not know.

We do not know the depth of people's devotion to God. We judge people from their outward appearance; whether they seem more religious from the outside, more orthodox, or whether they seem far removed from religion. But we do not know. Perhaps there is a person who does not show one sign of religion, yet in him there may be a spark of devotion, a perpetual fire of the love of God. There may be another person who in his outside actions appears to be narrow and inordinately fond of ceremonies; but perhaps the outside is quite different from what is hidden within him. But those who judge others: their beliefs, their conception of God, are very much mistaken. Their manner may be an outside appearance, a cover; one does not know what is hidden behind it.

A large number of mankind are so-called believers in God. And we may ask ourselves whether they are all happy, whether they are all wise, and prosperous and spiritual. There is also a large number of unbelievers, and again we ask ourselves whether they are all prosperous, happy, spiritual, intelligent, and progressive. And we shall find in the end that we cannot fix a rule. We cannot say that belief in God makes a person good or prosperous or evolved: we cannot say that the unbeliever is kept back from progress, prosperity, happiness, and evolution. But this leads us to another question: how to benefit ourselves by the God-ideal, and why the God-ideal is meant to be the best way to reach the truth.

If a man is standing on a staircase and remains on the first step, he may be a believer but he is not going up. Thus there are many believers who have a certain conception of God, but they are standing there without moving, while perhaps a person who has no

conception of God at all may be moving. There are thousands of people who pronounce the name of God many times during the day, but who are perhaps most wretched. The reason is that they have not yet discovered the purpose of the God-ideal. It is not merely belief; belief is only the first step. God is the key to truth, God is the stepping-stone to self-realization, God is the bridge which unites the outer life with the inner life, bringing about perfection. It is by understanding this that the secret of the God-ideal is to be realized.

v

It is the spirit of all souls which in all ages has been personified as God. There are periods when this spirit has been materialized in the faith of humanity and worshipped as God, the Sovereign and the Lord of both worlds, as Judge, Sustainer, and Forgiver. But there are also periods when this realization has declined and when mankind has become more absorbed in the life of the world than in the spiritual ideal. Thus belief in God comes to humanity like tides of the sea, and every now and then it appears on the surface, mostly with a divine message given as an answer to the cry of humanity at that time. So it is in the life of individuals; at times the belief in God comes like tides of the sea, with an impulse to worship, to serve God, to search for God, to love God, and to long for God-communication. The more the material life of the world is before ones eyes, the more this spiritual impulse is closed. The spiritual impulse therefore arises especially at times of sorrow and disappointment.

Belief in God is natural, but in life both art and nature are necessary. So God, who exists independently of our conception of Him, must be conceived by us for our own comprehension. To make God intelligible, man must first make his own God. It is on this principle that the idea of many gods and the custom of idol-worship were based in the ancient religions of the world. God cannot be two. The God of each is the God of all, but in order to comprehend that God we each have to make our own God. Some of us seek for justice; we can better seek for God who is just. Some of us look for beauty; we can best find it in the God of beauty. Some of us seek for love; we can best find it in the God of mercy and compassion. Some of us wish for strength and power; we can best find it in the God Almighty. The seeking of every soul in this world is different, distinct, and peculiar to himself, and he can best attain to it by looking for the object of his search in God.

The moment a person arrives at this belief, he need ask no question of his fellow man, for the answer to every question that springs up in his mind he finds in his own heart. The dwelling-place of God, which is called heaven, is then found in his own heart. The Friend on whom he can constantly depend, whom he can always trust, whose sympathy and love are secure, who will never fail whatever happens, who is strong enough to help, and who is sufficiently wise to guide him in life, he will find in his own heart.

Those who because of their materialistic outlook cannot believe in the God-ideal, lose a great deal in their lives. That ideal which is highest and best, the only ideal worth loving, worshipping, longing for, worth the sacrifice of all one has, and worth depending upon

both by day and through the darkness of night, is God. He who has God in his life has all he needs; he who does not have God may possess everything in this mortal world but he will be lonely; he is in the wilderness even in the midst of the crowd. Thus the journey of the Sufi is towards God. It is divine knowledge which he seeks; it is the realization of God-consciousness, which is his goal. The existence of God is a question which arises in every mind, whether of the believer in God or of the unbeliever. There are moments when even the greatest believer in God questions His existence – whether there really is a God. On reflection he finds it sacrilegious to have a notion such as this, and he tries to get rid of it. But more often such a question arises in the heart of the unbeliever: he wonders if it is really true, if there is such a thing as God. The idea of God is inborn in man. The God-ideal is the flower of the human race; and this flower blooms in the realization of God.

