

What Are We Trying To Do?
by
Sri Madhava Ashish

With suggested key points for discussion

[Note 1: The text of this article appears in bold face and is that which was published as Chapter 2 in Ashish, Sri Madhava: *What is Man: Selected Writings of Sri Madhava Ashish* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2010). Paragraphs are numbered in sequential order.]

[Note 2: Bracketed words and “Key Points” have been inserted by the commentator.]

[Note 3: The historicity of this article; how it came about and how it came to be published]:

In 1979, Sri Madhava Ashish (Ashishda as he was fondly known, “da” meaning big brother) showed me a book manuscript on which he had been working, addressing the meaning of dreams from a spiritual viewpoint. Another pupil, Satish Pandey, had seen the manuscript even earlier. Although Ashishda continued to work on it, at the time of his passing in 1997, the manuscript remained unpublished. Ten years later Pandey and I did some limited editing and brought the manuscript to publication as *An Open Window: Dream as Everyman’s Guide to the Spirit* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2007).

While the manuscript was in the publication process at Penguin, Ashishda’s stepson, Sri Dev Ashish called to my attention an unpublished article entitled “What Are We Trying to Do?” on which Ashishda had been working at the time of his passing. It was likely the last bit of writing that he did. Dev wondered if it could be included in the book on dreams, but it was too late for this as that book was already in the publication process at Penguin. I suggested that we just keep the article and await a later opportunity for its publication, not really having any idea about whether or when such an opportunity might arise.

Penguin found that *An Open Window: Dream as Everyman’s Guide to the Spirit* was selling well and suggested to Pandey that they would like to publish an “Ashish Reader”, a collection of Ashishda’s writings. This provided the opportunity for publication of the article “What Are We Trying To Do?” as part of this collection. Four of Ashish’s pupils, Pandey, Sean and Pervin Mahoney and I collaborated and produced this collection of articles which was published by Penguin in 2010 under the title, *What Is Man? Selected Writings of Sri Madhava Ashish*. Thus, the formerly unpublished article “What Are We Trying To Do” was brought into publication along with several of Ashishda’s articles that had previously been published in various journals but now stand as a collection of his most significant writings in the form of the book, *What Is Man? Selected Writings of Sri Madhava Ashish*.

Seymour B. Ginsburg, 2010
July2010 syginsburg@aol.com

What Are We Trying To Do?

(1) Before we set out on a journey, before we embark on a course of study, or before beginning any purposive activity, we need to know where we are going, what we expect to learn, and what we hope to achieve. It is the same with the journey of the soul. Before we start, we need to have some idea of what we are trying to do. If we do not take the trouble to clarify our ideas at the beginning, and to keep on clarifying them as we go along, then we shall wander aimlessly among the cheap - junk vendors of ersatz wares, until we find ourselves back at our starting point richer in experience, it is true, but older, sadder, though not necessarily wiser.

Key points:

(A) We must clarify our ideas of the journey of the soul and continue to clarify them as we go along in terms of what is our purpose?

(2) We are not good little children going to church or Sunday school to be brainwashed in the doctrine of our particular sect. We are adventurers, setting out on a journey of discovery. We hope to discover the truth of our own being, its origin, and its destiny. Our way lies through the jungles of the mind. And though others have travelled this path to the goal, leaving their footprints, and even blazing trails to guide those who follow, the jungle we have to pass is the jungle of our own minds. In that, each man's experience is in some sense unique.

Key points:

(A) Our path lies through the jungles of our own minds. Thus, each man's experience is in some sense unique. [No one can do this for anyone else.]

(3) But is there a goal? The soul of man affirms that there is. Those who have won their way to it affirm the unchanging Truth of what they found. Even the evidence of our senses, the evidence of physics, biology or anthropology, leads us to perceive that the Universe progresses from nothing to something. We may not be sure what that nothing and something are, but the evolutionary progress of forms stands before our eyes, and its purposiveness dreams in our hearts.

Key points:

(A) Those who have won their way to the goal affirm the unchanging Truth of what they found.

(A) Even the evidence of our senses and of the sciences leads us to perceive that the Universe progresses from nothing to something.

(B) The evolutionary progress of forms stands before our eyes.

(4) There is no 'proof' in the terms of the material sciences; there is only the proof of self - evidence. We are the subject matter of our research. We are both scientist and laboratory. For we must search in the one place where we have first - hand knowledge of anything at all, and that is in the roots of our own consciousness. We ourselves must know and be the result of our searching. Anyone else's experience is, for us, second - hand, ---a collection of words and images which have meaning for us only in so far as we can relate them to our own experience.

Key points:

- (A) There is no 'proof' in terms of the material sciences. The only proof is that of self-evidence.
- (B) We are the subject matter of our research.
- (C) We must search in the one place where we have first-hand knowledge and that is in the roots of our own consciousness.
- (D) Anyone else's experience is, for us, second-hand.

(5) If you cannot hear the urgings of your own soul; if your senses tell you of a material universe and nothing else; then you are not yet ready to undertake the perils of this path. Put this book aside. Yet live in harmony with what you believe to be the highest purpose of man.

Key points:

- (A) If you cannot hear the urgings of your own soul, and if your senses tell you of a material universe and nothing else, then you are not ready for this path.
- (B) Yet live in harmony with what you believe to be the highest purpose of man.

(6) Our purpose is not selfish. We do not seek within ourselves merely for our personal advantage, but because our own focus of awareness is one gateway through which we may transcend our otherwise inescapably individual viewpoint. However much we may struggle to infer what it feels like to be someone else, outwardly we remain limited to our material locus. We may sacrifice our egotism in the service of others. We may unite with others in a common aim, but only as a collectivity, never as a unity.

