

METHOD OF LIFE

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METHOD, METHOD OF LIFE, AND WAY OF LIVING

1st Teaching

“The method of life—which includes the meditation, retrospective examination and spiritual reading—bestows mental peace, clear discernment of priorities and, consequently, optimal use of physical and mental energy. Such mastery over their own energy is what allows the Sons and Daughters to make good use of their time.” *Method, Chapter One.*

When we commit ourselves to following a particular way of acting and behaving in order to fulfill an objective and make of this practice a habit, we frame our life within a method. A method brings effectiveness, speed and precision to the task we intend to do.

One of the characteristics that distinguishes the Method of Cafh is that of being an individual and exterior method. Because it is individual, the Method of Cafh adapts itself to individual characteristics, possibilities and objectives. Because it is exterior, the Method of Cafh does not affect the privacy, intimacy or freedom of feeling and thought.

The Method of Cafh is based on Cafh's teachings and it has an ascetic-mystical nature. It is “ascetic” because it presupposes dedication and an ordered and regular effort to make a positive impact on behavioral habits and personal tendencies. It is “mystical” because its recommendations guide us to traverse the road to divine union through a conscious and progressive participation with all living beings.

The Method of Cafh and the purpose that moves us to follow it are our responses to the questions that emerge from our yearning to unfold: What are we seeking in life? What do we do to attain that goal? Why do we make an effort? How do we relate to the unknown: the immensity of the universe, the mysteries of existence, of being born, of dying...?

The Asceticism of Renouncement and the Mysticism of the Heart are concepts which are inseparable from the Method of Cafh. The term “of Renouncement” defines the type of asceticism, an effort aimed at understanding and assimilating the notion that nothing is permanent—not ideas, not feelings, not actions and not even one’s own life. This understanding gives us the inner freedom to undertake the challenge of unfolding. The expression “of the Heart” defines the nature of our mysticism: consciousness and participation with everything that exists, not only through our understanding but also through our feelings and our ways of acting. Therefore the qualifying terms “of Renouncement” and “of the Heart” express the only objective of the Method of Cafh: the spiritual unfolding of those who practice it.

The purpose of the Asceticism of Renouncement is to stimulate the unfolding of our state of consciousness. It is based on the transcendent meaning of life that the Mysticism of the Heart

gives us. The Mysticism of the Heart, on the other hand, is sustained by an ascetic work of renouncement that guides our efforts of unfolding towards deepening our state of consciousness. In this way it helps us to avoid falling into attitudes, feelings and actions contrary to our goal, such as feelings of superiority that feed discrimination or the desire to stand out developing, for example, psychic powers not accessible to most human beings. If our ascetic efforts were not centered on the mysticism of participation, we could develop physical strength and skills, willpower and mental faculties and, at the same time, continue nourishing our vanity, boundless ambition, and intolerance. If our mysticism were not centered on a methodical and appropriate asceticism, we might deepen into our introspective work but, at the same time, weaken our will power and the clarity of the ideas we need to be able to apply the results of our introspection in our daily life. We could achieve an inner feeling of mystical union while we remain insensitive to the reality that surrounds us, oblivious to the needs of those around us and, moreover, we could even feel superior to them.

The mysticism and asceticism that Cafh offers us as the foundation of our method of life impel us to seek illuminative states directly linked to participation with the people around us and with all living beings.

Our ascetic-mystical method acts as a conceptual and practical unity.

Asceticism strengthens the will and mental functions, while mysticism gives a transcendent meaning to the ascetic effort and expands consciousness.

We learn to practice the Method through the teachings, exercises and practices that experienced members of Cafh teach us in reunions, retreats and private conferences. In this way we become familiar with the concepts of effort, self-control and inner offering, which are the foundations of the Method.

In the Sponsored category we come into contact with the Method by studying the teachings and practicing meditation. Moreover, through contact with other members of Cafh, spiritual reading and the study of teachings, we nourish the yearning that moved us to enter our path. That is why we say that in the Sponsored category the Method is essentially knowledge. The task of those of us who belong to this category is to deepen into this knowledge and to keep the bond with the Mystical Body of Cafh alive by attending the reunions.

In the Solitary category we deepen into the ascetic effort and the understanding of mysticism. Our bond to the Mystical Body of Cafh tightens and strengthens with practices that promote dedicating time and attention to the reunions, retreats, spiritual orientation and meditation. Our general behavior, ascetic practices, study of teachings, spiritual reading and contact with other members of Cafh are part of a perseverant asceticism that is accompanied by an expansive mysticism. Our effort is supported by the yearning to unfold, the desire to help, to learn to love and to cultivate inner freedom.

In the category of Ordained, the opportunity to deepen even further into the understanding and practice of asceticism and mysticism opens up for us. Through the vow of renouncement and the commitment of attention and time to the process of unfolding and the assistance to souls, the complete and sustained bond with the Mystical Body of Cafh influences all aspects of our lives. The Asceticism of Renouncement and the Mysticism of the Heart guide our conduct and nourish our feelings and our thoughts. The ascetic-mystical exercises become so integrated with our daily lives that the boundary between our practices and our natural way of behaving fades away.

Through our perseverance and offering, the way we live the Method gradually evolves from being a conceptual framework for unfolding and a sporadic practice of ascetic exercises to becoming an integral expression of our life, regardless of our category in Cafh.

As members of Cafh, we have the opportunity of living in accordance with our yearning to unfold and of transforming the Method offered by Cafh into our natural way of life.

PRAYERS AND STATE OF PRAYER

2nd Teaching

“...Cassian categorized reading as one of the four parts of prayer: Reading, Meditation, Prayer and Contemplation.” *Method, Chapter Thirteen*

“Meditation is the soul's inner strength and the meditation exercise is the habit that leads the soul to the meditative state.” *Method, Chapter Twelve*

“Members of Cafh take this attitude of participation into their families, their workplaces and their places of recreation. Thus, wherever they are, the members of Cafh sow the seeds of peace and concord in souls.” *Method, Chapter One.*

When we begin the spiritual road an inner space is opened within us where we unfold our spiritual life. An important part of this inner space is prayer.

Prayer encompasses every way in which we stimulate our spiritual unfolding orienting our thoughts and feelings towards the transcendent; that is, towards the reality that exists beyond our immediate context and interests.

In a very broad sense, we could say that to pray is to generate positive mental and affective energy and to expand this energy for the benefit of all.

We refer to the state of prayer as a habitual mental and affective state, characterized by inner stillness, right discernment, and good feelings and thoughts.

Why is it so important to practice prayer and to develop to some degree a state of prayer?

Formal scientific research has proven that a person in a state of prayer lowers the electrical brain activity, allowing the so-called alpha waves to occur. These waves have a frequency of eight to fourteen cycles per second, while in the habitual waking activity their frequency is fourteen to thirty cycles per second.

When the mind functions in an alpha wave state, independently of the method used to achieve it, it allows us to positively influence our biological and metabolic states. This explains the popularity of diverse forms of meditation and techniques to visualize situations or naturally attractive images that amaze the mind and calm its incessant activity. The systematic practice of these exercises helps us control the excesses of our mind, calm our emotions, control our physiological responses and also the stress we commonly experience. In recent publications about the effects of meditation, neuroscientists state that this exercise induces favorable changes

in the brain as well as in the cardiovascular and nervous systems; these changes have a positive effect on the functional interrelationships in the rest of the body.

The Method of Cafh proposes, in the practices of prayer, a more systematic and profound action than the practices that quiet the mind. Our Method leads us to generate a state of prayer that allows us to penetrate our inner world, recognize the phenomena that occur there and influence them positively.

Spontaneous devotional prayer, vocalized prayer, operational prayer and meditation are appropriate exercises to practice prayer and to develop the state of prayer.

The spontaneous devotional prayer is the prayer we do when we invoke the divine with our own words.

Vocalized prayer consists of repeating psalms or traditional prayers out loud or mentally, in silence. These prayers are charged with the mental and spiritual energy generated by countless people who have repeated them over the centuries.