Just as everything in the objective world tends to rise upward, so the tendency of the soul can be seen in human aspiration, which always soars upward whatever the sphere of man's consciousness. The aspirations of the man who is only conscious of material life, reach as far as they can in material gains; yet his aspirations become higher and higher, and he remains discontented with all that he achieves, owing to the immensity of life in every phase. This craving for the attainment of what is unattainable is the longing of the soul to reach life's utmost heights. It is the nature of the soul to try to discover what is behind the veil. It is the soul's constant longing to climb heights, which are beyond its power. It is the desire of the soul to see something that it has never seen; it is the constant longing of the soul to know something it has never known. But the most wonderful thing about it is that the soul already knows there is something behind this veil of perplexity; that there is something to be sought for in the highest spheres of life. It knows that there is some beauty to be seen; that there is Someone to be known who is knowable. This desire, this longing, is not acquired; this desire is a dim knowledge which the soul has within itself.

Therefore disbelief in the God-ideal is nothing but a condition which is brought about by the mists arising from the material life of illusion, and covering the light of the soul like clouds. That is why the unbeliever is not satisfied with his unbelief. Of course, sometimes his vanity is fed by the thought that he is wise in not believing in someone whose existence is only believed in by blind beings. So he begins to think, 'After all, to believe in God is not difficult; any simpleton can believe in the God-ideal.' He therefore takes the opposite direction and refuses to believe. He is honest, and yet he is like someone who stands before a wall which hinders his progress.

Even if this world offered somebody all it possesses, the soul would not be satisfied, for its satisfaction lies in its higher aspiration, and it is this higher aspiration which leads to God. Thus aspiration is a man's nature, but sometimes he wonders whether at the end of the journey he may perhaps find nothing. There is, however, no question which has no answer, and there is no desire that is impossible of fulfillment. There is appetite, and there is food; there is thirst, and there is water; there is sight, and there is something to be seen. So if there is aspiration then there is God, for one cannot know what does not exist; something must exist first to enable one to know it.

One might ask if those who do not know God, which not everybody can, then only believe in some idea, but the answer is: what is an idea? An idea is that from which everything is born – science, art, music, poetry, religion, and nationality. If the idea is the source from which all comes, then why should the idea be something insignificant, and why should not God, who is the source and goal of all, be found in the idea? The reason why the soul seeks for the God-ideal is that it is dissatisfied with all that only gives momentary satisfaction. All beauty, goodness, and greatness which man attributes to God are things he admires and seeks through life. He admires these things in others and strives to attain them for himself. At the end of his examination, he finds that all he thought to be good, great or beautiful falls short of that perfection, which his soul is seeking. He then raises his eyes towards the sky and seeks for the One who has beauty, goodness, and greatness; and that is God. The one who does not seek for God, is disappointed at the end of his journey of illusion. Throughout the whole journey he did not find the perfection of beauty, goodness, and greatness on the earth, and he neither believed in nor expected to meet such an ideal in heaven. All the disappointments, which are the natural outcome of this life of illusion, disappear when once a person has touched the God-ideal, for what one seeks after in life, one finds in God.

The seeking for God is a natural outcome of the maturity of the soul. There is a time in life when a passion is awakened in the soul which gives the soul a longing for the unattainable. If the soul does not take that direction, then it certainly misses something in life for which it has an innate longing and in which lies its ultimate satisfaction.