Key points:

- (A) Our own focus of awareness is one gateway through which we may transcend our otherwise inescapably individual viewpoint.
- (B) However much we struggle to infer what it feels like to be someone else, outwardly we remain limited to our material locus.
- (C) We may unite with others in a common aim, but only as a collectivity, never as a unity.

(7) As in sleep or in death, so on this path of discovery we are essentially alone. No matter how many people die simultaneously, nor how many relatives and friends gather at the deathbed, each man enters the portals of death in loneliness. Before we can pass inward to the knowledge of the unity of all things, we must stand alone, as individuals, supported by nothing other than the link between the firm centre of the individual and the firm centre of the universe. For the centres of all things that are, are linked to the one great centre of being.

Key points:

- (A) On this path of discovery we are essentially alone.
- (B) Each man/woman enters the portals of death in loneliness.
- (C) Before we can pass inward to the knowledge of the unity of all things, we must stand alone, as individuals, supported by nothing other than the link between the firm centre of the individual and the firm centre of the universe, for the centres of all things that are, are linked to the one great centre of Being.

(8) In truth we are not separate, either from each other or from the multitudinous forms of existence. In placing ourselves at the source of the universal purpose towards self – discovery, we serve not only all other men, but all things also.

Key points:

(A) We are not separate either from each other or from the multitudinous forms of existence.

(B) In placing ourselves at the source of the universal purpose towards self-discovery, we serve not only all other men, but all things also.

(9) We seek, and in our effortful seeking we may seem to be driven by egotistical motives. Yet the urge to seek wells up within our hearts from a source which is utterly beyond the reach of egotism. Indeed, as any practitioner knows, the significant events of inner life seldom arise in direct connection with conscious effort, but take us off-guard at moments when the ego is in abeyance.

Key points:

(A) The urge to seek wells up within our hearts from a source which is utterly beyond the reach of egotism

(B) The significant events of inner life seldom arise in direct connection with conscious effort, but take us off-guard at moments when the ego is in abeyance.

(10) Effort, constant, unrelenting effort is essential. We can no more tread the inner path without effort – though not with the feet – than we can tread a garden path without effort. You can take it for granted that you will misunderstand the instructions and will make the wrong sorts of effort and in the wrong way. For this reason some teachers will urge you to make an effort not to make an effort. It is true that what you will eventually find is that there never was a time when you and the Universal Source were not identical. Overwhelmed by this experience you may be led to deny any connection between your efforts to become and the Truth of your essential being, which was, is, and shall be, all rolled into one. Nevertheless, without the effort to become, your individual spark of essential being will never reach the state of incandescent awareness indispensable to the attainment.

Key points:

(A) Effort, constant, unrelenting effort is essential. When you take into account how many years you have been mis-educated to believe that you are the body-brain-ego organism, it becomes clear that constant, enormous, unrelenting effort is essential to undue that mis-education in order to move your identity from the ego who you mistakenly believe yourself to be, to identification with the Self, the Eternal Unchanging, or whatever one likes to call it, who you really are.

(B) You can take it for granted that you will misunderstand the instructions and will make the wrong sorts of effort and in the wrong way.

(C) For this reason, some teachers will urge you to make an effort not to make any effort.

(D) Nevertheless, without the effort to become, your individual spark of essential being will never reach the stage of incandescent awareness indispensable to the attainment.

(11) Awareness shines in the centre of Being and in the centres of all beings, but it can be brought to incandescence only in the centres of human beings. Only through its human vehicle can the self – seeking of the universe achieve fulfilment of its purpose. It is as if only man can draw the circle close enough. Only in man does the relationship between centre and circumference reach the intensity necessary to incandescence. Furthermore, there may be a flash, but no steady incandescence, if the circumference or periphery is not truly circular. In other words, if the whole nature of the man is not perfected then the shining light of the Spirit cannot irradiate the whole of him and his surroundings. This means, in effect, that a man may have a momentary glimpse of the eternal, but that it will not stay with him until he has built the results into his nature, or, as psychologists would say, has integrated the content of his experience.

Key points:

(A) Awareness can be brought to incandescence only in centres of human beings. Only through its human vehicle can the self-seeking of the universe achieve fulfilment of its purpose.

(B) Only in man does the relationship between the centre and the circumference reach the intensity necessary to incandescence. There may be a flash, but no steady incandescence, if the circumference or periphery is not truly circular. In other words, if the whole nature of the man is not perfected then the shining light of the Spirit cannot irradiate the whole of him and his surroundings. A man may have a momentary glimpse of the eternal but it will not stay with him until he has built the results into his nature.

(12) Our task is therefore rather more complex than may have appeared from simple reference to the centre. We have, as it were, two aspects to the work: one, to grope our way towards a centre of whose existence we have as yet no first-hand experience, the other to knock the psychic nature into something like a circle, without being quite sure as to where its centre lies.

Key points:

(A) We have two aspects to the Work:

(1) To grope our way towards the centre of whose existence we have as yet no first-hand experience.

(2) To knock the psychic nature into something like a circle, without being quite sure where its centre lies.

(13) And the situation is rendered even more complicated by the fact that we are normally aware of a small portion only of the total contents of our psychic natures. In order to deal with this ‘unconscious’ psychic content, introspection alone is not enough: we must allow these contents expression in action, in emotional effort, and in uncontrolled manifestations of thought. In fact, they manifest themselves whether we want them to or not. The difference is, that instead, as we usually do, of regarding them as natural, if seriously regrettable, traits of inborn character, we must observe them and use them, as effects, to trace their causes, hidden in the depths of the unconscious content of our psyches: thus opening the way to freedom from their compulsion. In practice, this is plain psychology. But with this difference:

we use the tools, provided for us by psychological techniques and theory, for a purpose whose validity few psychologists admit.