A particular form of prayer that is not vocalized consists of mentally repeating words following a determined rhythm. For example, mentally repeating “Divine Mother” to the rhythm of the heartbeat helps us, on one hand, to develop our capacity for concentration, and on the other, to orient our love towards the divine. If we persevere in this practice, this form of prayer leads us to contemplation.

Operational prayer consists of transforming the works we carry out during the day into acts of prayer by orienting the effort to perform them with an intention. For example, we can offer with a particular intention the time and effort required to go to work every day or the daily routines that we carry out. In these cases it is good to remember the particular intention we have chosen several times throughout the day. Another form of operational prayer we can perform during our daily activities is to offer with a loving and devotional intention our difficulties as well as our good moments. For example, if we are using a public means of transportation that is filled with people, instead of complaining or feeling uncomfortable we offer this small mortification with the intention of alleviating the suffering of the sick. We go from being focused on our own discomfort and negative feelings, to being concentrated in assisting those who need positive mental energy.

Meditation is also a form of prayer.

The discursive and affective meditations are ways of acting on our current thoughts and feelings as well as, in a prospective manner, developing future behaviors that are compatible with our vocation of expanding our consciousness.

The techniques of these two types of meditation are explained in the course *Nuances of Prayer*. Here, we will limit ourselves to pointing out the effects that practicing these exercises produces in us.

In a rather simplistic manner, we could say that the discursive meditation is a dialogue we establish with our most profound consciousness, in the divine presence.

The discursive meditation produces two types of effects. On one hand, it updates, through the seven themes of meditation, the values we hold. On the other hand, it helps us to penetrate within, beyond the image we have formed of ourselves.

The discursive meditation is a wide open door to our inner world. Through it we can transcend our unconscious defenses.

When we look at ourselves, since we are an interested party, we frequently do not see our whole interior and we deny what we do not want to see. However, what we do not see or do not want to see remains there and it can often be the root of our uncertainty, uneasiness and imbalances. Perhaps, it could also be the most important source of our possibilities.

In this meditation, the invocation helps us overcome the barriers created by the image we have of ourselves. We say what is happening to us in the presence of the virtual witness we choose—the Divine Mother, God, the divine Presence, the cosmos—but especially, we are our own witnesses. This allows us to accept those personal characteristics which we do not want or find difficult to accept. In the invocation, we take all the time we need to express what is happening to us. Sometimes the invocation is a profound catharsis that can lead us to tears. Let us not contain our tears or the emotions we feel. On the contrary, it is good to allow what we had restrained within us to surface freely. Then the step of silence becomes easy since we have expressed what we wanted to say. We simply stay there, in quiet waiting, without anticipation or expectations and without preparing a preconceived response. In some cases the meditation could end there, in this silent waiting.

The answer always comes; sometimes after the silence; at other times, it comes to us slowly with the passage of time. But we always receive the response.

For example, we want to live with an attitude of renouncement but we are afraid to make that decision. In the invocation we say this to ourselves, looking at our yearning and also at our fear. We say it to ourselves in as many ways as we can express it and we repeat it day in, day out. The response comes to us little by little, as a growing inner certainty of what we feel we should do. When we arrive at a fundamental decision in this way, it is most likely that we will be able to fulfill it later.

Since the technique of the discursive meditation is very simple and it is the first meditation we learn, we do not always give it due importance and stop practicing it when we learn the affective meditation. However, the discursive meditation is always very valuable for our unfolding and our mental and emotional health.

The affective meditation is an instrument that teaches us to generate feelings and states of mind at will. This capacity is not necessarily limited to the time when we are meditating. By practicing this exercise we can predetermine how we will respond towards specific stimuli when they appear. For example, if a particular situation habitually irritates us, we can take it to the imaginative picture and in the purposes and consequences we can generate a calm and receptive attitude towards what is happening. Practicing this meditation predisposes us to react in this calm manner when we find ourselves again in the same situation. In a similar way, we can produce feelings of desolation or compassion in a situation which normally excites us, even though it is really painful.

When we can produce chosen responses to specific stimuli at will, in addition to acquiring control over our reactions and our feelings, we can also better understand what is happening to us and what happens in our surroundings in these situations.

Another benefit brought about by the affective meditation is that it exercises our mind so that we may improve the way in which we organize our thoughts. When we think and also when we talk, we frequently change the subject before finishing it, or we follow associated thoughts that arise instead of continuing with the train of thought to develop what we want to express. The practice of the affective meditation helps us to maintain a logical and effective sequence in the way we think.

Prayer, in all its forms, leads us to naturally become centered in the divine presence, in such a way that we feel accompanied within by what we feel, think and do. The divine presence brings all the souls of the world into our daily life. The divinity within us is an echo of living reality and of the incessant flow of life. What appears is natural and spontaneous due to the simple fact that we place our inner vision on the Divine Mother.

To live in a state of prayer is to develop coherence between the way we act and the way we are; it is to integrate our actions with the constructions of our mind. The state of prayer helps us to live in a single reality, that of the consecrated life that unites our being with all beings, in the divine presence.

STUDYING, LEARNING, AND LEARNING TO LEARN

3rd Teaching

(The members of Cafh have the obligation) "...to be diligent in their studies and to collaborate in the activities of their Table." *Rule of Cafh, Chapter 6, About Obligations and Benefits, Item C.*

To study we need to make a deliberate and sustained mental effort that is aimed at acquiring a specific knowledge that considers the details as well as the meaning and ramifications of the content of what we study.

One of the goals of studying is to assimilate knowledge. This requires a method for organizing, analyzing, and storing the information we receive. In addition to adding knowledge in order to learn specific disciplines or skills, another goal of studying is to learn how to learn.

Studying implies performing a large variety of activities: to exercise our memory, observe, examine, read, analyze information, induce, deduce and infer. When we study, we may be carrying out many or some of these activities; but in one way or another, we always involve our capacity for reasoning. In order for study to yield the expected results, it is indispensable to have an adequate capacity for reasoning, at least from a logical point of view. There is a correlation between the degree of learning and the capacity for logical reasoning. The capacity for reasoning promotes learning and vice versa.

Information comes to us in many forms: in a massive way, through radio, television, and newspapers; in written form, through books and publications; and electronically, through the Internet. We also receive information through our daily interactions with other people, through events in which we participate and situations that we witness.

From our first experiences in our mother's womb and throughout our life, we incorporate information. Some of this information is transformed into tools that we immediately use, and some become the basis for future knowledge; some information is just static data that results in automatic responses; some information is very temporary because it is related to a specific time and place and therefore it is only valid for a short period while, in contrast, there is essential information that remains with us for our entire life. What is certain is that all information is dynamic and subject to reflection; otherwise it would lose its validity in our life. Not only are the data that make up our information updated; our way of understanding, remembering, and validating them makes all our information fluid, in a continual updating state.

We receive information by the simple fact of being alive. However, we do not always analyze it and process it to make it a valuable knowledge for our unfolding. In other words, even though we receive information continuously, we do not always incorporate it into updated knowledge.

The search for data in books, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and electronic files responds to a precise need for obtaining information and constitutes the basis for studying.

The information that we receive is not always objective. It is very frequently tainted by ideologies and the interests of power groups, and sometimes it may show lack of research and many other limitations.

Media publicity about scientific discoveries generally includes premature conclusions about their impact on humankind. Generally, applications of these discoveries are developed many years after the first results are obtained and sometimes they fail to yield actual benefits. Most often these highly publicized innovations are used for advertising services or products and do not deserve our attention.

On the other hand, events happening around the world that reach us immediately are dynamic. Because of the abundance and diversity of these events, the information tends to saturate our capacity for retention and analysis. Consciously or unconsciously, we set a limit to what we observe, remember, and analyze.

Most of the time we let information enter our mind and remain there floating like a cork drifting aimlessly in a river's current. Or we filter it, dilute it and forget it. However, when the information touches us directly we usually influence the way we interpret it, analyzing the consequences it can have for our own life. We do this without considering or being interested in the social, regional, and global consequences implied.

In order for learning to be beneficial, we must develop our analytical and critical capacity in respect to what we hear, read, see, and experience. The accumulation of information without analysis, experiences without reflection and the simple passage of time are not enough to bring about learning, since learning implies a deliberate effort to obtain new knowledge or a new way of understanding what we thought we knew.