Now the question is: all beauty, goodness, and greatness, however small and limited, can be found on the earth, but where can the same be found in the Perfection called God? The answer is that the first necessity is the belief that there is such a Being as God, in whom goodness, beauty, and greatness are perfect. In the beginning it will seem nothing but a belief; but in time, if kept in sincerity and faith, that belief will become like the egg of the Phoenix, out of which the magic bird is born. The birth of God is the birth of the soul. Every soul seeks for happiness, and after pursuing all the objects which for the moment seem to give happiness, it finds out that nowhere is there perfect happiness except in God. This happiness cannot come by merely believing in God. Believing is a process, and by this process the God within is awakened and made living; it is the feeling that God is living in one which gives happiness. When one sees the injustice, the falsehood, the unfriendliness of human nature, and to what a degree this nature can develop – that it culminates in tyranny of which both individuals and communities become victims – there seems to be only one refuge. And that is the center of the whole of life, God, who is the only place of safety and source of peace, which is the longing of every soul.

vi

Different conceptions of God have existed in various periods and among different people. Seeking for the deity, people in all ages have pictured Him in some form or other. This is natural with man. If he is told about someone he has never seen or known, he forms a conception of that person, and he takes this conception for knowledge of that person until

he sees him. There are some who make a conception in their mind of somebody whom they have never seen that is almost as real as the actual person.

The human heart is an accommodation, which conceives the idea of God and pictures Him according to man's own mentality. The Buddha of China has Chinese features, and that of Japan has the eyes of Japan; the Buddha of India resembles an Indian. Man cannot conceive of an angel being different from a human being, except that he attaches two wings to the angel in order to make it a little different. If the angel were not pictured as a man, it would not attract a human being; therefore it is natural that in every period people have conceived of the Personality of God as a human personality. They could have had no better conception, for there is nothing in the world which is a more finished personality than the human personality.

People have called God He, recognizing the might and power of the deity. Other people have called God She, recognizing in the deity the mother-principle and beauty. It is from the differences of conception that the many gods and goddesses have come. For it is true that there are as many gods as there are conceptions. At the same time many gods mean many conceptions of the one and only God. Ignoring this truth, many have fought over their different gods; and yet the wise man in every period of the world has understood God to be the one and only Being.

For the ordinary mind it is not sufficient to feel that something exists as an idea. It is too vague. Man wishes to feel its existence with his own hands; then only can he acknowledge something to exist. The wise, therefore, have given different objects to such people, and have pointed them out to the people as gods. Some said, 'See God in the sun', and the people understood this. They were not satisfied with thinking God was an idea; they were much more pleased to know that God could be seen by them, God who is incomparable even with the sun, and who is unattainable.

Some wise men have said, 'He is in the fire'. Some said to a simple man who asked to see God, 'Go into the forest and find a certain tree: that tree is God.' The search for that tree gave that man something to do, which was essential, and the patience with which he sought for the tree also did something to his soul. There was joy, too, in finding a rare tree, and in the end he found what he was looking for, for God is everywhere.

Some have made images of different ideas, such as love, justice, knowledge and power and called them goddesses molding them into different forms and they have given them to man to worship. Some wise men have said the cow is sacred. Certainly it is sacred for a farmer whose farming depends upon the cow. His life's sustenance, in every form, comes from the cow; it is indeed sacred.

The wise have pointed out different objects to man which will hold his attention and become objects of concentration for him to still his mind; for in the mind which is still, God manifests. Then, again, the wise have presented the God-ideal to the people in the form of symbols. To simple beings a symbol was God; and to awakened minds the same symbol of God was a revealing factor of the secret of the deity. If one could only see how

marvelously wisdom has played its part in the diversity of the conceptions of the divine ideal, guiding the souls of all grades of evolution towards the same goal, which in the end becomes spiritual attainment!

The conception of many gods came from two sources. One is the idea of the wise to personify every kind of power and attribute, and to call it a certain god. This was done in order to give the ordinary mind the thought that was most needed: that God is in everything and that God is all power. Later this idea was misunderstood and the wisdom behind it became obscured; and so some wise men fought against the ideas of other wise men. Yet they did not fight the idea; they fought the misconceptions of it. But in the west at the present time, when no such idea of many gods exists, a great number of people have lost their faith after the recent war. They said, 'If God is all goodness, all justice, all power why has such a dreadful thing as war been allowed to take place?' If these same people had been accustomed to the idea of many gods and had recognized Kali, who has been worshipped by the Hindus for generations as the goddess of war, then it would not have been such a strange idea to them that if all is from God, then not only peace but even war is from Him.