Key points:

(A) We are normally aware of a small portion only of the total contents of our psychic natures and this complicates the situation.

(B) Introspection is not enough to deal with ‘unconscious’ psychic content. We must allow these contents expression in action, in emotional effort and in uncontrolled manifestations of thought.

(C) We must observe them and use them, as effects, to trace their causes, hidden in the depths of the unconscious content of our psyches. This is the Work of self-observation about which Gurdjieff speaks, and this opens the way to freedom from their compulsion.

(D) In practice this is plain psychology. But with this difference: we use the tools, provided for us by psychological techniques and theory, but for a purpose whose validity few psychologists admit.

(14) Many traditional schools of spiritual discipline teach (or imply) that the pupil should perform the least possible actions, avoid all emotional relationships (exception sometimes being allowed in the case of God and the guru) and banish thought. With the resulting repression of unconscious psychic content, it is small wonder that practitioners of traditional methods should find themselves plagued with neuroses and with visions of terrifying forms representing the unaccepted content of their own souls.

Key points:

(A) Many traditional schools of spiritual discipline teach (or imply) that the pupil should perform the least possible actions, avoid all emotional relationships, and banish thought. It is small wonder that practitioners of traditional methods should find themselves plagued with neuroses and with visions of terrifying forms representing the unaccepted content of their own souls.

(15) From this we may see how our interpretation of the nature of our spiritual goal immediately affects our ideas about the sort of life we should live. Instead of retiring into caves, or monasteries, or behind any equivalent wall of psychic isolation, we need to expose ourselves to the sort of stimulus, challenge, and friction, which will show us where our weaknesses lie. Generally speaking, the situation in which we find ourselves provides opportunity for work on just those areas of our psychic being we most need to handle. It is only when we find ourselves safely entrenched, and consequently dulled, that a deliberate change of outer circumstances may be necessary.

Key points:

(A) We need to expose ourselves to the sort of stimulus, challenge, and friction, which will show us where our weaknesses lie.

(B) The life situation in which we find ourselves provides opportunity for work on just those areas of our psychic being we most need to handle. Gurdjieff called this, “a way in life”, where the conditions of our life when we encounter the Work are the best conditions possible, at least at the outset, to deal with the areas that we most need to handle.

(C) It is only when we find ourselves safely entrenched, and consequently dulled, that a deliberate change of outer circumstances may be necessary.

(16) More often, such changes of environment should arise not from a perverted wish to make life difficult, but from a natural recognition that one's occupation or environment represents the expression of an earlier choice whose grounds are no longer valid. Obviously, there can be no simple 'rule of thumb' in this matter. It is easy to say that one must be honest in regard to one's motives, and that is truly what one must attempt. But when a round dozen of voices are arguing in his head over the appropriateness of a proposed action, the beginner is as likely to be wrong, as he is to be right.

Key points:

(A) A change of environment for the purpose of the Work should arise not from a perverted wish to make life difficult, but from a natural recognition that one's occupation or environment represents the expression of an earlier choice whose grounds are no longer valid.

(B) It is easy to say that one must be honest in regard to one's motives, and that is truly what one must attempt.

(C) In making such a decision to change the environment or not, the beginner is as likely to be wrong, as he is to be right.

(17) However, the criteria for right and wrong in regard to decision-making are different for those on this path from those of world - oriented men. People whose aims in life can be compassed by the words success and security seldom have much difficulty in knowing where they can get their bread buttered. On this path however, motive is all-important. A 'wrong' decision made for the right reasons is more likely to pay well in the long run than its opposite. For this reason daring is a quality to be cultivated, for one often finds that following what one feels to be the right motive leads to decisions that run counter to the accepted norm. It would, however, be foolish to suppose that decisions running counter to the norm are necessarily rightly motivated.

Key points:

(A) For someone on this path, motive is all important. A 'wrong' decision made for the right reasons is more likely to pay well in the long run than its opposite. For this reason daring is a quality to be cultivated, for one often finds that following what one feels to be the right motive leads to decisions that run counter to the accepted norm.

(B) However, it would be foolish to suppose that decisions running counter to the norm are necessarily rightly motivated.

(18) As we have seen, hiding oneself behind any sort of monastic wall is not the desirable norm for all travellers on the path. The monastic is but one of many ways of life and is suited to a particular sort of person. Yet, whatever our way of life may be, there are qualities and practices we need to borrow from the monastery. Our lives must be dedicated and we must not be ashamed to make use of rituals both to arouse and impregnate those feeling levels of the psyche which respond directly to the language of symbolic action and not at all to rational thought, and to act as a

constantly repeated reminder feeding one's need to affirm and re - affirm one's self - dedication.

Key points:

(A) The monastic is but one of many ways of life and is suited to a particular sort of person.

(B) Yet whatever our way of life may be, there are qualities and practices we need to borrow from the monastery.

(1) Our lives must be dedicated.

(2) We must not be ashamed to make use of rituals

(a) To arouse and impregnate those feeling levels of the psyche which respond directly to the language of symbolic language and not at all to rational thought.

(b) To act as a constantly repeated reminder feeding one's need to affirm and re-affirm one's self dedication, and to remind us to remember ourselves.

(19) Furthermore, though to all appearance we may be living what is commonly called a worldly life, unless we discipline ourselves to the extent of setting fixed times for meditation, our worldliness will not go beyond appearances.

Key points:

(A) Unless we discipline ourselves to the extent of setting fixed times for meditation, our worldliness will not go beyond appearances.