In addition to acquiring information, learning implies framing the information we receive within a meaningful context. It implies knowing how to apply it, how to infer, deduce and derive knowledge through it. For example, can we be satisfied with knowing how many people die of hunger each year when this knowledge does not result in a better understanding of the human situation and in a consequent change in our behavior? Can we be satisfied with knowing the statistics on the number of passive smokers who die each year, and yet continue to smoke in the presence of a third party?

These reflections bring about the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence complements and increases our capacity for logical reasoning. Through its development we learn by analogy and by participation.

Beneficial learning implies studying, practicing what we learn, and developing our capacity to participate with the world in which we live. When we learn in this way, we assimilate knowledge, stimulate noble feelings, and also incorporate positive behaviors.

Members of Cafh receive a Method and a Teaching that stress values such as mental openness, study and participatory behaviors. It is our responsibility to decide what to do with this broad intellectual and spiritual framework that Cafh offers us.

Having an open attitude toward obtaining, selecting, and classifying information, without being overwhelmed by its quantity and sensationalism, leads us to analyze it logically and with a sense of participation. In this way we acquire useful knowledge, shaped by the social and spiritual framework necessary for developing a responsible and caring behavior.

We learn from life by analogy, developing our empathy as well as our capacity to observe and analyze by using diverse points of view and incorporating our own and other human beings' experience. In this way we assimilate useful knowledge, capabilities and skills that round out our understanding-and make us useful to society.

Learning how to learn is to commence a continuous and participatory learning process, in which intellectual and logical, as well as emotional faculties are placed at the service of our ultimate objective of union and participation.

Learning offers us training; comprehensive and up-to-date training leads us to erudition. *To create a way of life that continuously updates knowledge and training and makes us act accordingly gives us wisdom. Learning to learn is thus transformed into a living habit.*

This process needs to be consolidated in our soul through prayer. This does not allow us to forget that the ultimate goal of knowledge and learning how to learn is our active and spiritual participation with all souls.

MANUAL AND INTELLECTUAL WORK

4th Teaching

“It is comforting to lie down, worn out after a day of intense work, to receive a deserved rest.” *Method, Fourth Chapter.*

The objective of the Method of Cafh is our integral unfolding. Therefore, when referring to work, the Method considers manual work as well as intellectual work. For those of us whose work is mostly intellectual, it recommends dedicating some time every day to manual work. For those of us occupied mainly with manual tasks, it recommends a daily time for intellectual work. And, for all of us, it recommends study, meditation and prayer.

Therefore, the recommendation to do daily manual work is mainly for those of us who perform intellectual work.

The practice of manual work is a means of revising our preconceptions about work, and developing empathy, participation and responsibility.

Work is inherent to our life, since it is indispensable for the subsistence of society and for progress. Nonetheless, we don't always associate “working” with positive ideas and feelings. On the contrary, we tend to consider work as a burden that makes life heavy and we classify jobs according to what we get paid for them and the social position they give us. Throughout history, this categorization has led to painful situations and conflicts that are still evident. The use of power to obtain the privilege of not working, or of working as little as possible, brings about the exploitation of some human beings over others, and even more distressing, the exploitation of children. On the other hand, we usually consider the lack of work solely as an economic problem, without understanding that not having work is like not having the right to live or participate in society.

As long as we maintain this unjust situation, even those of us who could manage without doing manual work need it in order to empathize and participate with those who support us with their undervalued and poorly paid manual labors.

We are ready and willing to exert great efforts to carry out jobs that bring recognition and, whenever possible, do not imply a routine. At the same time, we find it acceptable that many people spend their lives dedicated to rendering us routine services that are poorly paid and lack stimulation. Lack of consideration for merit, inequality of opportunities and division of labor make for an unchanging situation in most societies of our present-day world.

Speaking about this topic during a meeting of Cafh members, our spiritual director commented that if we were to ask for someone to fulfill a mission we consider important, there would probably be many who would volunteer to do it. However, if we were to ask for someone to just sweep up the crumbs around the lunch table every day, there would likely be fewer volunteers. These points are based not only on the importance we give to work that awakens the gratitude or admiration of others, but also on the way we discriminate when we only tend to value "high-level" work.

Work is work, whether it's paid for or not. However, it's common for us to consider certain housekeeping chores, such as food preparation and laundering, something other than "work," despite the fact that these tasks often take up more time than paid jobs.

Manual work helps us become responsible for what we use and for the places we occupy. The work required to clean, order, take care of and maintain these places makes us aware of the responsibility we have for what is ours, thanks to the work which others did, directly or indirectly, and continue to do for us. Moreover, keeping the places we occupy clean and orderly shows our respect for ourselves and for those we share those places with. The places we occupy and the atmosphere we generate in them are the small world we create for ourselves and for those around us.

Dedicating some time daily to manual and intellectual work helps us maintain our physical and mental health.

Physical activity is indispensable to maintain our cardiovascular system healthy. As society's technological advances lead us towards increasingly sedentary jobs, daily manual work gives us the opportunity to get some of the exercise our body needs, as well as to do what is required to maintain the place we live in and the things we use.

On the other hand, appropriate manual work and physical exercises help us counterbalance the effects of jobs requiring us to stay on our feet for long periods or in harmful positions that lead to bone, circulatory, respiratory, and nervous problems.

Manual work is also a channel for our creativity, which we can apply not only in improving our surroundings, but also in being self-sufficient and saving on services and repairs. In this way, we generate resources in addition to beauty. For example, some people living in small homes plant herbs in flowerpots; others with big backyards usually have small vegetable gardens and those who have tools do simple home repairs.

There are chores we have to do every day such as ordering and cleaning. Other jobs might call for skills not all of us have. In these cases, the task of learning how to do something we didn't know is a good exercise for our mind. Many times, it is also a spiritual exercise if we must learn to control our impatience or discouragement when we are not able to attain rapidly the skill we want to develop.

It is good to work efficiently and responsibly. However, work must not become our only theme or objective and absorb us so much that we withdraw from the social interactions we need in order to maintain a participatory and empathic relationship with those around us.

The Method of Cafh recommends that we lead a balanced life. Working and resting imply a rhythm similar to breathing. We need to sleep in order to replenish the physical and psychic energies spent during the day. We also need time for recreation and healthy relaxation on a weekly basis, and a longer break on an annual basis. This latter span of time allows us to reflect on what we have done up to that point and what the future may hold for us. Furthermore, it allows us to take distance from what we habitually live and feel in order to broaden our perspective and think about the meaning we give our lives. This spiritual work keeps us updated in our thinking.

Manual work is a tool we can use for our mental hygiene. Concentrating on active tasks frees our attention from the issues or problems that might be worrying or bothering us. Time for manual work gives us a break from matters which could overwhelm us. It also gives us some distance to consider those matters with more equanimity when we return to them.

Intellectual work is indispensable for mental health. Even when we cannot work because of age or physical conditions, we are advised to keep our minds active by studying, reading, doing something artistic or any other activity which, while entertaining us, stimulates our attention and discernment.

With intellectual work we exercise different skills: by discerning, associating and studying, we develop our reasoning capacity. By imagining and creating, we also engage our emotions.

The intellectual work we carry out to acquire knowledge is one of the ways of developing our mind. Spiritual reading helps us to broaden our horizons and to widen our points of view. Studying human history reveals how we have arrived at the present time, shows us the debt we have for the cultural inheritance we have received, and also teaches us to recognize those mistakes from the past we must not repeat.

Meditation is a work of the mind upon itself to induce beneficial habits in our behavior and redirect those habits that harm us. Meditation also helps us accept life's painful circumstances and reflect on the decisions we have to make.

Prayer is a work we do by applying our mental energy to the realization of a specific spiritual objective, either through mental or active prayer exercises. The latter consist in giving a spiritual intention to the effort our work demands from us.

Our commitment to our spiritual vocation mobilizes our body, mind and heart in an integral spiritual work that closes the circle we began with our work to survive on Earth.

PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL TRAINING

5th Teaching.

(The Sons and Daughters) “will achieve inner liberation by means of exterior discipline” Method, Chapter One.