The mystics of all ages have therefore given God many names. The Sufi schools of esotericism have distinguished many different names of God all with their own nature and secret, and they have used them in their meditations upon the path of spiritual attainment. Therefore the Sufis do not have many gods, but they have many names of God, each expressive of a certain attribute. Suppose these names which the Sufis have used were not the Names of God, if they had only held in thought words such as mercy, compassion, patience, they would have worshipped a merit, not a personality. A merit is not creative; a merit is only something which is possessed. The attribute is not important; it is the possessor of the attribute who is important. Therefore instead of thinking of success the Sufi calls upon the God of success. For him the God of success is not a different God; there is only one God; only, by calling upon that name of God which is expressive of success, he attaches his soul to that spirit of success.

The idea of many gods has also come from the deep thinkers and philosophers who have seen God in every soul, and every soul making a God of its own according to its stage of evolution. There is a saying among Hindus, 'There are as many gods as there are strains of music,' in other words, there are countless imaginations and numberless gods. Whenever this idea was taught to the people, it was to break the ignorance of those who tried to confine God to heaven, and deprived the earth of His divine presence; they waited for death to come, that they might be taken into the presence of God, who was sitting on the throne of justice in the hereafter. By this the sages tried to show people that God is in every soul, and that there are as many gods as there are souls: some advanced, some not advanced, some further advanced, yet all gods. If there is a struggle, it is a conflict between gods; if there is harmony, it is friendship between gods. By these means they tried to make man realize the most essential truth that God is all. No doubt those who misunderstand will always misunderstand.

This idea also became corrupted, and made people who believed in many gods interested only in the legends of the past, which narrated the wars and battles that took place among the gods. Therefore the wise had to come to their rescue again, and to teach them the one God, in order that they might again come to the realization of the oneness of life, which is best realized in the God-ideal.

vii

Many who are ready to accept the God-ideal, yet question the personality of God. Some think that if all is God, then God cannot be a person; but to this it may be answered that though the seed does not show the flower in it, yet the seed culminates in a flower, and therefore the flower has already existed in the seed. If one were to say that the flower is made in the image of the seed, it would not be wrong, for the only image of the seed is the flower. If God has no personality, how can we human beings have a personality, who come from Him, out of his own Being, we who can express the divine in the perfection of our souls? If the bubble is water, certainly the sea is water; how can the bubble be water and not the sea? The difference, however, between the human personality and the divine personality, God's personality, is that the human personality can be compared, whereas God's personality has no comparison. Human personality can be compared because of its opposite; God has no opposite, so His personality cannot be compared. But to call God 'all' is like saying that he is a number of objects, all of which exist together somewhere. The word 'all' does not express the meaning of the God-ideal; the proper expression for the God is the Only Being.

And then there are others, philosophically and scientifically minded people, who have read many books and who have thought about the soul and the spirit, who have come to the intellectual understanding that if God exists it is as an abstract idea that we may call God or life, it does not matter which. They are the people who have eaten of the truth without digesting it. It is like swallowing pebbles, which one can never digest. They have some part of the truth, but they do not profit by it. To the one who believes that we should not consider God as being abstract, but that He can only be realized, to him the abstract means something. But when the abstract means nothing, then God means nothing.

By turning God into something abstract man loses the opportunity which is given to him to benefit by the formation of a conception of God. No doubt what man has constructed is subject to destruction; it can only last a certain time; but if he makes use of it he arrives at realization, whereas if he destroys that conception which was meant to bring him to the fulfillment of his life, he has lost something which was invaluable. By thinking in dry philosophical terms people often go astray, not so much by having false ideas as by not being able to digest the truth.

Thus one might ask if one should worship the personal God rather than the abstract God. We should begin by worshipping the personal God, and we should allow our soul to unfold in the abstract God. If we begin our religious life by worshipping the abstract God then we begin at the wrong end. The realization of the abstract God is the satisfaction



which comes after we have perfected the worship of the personal God. But if we were to remain forever at the stage of worshipping the personal God, we would not derive the full benefit of that worship; we should worship the personal God as a means to attain to the knowledge of God, and this knowledge is to be found in the abstract. It is like an artist who has painted a beautiful picture, the best he has ever painted, and he looks at it and is so impressed by what he sees that he cannot believe that it is he who has made it; he sees in it something which is beyond himself. This is the moment when he begins to understand art, when he begins to profit by it.