(20) As we have said, the outer life provides the friction necessary to work on the distortions of our psychic circumference. Unless we also compel ourselves to make time for regular meditation, the circumference will remain unrelated to any centre. If it is at all possible, the setting aside of a room or a corner of a room specifically for meditation is advantageous. The psychic atmosphere of places is a fact that we should not ignore; it is an objective reality whose effects go far beyond the limits of subjective suggestion. Even if your 'monastery' or 'ashram' be only three feet square, you need it and its atmosphere of sanctity in your home.

Key points:

(A) The outer life provides the friction necessary to work on the distortions of our psychic circumference.

(B) Unless we also compel ourselves to make time for regular meditation, the circumference will remain unrelated to any centre.

(C) The setting aside of a room or a corner of a room specifically for meditation is advantageous. The psychic atmosphere of places is a fact that we should not ignore.

(D) Even if your 'monastery' or 'ashram' be only three feet square, you need and its atmosphere of sanctity in your home.

(21) In the past, and particularly in the East, so much stress has been laid on meditational practices, almost to the exclusion of anything else, that a number of modern Teachers belittle the idea of sitting down to meditate and, instead recommend constant 'self - remembering', as trying to maintain self - awareness, during all activities. In practice it is best to combine both. It is true that we are attempting to reach a state in which we never for an instant forget our essential being, a state in which we are so firmly rooted that nothing can carry us off into self

- identification with fear, pleasure, anxiety or anger. But it is useless if we pretend to an attainment we have not yet reached. One often finds that people to whom the idea of constant self - remembering most appeals are in fact reluctant to accept the self - discipline necessary to regular meditation at specific times. Being reluctant to perform the latter and unable to do the former, they end by doing neither.

Key points:

(A) In practice it is best to combine both meditation and constant 'self-remembering', as trying to maintain self-awareness during all activities.

(B) We are attempting to reach a state in which we never for an instant forget our essential being, a state in which we are so firmly rooted that nothing can carry us off into self-identification with fear, pleasure, anxiety or anger.

(C) But it is useless to pretend to an attainment we have not yet reached.

(22) Similarly, people who stress their regular meditations are apt entirely to forget their aim at other times. By turning inwards towards our source during regular, intense, and single - pointed meditation, we, as it were, activate our quality of self - hood and bring it to a glowing luminescence. The glow then sustains us through the tribulations of the day - if we have been sufficiently intense and if, by self - remembering, we constantly re - activate it. It is an inherent part of the didactic [designed or intended to teach] between the self and its experience: once our self-hood has begun to glow, it constantly reminds us of its need to be re-activated.

Key points:

(A) People who stress their regular meditations are apt entirely to forget their aim at other times.

(B) By turning inwards towards our source during regular, intense, and single-pointed meditation, we activate our self-hood and bring it to a glowing luminescence. The glow then sustains us through the tribulations of the day – if we have been sufficiently intense and if, by self-remembering, we constantly re-activate it.

(C) Once our self-hood has begun to glow, it constantly reminds us of its need to be reactivated.

(23) Since we are talking so much about the self; a word should be said here for those who have been taken by the Buddhist teaching that there is no such thing as a self. It is largely a matter of terminology and the Buddha's historical setting. The Yoga, Sankhya, and particularly the Jain schools of philosophy, contemporary with Buddhism, taught that there are multiplicities of separate, indestructible human souls. These can purify themselves by ascetic practices and so win freedom from the recurrent cycle of birth and death, but they can never lose their identity and blend with their absolute source.

Key points:

(A) For those who have been taken by the Buddhist teaching that there is no such thing as a self, it is largely a matter of terminology and the Buddha's historical seeing.

(B) Yoga, Sankhya and Jain schools of philosophy, contemporary with Buddhism, taught that there are multiplicities of separate, indestructible human souls which can purify themselves by ascetic practices and win freedom from the recurrent cycle of birth and death, but they can never lose their identity and blend with their absolute source.

(24) The Buddha rightly denied this, but his denial of *atman*, translated as ‘self’ and understood as an indestructible unit of self-hood, has made the very word anathema to doctrinaire Buddhists, though they do not deny the empirical self, the entity of everyday experience.

Key points:

(A) The Buddha rightly denied that souls can never lose their identity and blend with their absolute source.

(25) We need not go into the complexities of controversial Buddhist arguments -- The Buddha himself refused to be drawn into them -- We have to see that it makes little difference whether we say that the void merges with the void, the self merges with the self, or the alone with the alone. Different men have described the same thing in different terms, and unless we see first that they describe the same thing, the discussion of their different viewpoints leads us not to vision but to confusion. If we see at all, we shall see and describe from our own viewpoint.

Key points:

(A) The Buddha himself refused to be drawn into complex arguments as to whether individual souls can lose their identity and blend with the absolute source.

(B) It makes little difference whether we say that the void merges with the void, the self merges with the self, or the alone merges with the alone. Different men have described the same thing in different terms.

(26) Unfortunately, it is just because each man who sees describes it from his own viewpoint that we run into difficulties. When a man’s nature is so purified that he sees the undistorted truth, then to anyone who has even begun to see, the ineffable Truth shines through his words. But when the nature has not been purified, when, for instance, he sees through the stained glass windows of his sectarian upbringing, then the colouring of his windows colours both his vision and his description. Furthermore, both in the field of literature and in the company of spiritual teachers there is much spurious coin. The men of our age are in general so ignorant of the spirit, and therefore so gullible, that there are few other occupations in which it is easier to make a living by deceit than by acting the saint or guru.

Key points:

(A) When a man’s nature is so purified that he sees the undistorted truth, then the ineffable Truth shines through his words.

(B) But when the nature has not been purified, when, for instance, he sees through the stained glass windows of his sectarian upbringing, then the colouring of his windows colours both his vision and his description.