The process of spiritual unfolding demands a constant, scrupulous and honest work upon ourselves both at the mental and physical levels as well as at the spiritual level.

The stimuli that we receive awaken within us thoughts and feelings that interweave and take shape in such a way that we often do not know whether we are thinking for ourselves or if we are being taken by waves of thought-feelings from which we cannot escape. These waves trigger reactions that we identify as our own way of being. The truth is that, out of habit, we think we are those thoughts, feelings and reactions and we accept living with this interpretation.

Moreover, modern life has become ever more complex. Urban growth, with its subsequent increase of demographic density, environmental contamination, sedentary jobs and changes in the rhythm of life and eating habits, all combine to undermine mental and physical health. These negative conditions exist in spite of advancements in our knowledge of the human body and of medicine today.

Therefore, in order to maintain our mental and physical health, we need to carry out appropriate mental work and practice healthy living habits.

Scientists and intellectuals who are outstanding in their specialties are faced with tremendous competition. To succeed, they not only depend on their innate abilities but they have to adjust to a strict discipline of study and to continuous and persevering effort to develop their rational capability.

In the arts, where the natural predisposition and innate gifts of the artist are of prime importance, the learning, application and perfecting of a technique are indispensable for the quality of his/her work, whether in the field of music, fine arts or literature.

A top-notch sportsperson knows that he or she must not only train his or her muscles but also perform exercises that strengthen the cardio-respiratory system, follow a strict diet and, in addition, work on disciplining the mind to achieve the concentration that the sport demands.

In the same way, to advance in our unfolding, we need to work with our mind and body, placing them at the service of our spiritual goal.

Exercises that discipline the mind, like the meditation or the retrospective examination, predispose us to perceive clearly and allow us to extract the teachings embedded in our life experiences.

In addition to spiritual exercises, we take responsibility for the care of our body. This includes developing healthy life habits such as taking daily walks, practicing physical and breathing exercises, doing manual work, following an adequate diet, having time for habitual study and sleeping a sufficient number of hours. These practices are recommended in our Method because they truly make a difference in our physical and mental health.

Mental and physical training keeps our mind alert and our body in the best possible condition. Spiritual training orients this work in a way that benefits our unfolding and contributes to the welfare of humanity.

Our attitude of offering and the ascetic-mystical practice lead to the deepening of our spiritual vocation and keep it free from influences not conducive to the fulfilment of our intention of expanding our state of consciousness.

RESPECT AND REVERENCE FOR LIFE

6th Teaching

“Those who exercise the right to participate in the reunion of souls of Cafh develop the capacity to respect the opinions of others, to avoid criticizing, to be willing to work as a team and to acknowledge the right of others to express themselves. More than virtues, these are essential requisites.” *Method, Chapter One*

“Members of Cafh show their respect and reverence for the planet that sustains human life by collaborating in the conservation and maintenance of their Stability Radius, and by caring for the natural heritage of the Earth.” *Method, Chapter Two*

All of us are part of the great context of humanity, but not all of us live in the same way or share the same vision of ourselves and the world. Let's take a look at some attitudes and ways of relating with our surrounding reality.

In spite of today's notable means of communication, many people in different countries and continents do not really know what's going on in the world. Not all of us keep up to date with social processes, technological advances, and the state of the economy. Nor are we familiar with events which take up much space in the media, current trends or events. Due to our peculiar personal circumstances, lack of education or stress, many of us dedicate ourselves mainly to satisfying our own basic needs.

Also, those of us who are educated and informed about what takes place in our social circle, our country and the world, do not always understand or are interested in the intricate relationships of today's complex world. Though we benefit from society's development, have enough economic means to satisfy our needs and live our lives with a certain degree of comfort, our attention often does not go beyond our own benefit.

It is also possible that, in spite of having a great wealth of knowledge about a particular discipline and keeping up to date on the related information, many of us interpret reality according to the intellectual or ideological paradigms we identify with and we stay in our very own mental bubble, oblivious to what is happening in the world. We have an intellectual outlook on life which does not always have much in common with what is actually happening in society and live our lives responding to the world we have created in our mind.

Nevertheless, many human beings with different levels of education and social standing are developing respect for themselves, for others, for life and for the planet. We endeavor to achieve an integral and participatory life that transcends current social, economic and cultural differences.

Members of Cafh traverse the road of spiritual unfolding within this context. We understand that if we used the world as a stage on which to carry out our own projects, their realization would not grant us deeper consciousness. We understand that if we do not work on the exaggerated view we have of ourselves and our way of seeing things--characteristics which lead us to habitually censure, criticize, disqualify and discriminate others--our perception remains very limited and distorted even if we keep up to date with what is happening in the world. This perception is as detrimental to our relationship with others as it is to our spiritual unfolding.

When we understand this situation we become aware of our limitations and that we are inseparable from the world we live in. Therefore, we do not reject anything we have to live just because it upsets us or does not directly benefit us. Rather, we understand that each experience can be relevant and can teach us something. This teaching of participation, inclusion, acceptance and knowledge of our own limitations is the basis for our respect for life in all its aspects.

Respect for life begins by respecting others. The Method of Cafh gives us this as a means to gradually become more conscious of the visible and invisible web of reality we are immersed in. It can also, little by little, help us deepen into our own self-knowledge.

To respect is to give space to others, to their ideas, convictions and ways of thinking and feeling. This respect becomes a reality when we respect those who are closest to us: our family, our co-workers, our spiritual companions, and members of the social group we belong to.

To respect implies recognizing the limits of our knowledge and experience within the context of our culture and the field we have studied. It also implies recognizing the efforts humanity has made to get to where we are, and the efforts we have made both to obtain that information and to live our experiences.

To respect, moreover, means to remain aware of our ability to learn and to be humble before our failures, successes, and the mistakes we make when trying to go beyond the limits of our capacity to perceive and understand.

To know we are not infallible, that we make mistakes due to ignorance, lack of precaution or because we have not considered beforehand the consequences of our acts, allows us to recognize our human condition. This recognition propels us to understand each person within his or her context, helping us to mutually correct our course when necessary, compensate for our mistakes and not repeat experiences which harm us all.

To respect existence means to respect each instant of our own and others' lives. Therefore, we don't squander our time or the time of others. Even our moments of rest and recreation are framed within the integral context of the meaning we give to life.

To respect the space we live in is an aspect of our spiritual unfolding. Significant improvements in human coexistence and in our quality of life have been the result, in part, of understanding the influence the environment has on our actions and relationships. Just as sterilizing the operating room is a basic prerequisite for an operation's success and the cleanliness of a kitchen is a basic prerequisite for a good meal, so in our private environment, keeping the places and things we use beautiful and in good condition expresses our respect for those we live with.

Those of us who have a spiritual ideal tend to undervalue material things without realizing that everything in life has value. Material things are the fruit of the sacrifice not only of those who produced them but also of those who conceived them in order to make our lives more comfortable and allow us to dedicate ourselves more efficiently to our tasks. This understanding moves us to respect their worth, to take care of them and keep them in good condition. Most of the things we use outlast us and are valuable for other people. Let's keep in mind the effort humanity has made over so much time to bring us out of a rudimentary life, centered almost exclusively on obtaining food and shelter, to the means we have today that allow us to live more comfortably, take care of our health, develop our skills and increase our knowledge and possibilities.

To respect nature and the environment implies becoming aware of the changes we bring about with our actions. Even though anything we do affects the environment, we can try to avoid harming future generations with the impact of what we produce, especially if we take into account the significant increase in population foreseen for the future. We already have the means to keep a sustainable world that will allow the harmonious development of humanity on Earth, and to partially correct the damage we have caused to our planet. To act responsibly respecting the harmony of the environment we are a part of is to respect the place within which we unfold.

To respect the norms of coexistence where we live allows us to unfold our individual responsibility. This responsibility is precisely the basis for our freedom in relation to society. Thus it is useful to revise the attitudes which lead us to break laws and rules as for example, not respecting traffic regulations, trying to get to the front of a line, seeking privileges, not paying taxes or not paying for services. This analysis will surely allow us to see those aspects of our behavior that are harmful not only for our own unfolding, but especially for other people's lives and society's harmonious functioning.