The worship of the personal God is the art of idealizing, the greatest and the best art there is. We idealize the object of our worship as the perfection of all things, of love and justice and forgiveness and power and beauty. In the idealization of our object we offer all the appreciation and admiration we have, and when we have humbled ourselves before the object we have created, we have begun our journey on the spiritual path. It is this beautiful negation of the self that is artistic, more so than the attitude of the ascetic who calls himself God but whose ego is rigid, devoid of beauty and art. In the end it is this path which helps us to efface ourselves entirely in that object of worship, that object in which we see God. And by doing so, in time a door opens, and then we enter into the abstract qualities of the Spirit, to realize the ultimate truth.

We read in the bible, 'Be ye perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect'. Man only knows the outermost part of his being, for man is the sign of imperfection; but in the innermost being of man is perfection. Therefore man is entitled to perfection by realizing his innermost being. But as from the time of his birth he has identified himself with his limited being, he has never known himself as anything else but imperfect. There is no possibility for him, even by realizing that he is God or the Deity Himself, of attaining to perfection; for his first impression always is of limitation, of imperfection. Whatever position he may have in life, whether he is a king, or as fame or wealth or power or wisdom, yet he is limited. He cannot think of himself as anything but an imperfect being. That is the position, and yet the purpose of his life is to come to perfection.

And how is man to come to perfection? Only in one way, and that is first to make a conception by worshipping God, by trying to know about God, by attributing all that there is of beauty and power and justice to that perfect conception in himself. By doing this a man will come nearer and nearer to the truth; and by the time he has come closer to God he will have lost the idea of his false self which stood between himself and perfection. And by this process of losing his false self, which is called in the Bible self-denial, and which the Sufis called Fana and the Yogis Yoga, he will come to the realization which is the longing of his soul and by the attainment of which he fulfills his life's purpose.

The God-ideal is so tremendous that men can never comprehend it fully, therefore the best method adopted by the wise is to allow every man to make his own God. In this way he forms whatever conception he is capable of forming. He makes Him King of the heavens and of the earth; he makes Him judge, greater than all judges; he makes Him Almighty, having all power; he makes Him the possessor of all grace and glory; he makes

Him the beloved God, merciful and compassionate; he recognizes in Him providence, support, and protection; and in Him he recognizes all perfection. This ideal becomes a stepping-stone to the higher knowledge of God. The man who has not enough imagination to make a God, who is not open to the picture of God presented by someone else, remains without one, for he finds no stepping-stone to that knowledge which his soul longs for but which his doubts deny.

There are many who feel that it would be deceiving themselves to make a God out of their imagination, Someone who is not seen in the objective world. The answer is that our whole life is based and constructed upon imagination; and if there is one thing in this objective world, which is lasting, it is imagination. The man who is incapable of imagination, who does not value it, is devoid of art and poetry, of music, manners, and culture. He can best be compared with a rock, which never troubles to imagine.

Man is not capable of picturing God as other than a person – a person with all the best qualities, the ideal person. This does not mean that all that is ugly and evil does not belong to the universe of God, or, in other words, is not in God himself. But the water of the ocean is always pure, in spite of whatever may be thrown into it. The Pure One consumes all impurities, and turns them into purity. Evil and ugliness exist only in man's limited conception; in God's great Being these have no existence. Therefore he is not wrong who in his imagination makes God the God of all beauty, free from ugliness; the God of all the best qualities, free from all evil. For by that imagination he is drawn nearer and nearer every moment of his life to that divine ideal which his soul is seeking, and once he has touched divine perfection, he will find in it the fulfillment of his life.

viii

Why is God called the Creator? Because the creation itself is the evidence of some wisdom working. No mechanical creation could result in such perfection as that of nature. All the machines of the scientists are built on the model of nature's mechanism, and every inspiration that comes to the artist is received from nature. Nature is so perfect in itself that it needs no scientific or artistic improvement upon it; but to satisfy the limited human fancies man develops science and art. And yet it is still the creation of God which is expressed in art and science through man, as in man God is not absent. In some ways man is more able to finish His creation, which God completes through man. No better evidence is needed for a sincere inquirer into the creation. If he only concentrates his mind upon nature, he will certainly get an insight sooner or later into the perfect wisdom which is hidden behind it. The soul that comes into the world is only a divine ray, and the impressions it receives on its way while coming to the earth are also from God, for no movement is possible without God's command. Thus in all creation, in its every aspect, at the end of the search God alone proves to be the only Creator.