(C) Both in the field of spiritual literature and in the company of spiritual teachers there is much spurious coin, and the men of our age are in general so ignorant of the spirit, and therefore so gullible, that there are few other occupations in which it is easier to make a living by deceit than by acting the saint or guru.

(27) And between the true saint and the charlatan lies the misty mid-region of inspired poets who give expression to insights they do not make their own,

missionaries who want to persuade you to believe what they themselves sincerely doubt, unenlightened traditionalists who urge the proven way to enlightenment, academics who place more importance on the double meaning of the Sanskrit root *vid*, (to know and to be) than on knowing and being, sincere seekers whose emotionally charged statements reflect their aspirations for what they have not yet experienced, and sincere fools whose self-deceit leads them to mistake a mild euphoria for the bliss of attainment.

Key points:

(A) Between the true saint and the charlatan lies the misty mid-region of:

- (1) inspired poets who give expression to insights they do not make their own,
- (2) missionaries who want to persuade you to believe what they themselves sincerely doubt,
- (3) unenlightened traditionalists who urge the proven way to enlightenment,
- (4) academics who place more importance on the double meaning of the Sanskrit root *vid* (to know and to be) than on knowing and being,
- (5) sincere seekers whose emotionally charged statements reflect their aspirations for what they have not yet experienced,
- (6) sincere fools whose self-deceit leads them to mistake a mild euphoria for the bliss of attainment.

(28) To separate the genuine from the spurious we need a touchstone - a rare object, to be found only in the cave of the heart. In this field the mind of waking life is an unreliable guide for the reason that, it is invariably prejudiced by a long association with our conventional values. The soul, on the contrary, recognizes its own kin and will, if we allow it to, guide us infallibly to the particular teacher or teaching we most need in relation to our particular state of being. Few of us, however, are on sufficiently good terms with our own souls for this advice to have any bearing on our immediate problem. All we can do is to muddle along on the strength of our misguided opinions. Yet, unless we bring some method into our muddling, we stand to lose ourselves in a welter of conflicting teachings. We have to hold constantly in mind that our search is not for teaching but for the *Thing*, which is the subject of all the teaching. Our search is for that which is and its direction is within. It is a confirmed fact of experience that if we search for the thing where we know it to be, inwards through the gateway of our innermost being, then we shall find our outer circumstances conforming to our inner needs. Books seem to fall into our hands, opening at the very passage, which answers our unspoken question. Casual acquaintances provide introductions to men and women in whom we see the realization of what we ourselves only aspire for. Long before we are able to feel anything more than faint stirrings in our souls, we are able to recognize in others the crystallization of qualities we ourselves lack, even though that 'recognition' be definable only in terms of liking, admiration, and a sense that they speak to our innermost being. But we should no more wed ourselves to the first person or system of thought that appeals to us than we should marry the first girl or boy we meet.

Key points:

(A) To separate the genuine from the spurious we need a touchstone, to be found only in the cave of the heart [the emotional centre].

(B) The mind [the ordinary intellectual centre] of the waking life is an unreliable guide for the reason that it is invariably prejudiced by a long association with our conventional values.

(C) The soul, on the contrary, recognizes its own kin and will, if we allow it to, guide us infallibly to the particular teacher or teaching we most need in relation to our particular state of being.

(D) Few of us are on sufficiently good terms with our own souls for this advice to have any bearing on our immediate problem. All we can do is muddle along on the strength of our misguided opinions. Yet, unless we bring some method into our muddling, we stand to lose ourselves in a welter of conflicting teachings.

(E) That method is to hold constantly in mind that our search is for the *Thing*, which is the subject of all the teaching.

(F) Our search is for that which is, and the direction is within. If we search for the thing, where we know it to be, inwards through the gateway of our innermost being, then we shall find our outer circumstances conforming to our inner needs:

(1) Books seem to fall into our hands, opening at the very passage which answers our unspoken question,

(2) Casual acquaintances provide introductions to men and women in whom we see the realization of what we ourselves only aspire for.

(3) We are able to recognize in others the crystallization of qualities we ourselves lack, even though that 'recognition' be definable only in terms of liking, admiration, and a sense that they speak to our innermost being.

(4) But we should be careful not to wed ourselves to the first person or system of thought that appeals to us.

(29) What we are doing is to develop our capacity to recognize in the outer world the reflection of what we seek in the inner. And our touchstone is used by comparing the outer with the inner image, contrasting the glitter of the false with the soft sheen of pure gold, weighing hollow words against solid knowledge. And we have to learn to trust this feeling judgment, without dependence on the criteria of worldly respectability. Nor must we take refuge from such independent evaluation of teachings behind a screen of false humility. Unless we put our certainty to the test in small matters, we shall never develop certainty in greater matters.

Key points:

(A) What we are doing is to develop our capacity to recognize in the outer world the reflection of what we seek in the inner.

(B) Our touchstone is used by comparing the outer with the inner image, contrasting the glitter of the false with the soft sheen of pure gold, weighing hollow words against solid knowledge.

(C) We have to learn to trust this feeling judgment, without dependence on the criteria of worldly respectability.

(D) Nor must we take refuge from such independent evaluation of teachings behind a screen of false humility. Unless we put our certainty to the test in small matters, we shall never develop certainty in greater matters.

(30) We have to come to terms with the unfortunate fact that no existing religious system teaches the undistorted truth, for the reason that they frame the truth in the co-ordinates of their systems. Properly understood, these systems are rafts to get us across the river, or railway trains to take us to our destination. Some rare men and women swim or walk. But if we take to a raft or a train, we need one raft or one compartment. And, as the Buddha said, when a raft has taken one to the other shore, one does not then pick it up and carry it on one's head. One supposes he could have said the same thing about railway trains. In other words, a man who has truly seen is outside the framework of his sect, even though the framework may still father his words. The man or woman who does not pass beyond the framework does not see true.