Respect for ourselves, for others, for the environment and for life never goes together with violence, no matter how it is manifested.

There is no place for violence in the process of spiritual unfolding. When signs of violence appear in us, whether physical, emotional or ideological, we need to work deeply and without delay to discover their origin and to make our life more meaningful and balanced. In this way we can counteract violent impulses and protect ourselves from their possible effects. Our method gives us the means to investigate the triggers of violent behavior, develop habits that distance us

from violence and give meaning to our life. Violence feeds on lack of understanding and absurdity. Non-violence is born of understanding and the participatory meaning we give our life.

To respect the trust others put in us is to be faithful to our commitments. This fidelity generates a bond of credibility that nourishes the building of shared meanings.

The attitude and practice of respect are the basis for our participation in the Mystical Body of Cafh.

When a respectful attitude becomes a part of us as a natural and genuine way of thinking, feeling and acting, it is transformed into reverence. In other words, the process of increasing respect for people, for the circumstances we live, for existence and everything it implies, culminates in reverence for life.

Respect and reverence embody our offering to the work of Cafh. We express fidelity to our vocation in our respect for the divine. We respect life in the concrete and practical way with which we express our sense of participation.

A Chinese proverb says: “When you drink water, remember the spring.” Likewise we can say that respect and reverence are born from our ever-growing awareness of the divine spring that nourishes us and gives us life.

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE PROCESS OF UNFOLDING

7th Teaching

The right of members to belong to the Mystical Body of Cafh carries with it the responsibility to be worthy of that right. Moreover, the mission of Sons and Daughters to carry out the Work of Cafh in the world requires the ability to participate in harmonious groups. Their objective in these groups is to fulfill that mission, not to prevail over others.” *Method, Chapter One.*

According to the dictionary, responsibility is the ability to recognize and accept the consequences of any act freely performed. In broader terms, in this teaching, to assume responsibility is to recognize our condition as individuals belonging to a larger group—humanity—from which we receive goods, services, affection, protection, and education, and to which we have to contribute to the extent of our possibilities. Within this context, to assume responsibility also implies accepting the consequences of being an integral part of humanity. We do not have an individual destiny separate from the whole. As individuals, some of us may have a better life than others, may live longer or shorter lives, and enjoy more or fewer privileges. However, as part of an integral body, we all suffer what humanity suffers, and as humanity advances, we all advance. It is like travelling on a train that offers two or more classes of service. Although we may be travelling in different cars, we are all heading toward the same destination and sharing the ups and downs of the trip. From this point of view, developing a sense of responsibility and unfolding spiritually are parts of the same process.

The responsibility we assume by living in society becomes quite evident when we are judged for disobeying the laws or transgressing legally established norms. In those cases, society, through its system of justice, applies the penalties that correspond to our infractions.

However, we do not always pay directly for disobeying the law. Although every transgression represents a cost to society, we do not always recognize our own responsibility for this cost. There are legal responsibilities that require a formal complaint in order to be considered. For example, if after a divorce, one of the parents fails to comply with the monetary obligations stipulated for the children, a formal complaint is necessary to obtain justice. Cases like this show that fulfilling our obligations is not always a priority for us, even if failing to comply is contrary to logic and ethics. This reversal of priorities becomes even more evident when it concerns fulfilling moral responsibilities, whose only penalty is the censure of others because one has breached the unspoken codes of our culture.

Being part of the society we live in entails, at the least, accepting its laws and the consequences for breaking them. Although this responsibility is imposed, it is necessary for living together in a

civilized and harmonious way and opens the door to an even deeper participation. Can we increase our sense of responsibility? Can we voluntarily assume a spiritual and social responsibility that unites us to all human beings?

When we become aware of being part of the web that connects us to every individual who forms society, and when we begin to understand the effect that our actions have on our surroundings, we feel the need to accept, each time more fully, the responsibility that our participation with humanity implies.

The practice of the Method of Cafh promotes in us a sense of responsibility to ourselves, to our family, to the society in which we live, to all beings, and to the Earth.

The Method of Cafh offers us the retrospective examination and the meditation as means to explore our habits in relation to our vocation of unfolding. These practices help us to harmonize what we do with the purpose we yearn to fulfil. In addition, our participation in reunions and retreats and in the development of habits of reading, study, and self-observation support us in our process of unfolding.

The responsibility of being truthful with ourselves is very important for our unfolding. If we were to support our ideal on the illusion of achieving a perfect image of ourselves, we would end up frustrated and disillusioned. Oscar Wilde's well-known book, *"The Portrait of Dorian Grey,"* gives an example of this sad situation: lacking the courage to acknowledge what we really are in order to maintain the ideal self image we pretend to have. On the contrary, basing our life on the reality of our true thoughts, feelings, and subsequent acts allows us not only to become aware of them, but also to improve them continuously and to keep our ideal fresh and alive through evident and concrete actions.

In the measure in which we develop a sense of responsibility, we increase our capacity to be truthful. Reciprocally, by developing truthfulness, we become more responsible. This circle of beneficial feedback accompanies the way we understand responsibility until responsibility becomes our way of being rather than a virtuous practice.

Fidelity to our spiritual vocation is our way of expanding our sense of responsibility since in the measure we identify with our vocation, our excuses for avoiding it decrease. We try to live in a way that is coherent with ourselves and with the reality around us.

Responsibility is a burden when we dream of freeing ourselves from it; it is an obligation when we relinquish our discernment and replace it with a fearful subjection to laws and the demands of others. It is a moral obligation when we feel involved with what happens. It is a duty when we recognize how much we have received from society. It is a commitment when, discovering our vocation, we recognize that we are part of the whole.

AN ORGANIZED LIFE

8th Teaching

“May their first act upon awakening be a fervent elevation of thought to the Divine Mother. From then on, they (the Sons and Daughters of Cafh) strive to distribute their time in order that they may amply dedicate themselves to the unfolding of spiritual life, both by fulfilling their daily obligations responsibly and by performing the ascetic practices recommended in this Method.” *Method, Chapter One*

What happens to us every day, the vicissitudes we sometimes complain about and which other times make us happy, generally do not occur by chance or as the result of a capricious fate. Most of the times, what happens to us is the synergetic result of our own actions, thoughts and feelings and their underlying causes.

Synergy is the action of two or more causes, and its effect is greater than the sum of the individual effects. A synergetic effect can be either positive or negative. In our life Synergy has positive results when it occurs within a structure of order and priorities which reflect spiritual principles and objectives of unfolding.

When we carry out household chores, travel to the office, workshop or school, practice a sport, attend a concert, movie or play, visit a museum, go on a picnic, go to class, study, or do many other things, we do them following a pre-established order, accepted by most of us and validated by our mores.

However, sometimes we reject the method that helps us unfold. On the other hand, sometimes we think that everything should be regulated and that any departure from the order we have established should be criticized.

The fact is that every activity we carry out presupposes some kind of order. Even common activities are based on a system determined by culture, family, education and the personal characteristics of each individual. Likewise, more specialized activities follow a particular system which we need to learn if we want to perform them adequately. The builder, electrician or plumber follows a different system from that of a surgeon, dentist or physical therapist. Nevertheless, all good professionals follow an orderly protocol in their work.

When we want to work on our unfolding, we follow a method of life. This method responds to the need for introducing ways of acting, thinking and feeling that will allow us to orient our life towards the objective we have established. Our method does not impose a strict control on our actions and behavior. Rather it helps us organize the time and space in which our daily life

unfolds so that we may adapt our habits, activities and places to the tasks our vocation moves us to fulfill.

Regarding the material aspect, order refers to the place where we keep the things we use. Just as the kitchen utensils we use to prepare meals cannot be kept in the bathroom, we cannot expect to find pots and pans in the bedroom. The appropriate placement of the different things we use helps us save time and do our work more efficiently. An excellent example is the arrangement of the instruments used in surgery; in fact, there is a “surgical nurse” for this specialized activity. Surgical nurses not only know the proper instrument for each procedure but also its best placement so that it is ready for immediate use.