Another name for God is the Sustainer. Jesus Christ said, 'Consider the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin; yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' And Rumi explains it further in the Masnavi, where he says, 'Even the spider is not neglected by God, but is supplied with its food.' If the smallest worm or

germ, insignificant as it is, had depended for its supply upon man who cannot always supply himself even, how would the creation have continued? It appears that the creatures who do not worry for their supply have their food conveyed to their mouths.

Man's struggle for his supply seems to be greater than that of any other living being in the lower creation. But what makes it so? It is not God; it is man himself, who is selfish and unfair to his brother, and absorbed in his own interests in life. In spite of all the famines, the world still has sufficient supplies; but imagine the amount of food that has been sunk in the sea, and for how many years the earth, in which man's food is prepared, was neglected by men busy killing one another! If the result is hunger and greater strife, is God to be blamed? It is man who deserves all the blame.

Sadi very subtly and beautifully explains human nature in regard to providence, 'The Creator is always busy preparing my supply for me, but my anxiety for my supply is my natural illness.' Life is such a phenomenon, if only we dive deep into it, that we find that there is no question without an answer. It is never that we need something and are not provided with it. Only, there is a difference between what we think we need and what we really need, in fact the supply is always greater than we need; that is the miracle of providence. Sometimes we look at it with smiles, at other times with tears, but it is something real and living; and it will prove to be still more real if we look at it by climbing to the top of our reason.

God is spoken of as Judge by many prophets, and the man of reason and logic has tried to attribute justice to the law. But justice is not law; justice is above the law. To our limited view things in the world often appear unjust; and often it seems that man's law is simply to do what he wishes if it lies in his power. But behind this illusive appearance there certainly is a strict justice and a real law. No sooner does the heart become living than this law manifests. One cannot but marvel at life and nature, seeing how great is the justice of God. No soul has to wait for days or weeks or years, or for death to come, for the law to manifest. Everyday is Judgment Day, and every hour is the hour of justice. A criminal will escape from the prison bars, but he cannot escape from being under the sky. There is the judge within and without. When his eyes are closed he is being judged within; when they are open he is being judged without. We are always in a court of justice. If we do not realize it, it is because we are intoxicated by life, and we become like a drunken man in the court, who sees neither judge nor justice.

But what we can most marvel at in life is the knowledge that in spite of His great justice God is the forgiver. He forgives even more than he judges, for justice comes from His intelligence, whereas forgiveness comes from His divine love. When His divine love rises as a wave, it washes away the sins of a whole life in a moment. For law has no power to stand before love; the stream of love sweeps it away. When the woman accused by everyone was brought before Christ, what arose from the heart of the master? The law? No, it was love in the form of mercy and compassion. Even the thought of the love of God fills the heart with joy and lightens its burden. And if, as the religions have always taught, a man even once in his life has asked wholeheartedly for forgiveness, in spite of all his life's sins he will certainly be forgiven.

God is called the King of heaven and earth, and of the seen and unseen beings, only because we have no better words than those we use for all the things of this world. To call God King does not raise Him any higher; it only helps to make His power and glory more intelligible to our minds. Yet there are certain characters, which are kingly, and in God is to be found the perfection of such characters. It is not that every person cannot have that kind of character, but that in a higher position a soul can perhaps show fourth that character more than in an ordinary capacity. That character is love hidden behind indifference; in Sufi terms it is denoted by a Persian word, Bi-niyaz, which means hidden. It does not mean the hidden God; it means hidden beauty. Love expressed is one thing, and love hidden is another. Under the veil of indifference love is often hidden, and the Sufi poets have pictured it most beautifully in their verses, which are nothing but pictures of human life and nature.

There are examples in the histories of kings, which show this character. Sometimes a person whom the king favored the most was kept back from being the Prime Minister. This did not mean that it was not the wish of the king; it only meant that the king considered the sympathy and admiration he had for that man to be worth more than the prime ministership. Also, when the king did not speak to a certain person for a long time, this did not mean that he was out of favor; it only meant that the king knew that he would understand. There are instances when the patience of saints and sages has been tried to the utmost. The pain and suffering that the spiritual souls have sometimes gone through has been greater than the average person's, but behind their indifference there are many reasons.