Key points:

(A) No existing religious system teaches the undistorted truth, for the reason that they frame the truth in the co-ordinates of their systems. These systems are rafts to get us across the river, but once across we no longer need them.

(B) A man who has truly seen is outside the framework of his sect, even though the framework may still father his words.

(C) The man or woman who does not pass beyond the framework of his sect does not see true.

(31) On the assumption that we have looked around sufficiently to develop in ourselves some lopsided apology for a power of discrimination, the question follows as to whether we should affiliate ourselves to the teacher, system, or religion, which appears to embody the truth we seek. Here we run up against further psychological difficulties. Some people want the nice, safe feeling of belonging to a group of like-minded associates, the security of social approval, or the impregnability of orthodoxy. Others want freedom from the disciplines of society, religion, and family. Both argue the merits of their preference, and both are blind to the determining factors in their psyches, which push them to favour one or the other mode of behaviour. They are not feeling their way by direct perception of the presence or absence of the Spirit. They are so conditioned that they can feel the Spirit's presence only where the form in which it manifests itself promises them a psychologically comfortable environment. Sooner or later each will have to deal with the causes of his reluctance to face self-sustained independence for the one and submission to discipline for the other. Yet there is one danger which is worse than either of these, and that is to hover on the brink of decision, lacking the courage to plunge where the Spirit seems to shine, for fear that one might make a mistake. No man or woman who fears to plunge into the turbulent flood will ever reach the cool mid-stream.

Key points:

(A) A question that follows after we have looked around and have developed some power of discrimination in spiritual matters, is should we affiliate ourselves to a teacher, system or religion which appears to embody the truth we seek?

(1) Some people want the nice, safe feeling of belonging to a group of like-minded associates, the security of social approval, or the impregnability of orthodoxy.

(2) Other people want freedom from the disciplines of society, religion and family.

(B) Both argue the merits of their preference and both are blind to the determining factors in their psyches, which push them to favour one or another mode of behaviour.

(C) They are not feeling their way by direct perception of the presence or absence of the Spirit. They are so conditioned that they can feel the Spirit's presence only where the form in which it manifests itself promises them a psychologically comfortable environment.

(D) Sooner or later each will have to deal with the causes of his reluctance to face self-sustained independence for the one and submission to discipline for the other.

(E) There is one danger which is worse than either of these, and that is to hover on the brink of decision, lacking the courage to plunge where the Spirit seems to shine, for fear that one might make a mistake. No man or woman who fears to plunge into the turbulent flood will ever reach the cool mid-stream.

(32) To the man or woman who has reached the closer approaches to the goal, there is no need of systems of thought, beliefs or ritual practices. Indeed he is concerned with removal of his dependence on such external supports, seeking to see the truth as it is and not as someone else has seen it, or as someone has said it ought to be seen. But though that is our intention also, we need the humility to admit that whether we have a clear, intellectual concept of our aim, or only a vague feeling about it, neither clear concepts nor even rich feelings can be substituted for the applied alchemy of actual work. And though we shall, and must adapt available methods of working to our personal idiosyncrasies, it is only by coming into contact with existing methods of work that we begin to come to terms with the application of method in the approach to our goal.

Key points:

(A) To the man or woman who has reached the closer approaches to the goal, there is no need of systems of thought, beliefs or ritual practices.

(B) He is concerned with removal of his dependence on such external supports, seeking to see the truth as it is and not as someone else has seen it, or as someone has said it ought to be seen.

(C) But we need the humility to admit that whether we have a clear, intellectual concept of our aim, or only a vague feeling about it, neither clear concepts nor even rich feelings can be substituted for the applied alchemy of actual work.

(D) Though we must adapt available methods of working to our personal idiosyncrasies, it is only by coming into contact with existing methods of work that we begin to come to terms with the application of method in the approach to our goal.

(33) Among so-called spiritual aspirants there is a tendency to inflation. They think they have rejected worldly aims, when they are in fact slaves to the most worldly of all aims, namely, ego-aggrandizement. And because the primary demand of all genuine schools of spiritual teaching is submission of self-interest to the demands of the spirit - whether personalized in the guru, symbolized in a deity, or as a formless and quality - less transcendental principle - they hold themselves superior to any system which demands such submission. They see only the shortcomings and disadvantages of systems, and only the human aspects of Teachers. Without knowing what it is to submit to anything greater than their own egotistic desires,

they claim to be entirely dedicated to the mystical quest, without having had any experience of the Spirit. They claim to be submitted to it, they lay claim to a universal love never having surrendered themselves even in individual love. If they at all agree to the principle of surrender to the Teacher, their pride could humble itself only at the feet of a Master or Perfected Man, and one finds that not only have they no capacity to recognize such a man or woman were they to meet one, but that the ones they so claim to recognize are, for the most part, either conveniently dead or otherwise inaccessible.

Key points:

(A) Among so-called spiritual aspirants there is a tendency to inflation. They think they have rejected worldly aims, when they are in fact slaves to the most worldly of all aims, namely ego-aggrandizement.

(B) Because the primary demand of all genuine schools of spiritual teaching is submission of self interest to the demands of the spirit – whether personalized in the guru, symbolized in a deity, or as formless and quality-less transcendental principle – they hold themselves superior to any system which demands such submission. They see only the shortcomings and disadvantages of systems, and only the human aspects of Teachers.

(C) Without knowing what it is to submit to anything greater than their own egotistic desires, they claim to be entirely dedicated to the mystical quest, without having had any experience of the Spirit.