Another way to see order is from the aesthetic point of view. The placement of things in our home creates an atmosphere that can be welcoming or not. Even when we have very few things, their order, together with the cleanliness of our living quarters, gives us dignity and predisposes us to a clear and orderly inner life. However, let’s remember that the exterior appearance of good order is not always a sign of inner order.

Besides helping us to use our time efficiently, the exterior order of our life helps the functioning of our minds. When we put our exterior in order, a synergetic force is created which helps us to put our interior in order. Good mental order highlights the tendencies driving our behavior and helps us harmonize them so that they may reflect the objective that motivates us. Putting our thoughts in order does not mean we all have to think the same way. Rather, we orient our mental functioning towards what is meaningful for our unfolding and towards the possibility of carrying out the tasks of each moment responsibly and efficiently.

The exercises our Method recommends help us put our thoughts in order and orient our feelings according to the objective of our unfolding. In turn, an orderly way of thinking and feeling in accordance with our vocation helps us to organize our time. In other words, we make the hours of wakefulness and sleep conform to the rhythm we choose and the emphasis we wish to give to each one of our activities. Similarly, we arrange the means and material items we use to be instruments suitable for our vocation.

In the measure in which we apply the method, our system of life becomes a rhythm. In addition to organizing our time and material things, we organize our thoughts and make them positive; we put order to our feelings and make them more expansive; we put order to our actions and multiply our efficiency and capacity for work.

The rhythm in our existence is an attribute of the harmony resulting from the integral organization of our life.

Yehudi Menuhin said music brings order out of chaos because rhythm imposes unanimity upon the divergent, melody imposes continuity upon the disjointed, and harmony imposes compatibility upon the incongruous.¹

We could make an analogy between Yehudi Menuhin's concept of the role of rhythm, melody and harmony in music and the objective of our Method regarding the ordering of our daily life. The Method makes rhythm possible in our daily work by helping us establish periods for relaxation and activity, for study and leisure, for nourishment and exercise adequate to our body's needs, and for mental activities that cultivate our intellect and spirit. It also helps us bring coherence to our intention, objectives and actions. Metaphorically, the Method introduces into our lives a kind of melody that marks our days with clear goals and consistent actions. Furthermore, because our Method adapts to each one's needs, it helps us create harmony even in today's hectic life when we need to carry out multiple, and even apparently incompatible tasks.

Some examples of rhythm in our life are: time for prayer, time for study, time for manual work, time for recreation and time for rest.

Some examples of the kind of melody that marks our days are: praying while traveling; practicing habitual silence during the day (that is, speaking when it is appropriate, and not just speaking for the sake of speaking); respecting the opinions of others, even when they contradict our own; eating well and moderately in order to remain healthy; and taking care of our surroundings, beautifying and respecting them.

Some examples of harmony in our life are: stopping for only a few seconds during our daily activities in order to remember who we are and what our objective is; making the most of sedentary activities by learning to relax while being mindful of good postures; deriving maximum physical benefit from doing household chores without being reticent regarding the physical effort they demand; developing the attitude of learning by listening, especially when we have to play the part of leader, due to our role as parent, teacher or supervisor; and practicing dialogue, which helps us to avoid confrontation and stimulates the development of shared meaning.

Let us recall the words attributed to Confucius: "...he who has present the dangers of disorder keeps a state of order."² Let us remember as well that in order to have a positive influence on our life, on what happens to us and what affects us, we have to create a certain order: not just any order, but an order which promotes our unfolding.

¹ Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1990. London Times. English violinist, USA citizen.

² Confucius (551 BC-479 BC). Chinese philosopher, administrator and moralist.

INDIVIDUAL, EXTERNAL METHOD

9th Teaching

“Cafh is a reunion of souls who seek their inner liberation through an individual, external method.” *The Rule, Article 2.*

Customs, culture and habits set the standards of conduct that are reflected in all aspects of our life. Education and family customs make us behave in a specific way from a very early age. At the same time, through our interactions with society, we acquire cultural characteristics that, in most cases, are very old and well established. All this leads us to adopt habits that we consider are our own and express our natural way of being, despite the fact we have received them from our environment.

If we always live in the same place, we may not even be aware of many of the habits that we have. Some of us live and die without realizing that our behavior is shaped by a model that we have assimilated without even noticing. We often say, "That's just the way I am," when in reality we should say, "I am as I have been conditioned to be." Becoming aware of this is a fundamental step towards acknowledging that we have adopted patterns of behavior that determine and condition our individual and social development.

When we travel away from the place where we live, come into contact with other customs and interact with people from other cultures—even if we move to another part of our own country—the differences between our ways of behaving and those of other people become evident. Obviously, the differences are greater when we make contact with cultures that are very foreign to our own and have developed in places with different norms of behavior. In these cases, our tendency is to immediately compare and judge the virtues and defects of those sets of norms in relation to our own. Because we believe that our way of behaving is the right one, we usually think that ways of behaving that differ from our own are inappropriate or inconvenient. This reaction, so common in all of us, shows us how our way of behaving is so deeply ingrained and how natural it appears to us. That's why, when we set objectives for ourselves, it is important to consider if we need to adjust our pattern of conduct to comply with what we have set out to accomplish. It's clear that in our attempts to spiritually unfold we may discover that not always, or not all, the habits we inherited from our customs, our culture and our family will serve us in reaching our goals.

Although the Method of Cafh does not impose specific moral guidelines or strict rules of conduct, it obviously suggests that we adopt an individual standard of conduct in accordance with our objective of unfolding.

The Method of Cafh invites us to behave and act in ways us that have a beneficial influence on our way of thinking and feeling and, in some cases, involve changes in habits or routines, for example, to attend meetings and retreats, follow the ceremonial, and practice exercises such as the meditation and the retrospective examination. It also urges us to adopt a healthy diet and implement practices to improve interpersonal relationships. Although we realize that these activities are good for us, we may initially react negatively to some of them because they interfere with our plans or because they differ from our habitual way of behaving. Once we realize that they help us reach our goal, we can easily accept them.

A sportsperson who takes his profession seriously doesn't limit his training only to the physical aspects of his sport; he also regulates his life as part of this training. If he didn't, he would be at risk of not being successful. In the same way, regardless of how devoted we are to our practices, they would yield little fruit if our method of life weren't in harmony with our decision to unfold spiritually.

As members of Cafh, we maintain a conduct based on the Method of Cafh.

The Asceticism of Renouncement offers us guidelines for attitudes and conduct we are free to adopt and adapt in order to establish our individual method of unfolding. The Mysticism of the Heart encourages us to give a spiritual significance to our ascetic effort, so that our method of life becomes a road toward the expansion of our consciousness. This allows us to transcend the dichotomy between a spiritual life reduced to the practice of certain exercises and a daily life that is disconnected from those exercises and from the thoughts and feelings that should accompany it.

As we internalize the habits instilled by the Method, our life is transformed in such a way that our exterior activity reflects our interior life and conversely our interior life expresses itself in our exterior life. In this way, we do not differentiate between exercises and mysticism on the one hand and our conduct on the other. If, for example, we meditate on the love that we feel towards all human beings and on acceptance of diversity, we will consequently adopt habits of respect and mutual assistance in our relations with the people around us.

This way of acting keeps us conscious of our path and enables us to discern between acceptable behaviors and those that we should leave aside; between thoughts that help us to unfold and thoughts which harm us; between feelings that expand our consciousness and feelings which limit it.

Our method of life is individual since it adapts to our idiosyncrasies and needs. It is external because it is based primarily on practices that beneficially influence our conduct. It is an essential part of our spiritual unfolding because it is based on expansive thoughts and feelings of love and generosity.

LIVING WITH HARMONY AND MEASURE

10th Teaching

“They (Sons and Daughters) are prudent and measured; they avoid practices that could be harmful to their health, bearing in mind that Cafh’s method of life, which includes practices that foster physical well-being and habits of having good thoughts and feelings, contributes to maintaining the health of the body and mind.” *Method, Chapter One*

Life in today’s world is competitive, demanding and, above all, stressful. This occurs in great urban centers as well as in remote places or social groups which, until recently, lived in what might be called an oasis of tranquility. Employment, once stable, has become uncertain and transitory. The institution of marriage is in crisis. Its meaning and very existence are being questioned. Youth is exposed to the pressure of fads in clothing, behavior and spending. This pressure is heightened by the fragility of affections and the frequent lack of family or social restraints. The increase in life expectancy has brought new actors into social life, with their own particular needs. We find ourselves in a world in transition which confronts us with new situations such as insecurity, overpopulation and violence, as well as other challenges which were unimaginable just a few years ago.