Then one sees the other part of kingliness: that sometimes those whom the king cared little for were graciously received and amply rewarded. The ordinary mind could not conceive of the reason behind this, but the king who was responsible for his subjects, understood rightly, like a gardener who knows which plant to rear and which tree had better be cut down. In spite of all opposition from all around, kings have held to their idea, conscious of their duty. So it is with God.

But apart from kings, even the manner and method of a responsible person is not always understood by another whose responsibility is not the same, so how can man always understand the ways of God, the only King in the true sense of the word, beside whom other kings are nothing but imitations? It is the kingship of God which manifest in the blossoming of every soul. When a soul arrives at its full bloom, it begins to show the color and spread the fragrance of the divine spirit of God.

The God-ideal is meant to awaken God in the soul, in order that He may realize His kingship. It is this which is suggested in the prayer of Christ where it is said, 'Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done.' It is in this realization that the Kingdom of God comes; and what follows is that His will is then done. But when a person does not know who is the King, neither does he know what is the kingdom.

From the time that man evolved enough to be able to understand his affairs, kingdoms have been established; when man had learned the first lesson, when he understood what a king and a kingdom meant, he knew that there was someone whose command was obeyed by all, both great and small; someone who raised and judged all those deserving of honor and respect in the kingdom; who was like a mother and father to his subjects. It was the same education as that of a child, which after playing with its dolls, begins to understand about the cares of the household.

The next step on the spiritual path was taken when the spiritual hierarchy was recognized, the prophet or the high priest representing the spiritual Head. In this way man realized that it is not the outer environment, money, or possessions which make a king, but that spiritual realization can make a person greater than a king with all his kingly surroundings. This was proved to the people when the king, who was accepted as the head of the community, went before the high priest with bent head and knelt down in the place of prayer. This taught man that kingship lies not in outer wealth but in spirituality; that even the king stands humbly at the door of the God-realized man.

When once this step was taken, then came the third step, which was to see that the high-priest, who was acknowledged as such even by the king, knelt down and bent his head low to the Lord, the king of humanity, showing his own greatness to be as dust before God, to whom alone belongs all greatness. When people realized the greatness of God, they glorified God, and the purpose of aristocracy was fulfilled; it was nothing but a rehearsal before the battle. For once man realized that it is God alone before whom he should bow, that it is God alone who is really rich while all are poor, that it is God alone whose wisdom and justice are perfect, then for him the kingship of the king and the holiness of the high-priest faded away, and there remained only one king, the King of kings. On Him he depended, and under Him he sought refuge in all the different circumstances of life.

After man had taken these three steps towards the goal, he found the goal to be quite different from the way that he had taken, and that goal was the discovery of the traces of the King of kings within himself, a spark of that divine light which is the illumination of his own heart, a ray of that Sun which is the light of the whole universe. And thus self-realization developed, in which the soul found the wisdom, illumination, and peace, which are the purpose of the God-ideal.

x

An ideal is something to hope for and to hold on to, and in the absence of an ideal hope has nothing to look forward to. It is the lack of idealism which accounts for the present degeneration of humanity in spite of all the progress it has made in other directions. There are many kinds of ideals: principles, virtues, objects of devotion; but the greatest and highest of all ideals is the God-ideal. And when this God-ideal upon which all other ideals are based is lost, then the very notion of ideal is ignored. Man needs many things in life, but his greatest need is an ideal.

Without ideals man can fulfill neither his obligations at home nor those outside his home. A man with an ideal, whether in business or in a profession or in politics, in whatever walk in life, will prove to come up to the standard of everyone else. When we look at life, when our mind has sobered from life's continual intoxication, then we can see the futility of life, its falsehood, its changeability, its illusive character. Then the importance of that same life which we considered in our intoxication to be so real begins to fade away, and its reality loses color; something which we saw as beautiful during this intoxication seems now to be quite different from what we had thought. At this moment of soberness man begins to realize that there is nothing in anything, neither in this life nor in the hereafter; and if there is anything that could come to the aid of his reason at that moment of disillusion it is the ideal, the ideal which he has made in his heart. It is this ideal which supplies all that is lacking, all that hides beauty from his vision.