(D) They lay claim to universal love, never having surrendered themselves even in individual love.

(E) If they at all agree to the principle of surrender to the Teacher, their pride could humble itself only at the feet of a Master or Perfected Man. But they have no capacity to recognize such a man or woman were they to meet one, but the ones they so claim to recognize are, for the most part, either conveniently dead or otherwise inaccessible.

(34) In one way or another we have to get beyond the ego-oriented outlook, which is the distinguishing characteristic of the worldly man. And the key to this change of outlook lies in willing submission, of the ordinary self-interest to something which lies beyond oneself. No one can truly know the spirit who is not submitted to it, so that though we must make the attempt to submit to the dictates of what we believe the spirit to be, we cannot in fact submit to something we do not know. When men and women worship divinity through a symbolic form, they believe themselves to be submitting their personal will to the will of the divinity, whereas they are in truth abrogating their personal power of decision not so much to the divine will as to the discipline of their particular religious system and to the moral ideals of their social upbringing. Nevertheless, in so far as they accept obedience to a discipline, they learn what submission means. It little matters in what way the egocentric integration is reduced or dispersed; it will eventually be replaced by the true centre.

Key points:

(A) In one way or another we have to get beyond the ego-oriented outlook, which is the distinguishing characteristic of worldly man. And the key to this change of outlook lies in willing submission, of the ordinary self-interest to something which lies beyond oneself.

(B) No one can truly know the Spirit who is not submitted to it, so that though we must make the attempt, we cannot in fact submit to something we do not know.

(C) When men and women worship divinity through a symbolic form, they believe themselves to be submitting their personal will to the will of the divinity, whereas they are in truth abrogating their power of decision to the discipline of their particular religious system and to the moral ideals of their social upbringing. Nevertheless, in so far as they accept obedience to a discipline, they learn what submission means.

(D) It little matters in what way the egocentric integration is reduced or dispersed; it will eventually be replaced by the true centre.

(35) All working disciplines, even purely traditional ones, have been invented by living men and women and, in real life, are imposed by them. In submitting to a discipline we submit to a man. The Teaching, and its application as a discipline, is an expression of the one who teaches. Whether or not the Teacher claims to have originated the Teaching is beside the point: he may claim only to be a vehicle of transmission for an ancient doctrine. Unless we feel that he embodies the Teaching, we are only the idolater, serving an image of the divine at second hand. We must not separate teacher and teaching, for the sole guarantee of the Teaching is the one behind the words.

Key points:

(A) All working disciplines have been invented by living men and women and, in real life, are imposed by them. In submitting to a discipline we submit to the man. Unless we feel that he embodies the Teaching, we are only the idolater serving an image of the divine at second hand. We must not separate teacher and teaching, for the sole guarantee of the Teaching is the one behind the words.

(36) And here lies one of the most subtle and difficult points of the whole business, to understand which, requires an apprehension of the whole cosmic order, for the completion and fulfilment of the cosmic process lies not in units of human awareness momentarily losing themselves in the void from which all came, but in the perfection of those microcosmic representatives of the macrocosm, a complete actualisation in the microcosmic man of all that is potential in the Macrocosmic Man.

Key points:

(A) The completion and fulfilment of the cosmic process lies not in units of human awareness momentarily losing themselves in the void from which all came, but in the perfection of those microcosmic representatives of the macrocosm, a complete actualization in the microcosmic man of all that is potential in the Macrocosmic Man.

(37) Therefore, so long as our primary concern is with Teaching in the form of a set system, we are missing the point, for the True Teaching is not just the words with which a man describes a method for reaching the goal, but is rather the totality of the one who has attained. And just as children besides the spoken instructions of social discipline also learn by example and by a kind of psychic osmosis, so there is much in a man or woman of attainment that can be conveyed only to a pupil living in close association, psychic attitudes and values which are subconsciously absorbed rather than mentally comprehended.

Key points:

(A) So long as our primary concern is with Teaching in the form of a set system, we are missing the point.

(B) The True Teaching is not just the words with which a man describes a method for reaching the goal, but rather is the totality of the one who has attained.

(C) Just as children learn by example and a kind of psychic osmosis, so there is much in a man or woman of attainment that can be conveyed only to a pupil living in close association, psychic attitudes and values which are subconsciously absorbed rather than mentally comprehended.

(38) The above may sound as though we were contradicting our previous statements and advising aspirants to set out in search of a self-realized Teacher. We repeat, that unless the Spirit within has been activated by inner search you will not develop the discrimination to distinguish the saint from the charlatan. No worldly co-ordinates of social and religious values can help you. The man or woman of attainment plays many parts that may or may not be consonant with your preconceived notions of saintliness. He is unconditioned and will not correspond to your conditioned image. You are an idolater while he is the formless Truth that dwells in many forms.

Key points:

(A) We are not advising aspirants to set out in search of a self-realized teacher.

(B) Unless the Spirit within has been activated by inner search you will not develop the discrimination to distinguish the saint from the charlatan.

(C) The man or woman of attainment is unconditioned and will not correspond to your conditioned image. You are an idolater while he is the formless Truth that dwells in many forms.

(39) But supposing you develop this power of discrimination, and your inner strivings lead you into the presence of one in whom you see your own goal reflected, would thousands of you be able to rub up against him and osmose his essential being? Obviously not! And why should you suppose he would grant it? As it is, do you think he would 'recognize' you, your inflated badge of office? There are not enough of such men and women to go round - which is why the charlatans are making fortunes.

Key points:

(A) But supposing you develop this power of discrimination, would thousands of you be able to rub up against him and osmose his essential being? Obviously not!

(B) Do you think he would 'recognize' you, your inflated badge of office?