What does the Method offer to help us adapt to this uncertain and changing world? It urges us to live with measure.

Let us try to understand what living with measure is by using an analogy. The beauty of the great masterpieces of classical architecture comes mainly from the harmony of their measurements. The relationship between height and volume, for example, is a basic indicator of a construction’s architectural beauty. Continuing with the analogy, we might say that harmony in our behavior is based on the discernment which allows us to balance our needs and desires with the objectives for spiritual unfolding that we have chosen. If we apply this discernment to our inner life and daily actions, the measure we adopt to mold our behavior results in a harmonious life, channeled as much towards our own unfolding as towards that of all humanity.

Can we speak of the possibility of living with measure and harmony in present-day society? Can we center on harmonizing our own lives without disconnecting ourselves from others or forgetting the lack of resources and afflictions that surround us?

Our work on unfolding would be a fantasy if we lived it separately and independently from our immediate reality, and above all, in a manner opposite to the existential situation of the rest of humankind. We are one with all humanity: physically, mentally and spiritually, as well as

individually and collectively. Our life influences the world around us, just as that world influences us. Although the world may seem to be separate and independent there is a relational bond between “us” and “them.” This bond makes it possible for us to shower the world with the love that we are capable of offering as an expression of our inner participation and expansion.

Therefore, living with harmony and measure implies recognizing this unity. We achieve harmony between the personal and the collective, the inner and exterior world, the contingent and the transcendent and between the present moment and eternity. This moderation is not a utopian objective. We can reach it through a methodical, consistent and scrupulous inner work that is carried out in the context of the transcendent meaning of life.

We begin that work by differentiating between the operational and the fundamental issues of life. Operational issues are solved by applying the resources that the acquired experience of humanity offers us, and by studying in order to contribute solutions.

To solve operative issues that go beyond our personal knowledge and skills, we turn to the people who have been trained to deal with those issues: doctors for health problems, lawyers for legal issues, engineers for building matters, etc.

We turn to our Method, and work methodically and objectively on our asceticism in order to resolve issues of harmony in our life and moderation in our behavior. By doing this, we are better able to respond to the fundamental objectives of our unfolding. One of the pillars of our spiritual work rests on this foundation.

Our defects generally appear first in this spiritual work. But these defects are operational problems which can be solved, or at least contained, by following suitable techniques. Therefore, we must not feel overwhelmed by the amount of characteristics we consider unsuitable, nor should we believe that it is necessary to eliminate them in order to advance. It is not a question of being “perfect,” but rather learning to know ourselves, applying our energy to the goals we have set, and progressively leaving aside whatever distracts us from our end.

Living with harmony and moderation is achieving balance between the parts and the whole; between what we cannot change and must accept, and what we can change; between what we desire to attain and what we need to accomplish.

If we lived obsessed with the unforeseen events we have to face each day, we would not be able to recognize the transcendent meaning of life. A simple way to keep our concerns and actions in context is to inwardly offer our efforts for our own well-being and that of humanity. This offering maintains us aware of our place in life and in the world, and places the unforeseen events of each moment within the context of the whole of life.. It also places our limited perceptions within the infinity of the divine.

Maintaining harmony between the finite and the infinite, the present moment and becoming, the individual and the collective, prevents us from falling into the extreme of thinking that to live

spiritually is to dedicate the whole day to carrying out spiritual exercises. Such an idea implies that others would have to work to take care of our needs. Each man, each woman and each human group participates of humankind which unfolds as a unity. From the individual point of view, when we live with harmony and measure we fulfill the function that corresponds to each one of us within human unfolding. At the same time, we unfold harmoniously within that function.

We maintain the balanced life that the Method of Cafh recommends when we harmonize the time we dedicate to earning our living, mental work, prayer, rest and interpersonal relationships. And most importantly, when we connect our life experiences with those of all human beings through participation.

A practice derived from the Method of Cafh is to finish well what we have started, without leaving any loose ends. This practice helps us achieve a harmonious and moderate life and resolve issues which could create difficult, and sometimes painful situations. By not finishing something, the time, dedication and energy we put into it disappear without bearing fruit. However, this practice not only implies finishing work and other things. It also implies resolving conflicts in relationships. In this sense, we could say that an unresolved conflict is a problem which generates many more problems.

In the context of relationships, we sometimes think that if we do not reach an agreement, we solve the conflict by discontinuing the relationship. But in reality, when we have not reached an agreement, or when we ended a relationship for that reason, the conflict continues in the form of rancor and resentment, or even worse, in the desire to get even or to obtain revenge. Nevertheless, even in these cases we can end well what we began badly. We can still make peace with that person in our heart, even though we have not been able to resolve the conflict. Finishing what we have started implies resolving situations by creating an order that closes one stage and frees us to undertake the next one.

We can ask ourselves why moderation and harmony are so necessary in our effort to unfold. The answer is that harmony and moderation help us place our experiences in the context of the great framework of becoming. By understanding the reality that limits us, we achieve the peace and serenity necessary to sustain our effort to unfold.

The Method of Cafh offers us the means for overcoming the obstacles we may encounter in our unfolding, without becoming either obsessive or neglectful in that work. When our decisions and the way we carry them out are measured, life becomes harmonious, especially for us. And it is a driving force towards a harmonious life for society.

LIVING WITH FREEDOM

11th. Teaching

“Souls spontaneously yearn for freedom. But how can they attain it?”

Human beings who attempt to gain freedom by becoming materialistic fall inescapably under the tyranny of objectivism. They join the great human machine that incessantly marches forward, exhausting itself in an endless experience.

Those who attempt to gain freedom by becoming idealists are enslaved by their minds. They become entangled in an endless rational web that distorts their perceptions and hides the meaning of their spiritual individuality from them. When the mind is sovereign it does not recognize its limits.

Those who attempt to gain freedom by becoming devout, fall prey to dogmas that prevent them from casting themselves into the immensity of their possibilities to know and expand themselves.

Real and true freedom is not found in living outwardly, bewildering and confusing oneself. Nor is it found by seeking inwardly for a rational and personal perfection. Real freedom is found in being what one is: a human being with infinite possibilities.” *Method, Chapter Twenty-four*

The search for freedom is almost an obsession for those of us who aspire to resolve existential anguish. Recognizing our need to respond to the meaning of life is closely related to the longing for freedom.

The utopian response to this need for freedom is to want nothing or nobody to stand between us and the fulfilment of our will. We say it is utopian because it is impossible to achieve given that our individual will clashes with the wills of those around us, thus limiting each other. Besides, instead of freeing us, this attitude binds us to our moods and ever-changing ways of thinking. It also makes us dependent on fortuitous circumstances over which we have little or no control.

Another response to our need for freedom, also possibly utopian, is the belief that by simply longing for something transcendental, beyond our vital and cultural needs, we are already free. In this case we could say that the freedom we long for would be a state of inner happiness that could possibly result in feeling integrated and united with the divine at some undetermined point in the future.

The Method of Cafh proposes that we explore another kind of response to achieve inner freedom:

To know the natural, social and spiritual laws that govern our lives.

To know our real needs.

To distinguish real needs from desires and the needs imposed by fashion or social pressure.

To gradually achieve independence from the contingencies of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual states.

The Method of Cafh provides us with the tools to address these challenges in the context of our daily life.

Wanting to free ourselves from the laws of nature that govern our life or from the social, legal or spiritual laws that govern the life of the society we live in, is a utopian wish. As we practice the ascetic exercises the Method grants us knowledge of those laws and teaches us how to act within them. In this way we are able to direct our energy toward the goal of spiritual unfolding that we have set for ourselves.