For the one who has the God-ideal before him, the absence of this changeable world makes no difference; he has something, which is greater than anything else. The sacrifice of someone who has suffered a great loss in life in order to keep his principle is not so hard for him to bear, for his ideal gives him the strength to stand firm. There is no one who is perfect in this world, and even in those whom we love and adore and respect we shall always find some lack, some want. And if there is something lacking in every entity, in every being, and we have nothing to fill it with, what must be the consequence? Nothing but disappointment. Is this not the source of the tragedy in the lives of thousands and thousands of people? The general complaint is that one's brother or sister, wife or husband, child or parents do not come up to one's ideal, that they are not as one would wish them to be. But how can they be? They are different from us, our imagination has not made them, they are different entities. We have our imagination and we wish them to fit in with our imagination, but this is not possible. And how many souls one finds in the world constantly sorrowing over this question! If there were an ideal, that ideal would help to bring every person all that he lacks. In this way all that we lack in our life, whether money, position, power or rank, all these gaps can be filled by the ideal, and it is the ideal which is the strength of our hope and our very life.

Those who think that God is not outside but only within are as wrong as those who believe that God is not within but only outside. In fact God is both inside and outside, but it is very necessary to begin by believing in that God outside. From our childhood we have learned everything outside. We learn what the eye is by looking at the eyes of others; everything we see in ourselves we have always learned from outside. So even in order to learn to see God we must begin by seeing God outside: as the Creator, the Judge, the Knower of all things, the forgiver; and when we have understood Him better, the next step is that the God that we have always seen outside we now also find within, and that completes our worship. If we have only found Him outside then we are His worshippers, but we remain separate from him and there is no communion, which is the purpose of life.

But now there comes a question: how shall we apply our ideal in practical life? For sometimes the practical life seems to be the opposite pole to the ideal, and while wanting

to keep to the ideal we spoil our practical life, or while keeping to the practical life, we lose the ideal. What is the solution of this problem? The answer is that no doubt it is very difficult to apply our ideals in our practical life, because sometimes the ideal stands too far away from our practical needs. Idealism is more of the mind than of the body, but at the same time the body can be so worldly that it opposes idealism by not allowing the mind to express itself fully. But one thing should be remembered: that in order to live our practical life to the best of our ability, it is not necessary to forget our ideals. We can sustain the ideal just the same in the tenderest corner of our heart and do our very best to apply it; and if we cannot do this, we can still hold our ideal in our heart, and that will do us a great deal of good.

The ideal must be used as a torch in a dark house. We do not need to burn all the objects there with the torch; we only need to direct the torch upon them. The ideal is meant to illuminate our lives, not to paralyze our action. The ideal which paralyzes our action is not properly applied. It is not the fault of the ideal; it is our own fault, our own weakness and not our goodness. If something happens to be our duty, then goodness may be an illumination for it, but this duty must be performed. We ought to discriminate between what should be done and how it should be done in everything concerning our practical life, and the ideal must not hinder what needs to be done. The ideal must only give the light on the path. Those who bring about a conflict between their action and their ideal are not clear in themselves. In reality the ideal and the action are not made to confuse man's life; they are made to perfect it.

The question humanity asks itself is, 'How can we live in the world, making the best of our life?' And this question can be looked at from two points of view. The first point of view is to try to make the best of our individual life so that those around us may benefit by it. This point of view takes us as deep as is our soul. It is not only a question of how we can lead our external life decently and properly; the question is how to keep our mind in a balanced and tranquil condition, how to find that happiness which is hidden in our own heart, how to reach that light which is hidden in our own soul and which is divine. By constantly thinking about this question we prepare the way for our happiness, illumination, peace, and rest which our soul constantly longs for.

And the other point of view is to concentrate on the life of those around us, asking ourselves how we can make them happy. It is not only a matter of those around us in the house, but of being responsible for giving happiness to all, however humble and small, in our village or town or country, in the whole world. This takes us from our home to the other end of the world with our sympathy. But if a man becomes proud, either of progress within himself or of his work for the good of others, then his true progress is halted and this brings inactivity, inertia. It is activity which makes life, and its absence is death. The ideal life, therefore, begins with the ideal and becomes perfect in completing the journey of progress by these two paths.