(C) There are not enough of such men and women to go round – which is why charlatans are making fortunes.

(40) Then what to do? Deflate yourself and get on with the job in hand. Put a check on your fantasies of becoming the chosen disciple of a Master and begin cleaning up the junk with which your psyche is cluttered.

Key points:

(A) Then what to do? Deflate yourself and get on with the job in hand.

(B) Put a check on your fantasies of becoming the chosen disciple of a Master and begin cleaning up the junk with which your psyche is cluttered.

(41) It is highly improbable that you will see a realized man or woman for what he is. The recognition we speak of will not be in terms of direct perception, for the reason that you cannot consciously recognize what you do not yourself know. All that you will know is that his words are in assonance with your highest aspirations and that they ring true --- and, if he is to be more to you than a source of inspiration, then you will like him as a man. However great you may think him to be, do not forge a permanent link of initiation if you do not like him. You will not have the means to assess his actual position, and to attempt to do so would be an act of overweening pride or a demonstration of stupidity. If you have the good fortune to find a personal guide, your requirement is only that he should be a few steps ahead of you.

Key points:

(A) It is highly improbable that you will see a realized man or woman for what he is, for the reason that you cannot consciously recognize what you do not yourself know. All that you will know is that his words are in assonance with your highest aspirations and that they ring true.

(B) If he is to be more than a source of inspiration, then you will like him as a man. If you do not like him, do not forge a permanent link.

(C) If you have the good fortune to find a personal guide, your requirement is only that he should be a few steps ahead of you.

(42) The pride that our modern generation takes in its education makes it difficult for them to accept the irrelevance of schooling to inner attainment. One constantly hears approving remarks about such and such a Teacher's knowledge of some dead language, his study of philosophy, his deep learning, or his moving lectures in any of which he could be equalled or excelled by dozens of professional academicians - as if these qualities in some way re-enforced the claims for his spirituality. It is as though people think the spiritual path needs lifting out of its archaic setting amongst the superstitions of the uneducated past and respectably reinstating amongst the modern educated elite.

Key points:

(A) The pride that our modern generation takes in its education makes it difficult for them to accept the irrelevance of schooling to inner attainment.

(B) The qualities of deep learning or moving lectures do not reinforce claims of spirituality.

(43) Having gained the advantage, we now pay its price in being compelled to filter all experience through our conscious minds, to the detriment of our capacity to experience directly through feeling. We demand explanations for everything, and frequently think to have grasped their content when we have understood only the words. We thus tend to reject all seemingly irrational situations, erecting a mental shield to ward off their impact. In effect, we grow psychic corns, which, like the corns of the physical body, exacerbate the sensitivity of the spots they are intended to protect. The true Teacher is not concerned to flatter our pride by suggesting that we who understand his words are an intellectual 'elite'. Most highly articulate

explanations are but signposts pointing the entry to the path. Once having entered, the Teacher is more likely to tread on your corns, without comment, than he is to explain either the corn or his action. Someone has to get behind our shields and prod us where it hurts. We can never inflict pain on ourselves as efficiently as someone else can -- we are not sufficiently honest. And, unless we like the other man, we will seldom admit the pain because to do so would be humiliating.

Key points:

(A) We now pay the price in being compelled to filter all experience through our conscious minds, to the detriment of our capacity to experience directly through feeling.

(B) We demand explanations for everything, and frequently think to have grasped their content when we have understood only the words. We thus tend to reject all seemingly irrational situations, erecting a mental shield to ward off their impact. In effect we grow psychic corns, which like the corns of the physical body, exacerbate the sensitivity of the spots they are intended to protect.

(C) The true Teacher is not concerned to flatter our pride by suggesting that we who understand his words are an intellectual 'elite'.

(D) Most highly articulate explanations are but signposts pointing the entry to the path. Once having entered, the Teacher is more likely to tread on your corns, without comment, than he is to explain either the corn or his action.

(E) Someone has to get behind our shields and prod us where it hurts. We can never inflict pain on ourselves as efficiently as someone else can.

(F) Unless we like the other man, we will seldom admit the pain because to do so would be humiliating.

(44) Thus it is not for articulate accounts either of traditional or new philosophies, or for knowledge of psychological technicalities that we go to an enlightened man or woman. Primarily we go to him or her for an affirmation of the Truth we seek, because we need the experience of seeing someone who is in himself the thing we aspire to be. We must not go with the foolish expectation that he will do something for us. Whatever has to be done, we must do for ourselves. Yet, there are things which a Teacher can do for us, if, and only if we make ourselves receptive to his influence. As we have said, if we like the man we can let him get behind our shields.

Key points:

(A) We go to the enlightened man or woman primarily for an affirmation of the Truth we seek, because we need the experience of seeing someone who is in himself the thing we aspire to be.

(B) We must not go with the foolish expectation that he will do something for us. Whatever has to be done, we must do for ourselves.

(C) Yet, there are things which the Teacher can do for us, if, and only if we make ourselves receptive to his influence.

(45) There is thus a close relation between the amount we like a person and the effectiveness of our defences. The more we like him, the less we defend. When we truly love, our defences are demolished. In this sense, the essential being of the Teacher is love, for it is only in the presence of love that the defences of the ego can

be utterly dropped. Only when we can stand before the beloved, naked of all pretence, can the True being emerge from its protective covering of personality.

Key points:

(A) There is thus a close relationship between the amount we like a person and the effectiveness of our defences. The more we like him, the less we defend.

(B) When we truly love, our defences are demolished. In this sense, the essential being of the Teacher is love, for it is only in the presence of love that the defences of the ego can be utterly dropped.

(C) Only when we can stand before the beloved, naked of all pretence, can the True Being emerge from its protective covering of personality.