With regards to natural laws, we know that by living a healthy and balanced life we can help maintain our health and our energy. But we also know that even if we follow this lifestyle, the time will come when our vitality will decline, our muscles will not respond as before and we will be more prone to diseases and physical limitations.

We know that our mental exercises will give greater clarity and depth to our thinking. But we also know that no matter how much we exercise mentally we cannot guarantee that that clarity and depth will not decline or disappear at some point.

We also know how to enjoy our physical and mental faculties when they are at their prime, but it's possible we may not yet know how to sustain that enjoyment if those faculties deteriorate.

Let us then follow the norms of the Method. In this way we will not only live well, but the peace of mind we attain by living well will not only depend on what happens to us, but also, and especially, on our ability to respond adequately to whatever comes. For example, let us meditate on the chapters of the Method about the sick and death in order to prepare our responses to these aspects of the law of life.

Regarding the laws of society, we know which ones the regulations of our country require us to obey. We also know our responsibilities implied by the fact that we live in society. Let us meditate especially on these latter responsibilities in order to exercise our freedom to follow

through with what we know we must do regarding our surroundings. Getting used to practicing what the Method recommends, such as behavior at home, during meals, at work and in relationships, helps us fulfill basic aspects of our social responsibility.

Regarding spiritual laws, we know that each action--including thoughts and feelings--produces a consequence. We also know that we have free will, that at any moment we can act, feel and think in one way or another and that each one of these acts, thoughts and feelings generates consequences. In this sense, what would it be like to act with freedom, so that the outcome of our conduct would result in our own good and that of others? It would be like having the ability to accomplish what we intend to do and to act as we know we should according to our ethics.

However, do we already have that freedom? The truth is that even if we have good intentions, we are not always able to carry them out. At other times we find ourselves doing something that we either don't consider ethically correct or doesn't respond to our good judgment. In these cases, what can we do? We can simply repair the damage and redirect our course, both at the same time. Above all, we need to learn not to repeat the mistakes we have already acknowledged.

Moreover, when we allow ourselves be carried away by anger or reactions, we do not always have good thoughts. What can we do to have the freedom to think well, given that good thoughts attract the good and bad thoughts attract suffering? In addition to bringing this topic to the meditation, we can practice a very simple exercise: as soon as we notice that a negative thought appears, immediately replace it with the best thought we can come up with at that moment. This practice, that takes only an instant, brings about a rapid increase in our freedom to think as we would like.

Practicing simple and clear rules, such as those found in the Method, helps us to strengthen our will and gain control over what we do, think and feel so that we can always live according to our principles and our vocation.

Regarding freedom in relation to our needs, let's ask ourselves what we *really* need when we want something. Let's use our free will to become independent of the pressure of desires that do not always satisfy real needs, or if satisfied would not be beneficial. Many times, by letting ourselves be carried away by what we want at the present moment, we may jeopardize our ability to meet a real need in the future. Knowing how to defer or reject a possible, but not indispensable, gratification is to attain freedom, not only to live sensibly, but especially to create a viable and predictable future.

When we develop sufficient inner freedom, we understand that freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. Being responsible is being careful and paying attention to what we say or do and assuming the commitments that pertain to us as members of our society. We do this when we are free enough to act, think and feel in a way that enables us to carry out those purposes.

Achieving mastery over ourselves is not enough for exercising freedom. We are subject to the pressures of advertising, fashion, ideologies and social class. We are not always sure if what we propose, do, or presume reflects the decision we have freely taken or if it is influenced by something outside ourselves. Therefore, in order to exercise our freedom in a beneficial way, we need to sharpen our discernment and our ability for analyzing and evaluating both what we receive from outside and what comes from within: impulses, desires, reactions and emotions. It is easy for us to remain conscious of our role as spectators when watching a show; it is also good for us to be spectators of what we do, feel and think. Our mind has the capacity for observing itself and what we are doing; using that ability to know ourselves better lays a good foundation for exercising our freedom.

The meditation, retrospective examination, teachings, retreats, weekly reunions and spiritual reading are some of the tools that the Method of Cafh offers to help us know the natural and social laws that govern our lives, to understand our needs and harmonize body, mind and spirit in order to achieve independence of the ups and downs of our moods and physical condition.

The Method of Cafh provides the means to live in a way that opens the doors to inner freedom. Neither the utopian freedom of doing only what we want nor fostering a vague yearning to feel integrated and united with the divine at some undetermined point in the future give us true inner freedom. Vague yearnings may not bring us to a safe haven or perhaps to any haven at all. To defer the fulfilment we are looking for to some future date is to make it impossible to ever accomplish what we wish were real now. Each one of us attains inner freedom through a conscientious and systematic work on our body and our mind.

To know ourselves, the reality that surrounds us and our relationship with the laws that govern our life is the basis for being able to act productively within those laws. This form of action is the true force that moves us toward the attainment of our inner freedom.

THE USE OF TIME

12th Teaching

“The method of life—which includes meditation, retrospective examination and spiritual reading—bestows mental peace, a clear discernment of priorities and, consequently, optimal use of their physical and mental energy. Such mastery over their own energy is what allows the Sons and Daughters to make good use of their time.” *Method, Chapter One.*

“The times for rising, eating and working are to be well distributed.” *Method, Chapter Two.*

The concept of time is linked to the concept of change. Measuring the passage of time implies perceiving that something is changing. This is why we tend to say that a photo is an image fixed in time. On the other hand, the idea of the passage of time is linked to that of the irreversibility of change; the sequence of time is a succession of “nows.” According to the way we perceive things, everything that happens slides from an irreversible past through the present towards an endless future. We think of time as something that is passing by, a present that is becoming the past and moving toward the future. However, we could say that time doesn’t pass by, but it is we who change within it; we could say that transitoriness is a way of being, a way of existing in the world.

In considering the idea of time, we can distinguish between chronological, psychological, and mental time.

Chronological time is the time we measure with a clock.

Psychological or subjective time—which we commonly call “duration”—is the way we perceive time. We can also consider it as the succession of individual experiences.

Mental time is thinking time.

Chronological time is established by social agreement. Without a common unit for measuring time, we wouldn’t be able to live together in a worthwhile way. Showing respect for chronological time is our way of acknowledging our integration in society.

Chronological time is a non-renewable resource; we can’t recover time that has gone by. It therefore behooves us to use it in a way that is spiritually and materially beneficial both for ourselves and others. Let’s keep in mind that spending time on practical tasks isn’t a materialistic aim as opposed to a spiritual one. Not only are such tasks necessary to support our lives, but using time productively and efficiently is our way of participating in the support and

advancement of all human beings. Beyond expressing a paternalistic attitude of service to others, using our time to produce what is needed for ourselves and society is an inescapable imperative. That is why not wasting time is a basic aspect of our method of life.

In the use of chronological time, we distinguish between personal time (how each of us uses time) and time in common (the time we share with others).

We decide how we use our personal time. This use of time reveals how efficient we are in terms of practical production and also in terms of our unfolding. Personal time is also linked to time in common because we share time with everybody. The way we use our personal time, therefore has an influence on everyone else's life one way or another.

There are also specific instances when our personal time directly involves the time of others. For example, when we make an appointment; when others' work depends on when we finish ours; when an activity can't start until we arrive; when we take advantage of someone's presence to talk about something we are interested in without asking them if we can take their time to do so; and so forth. The way we use other people's time shows our respect for their time, which means showing respect for their lives. This respect makes us punctual, and fulfilling of our commitments. It makes us refrain from intruding on other people's time and respectful of the rhythms of those we work with. If we sometimes feel we're wasting time because we have to wait in line or wait to be served, let us remember that we don't always use our own time efficiently. We don't only waste our time but waste other people's time.

Psychological time is influenced by age, maturity, moods, and our individual experiences. It's prudent to recognize that it won't be convenient to follow the same work regime and pace when we're strong and healthy than when we are not so well. That's why it's good to make sure that our psychological time harmonizes with our chronological time as much as possible, especially in our daily activities, so that these activities are productive and don't create unnecessary risks.

It's not often easy to create this harmony in all situations. Enthusiastic moods can influence us to act in a way that puts our health at risk; a depressive state may stop us from doing the things we need to do and indeed can do. There are occasions when it is out of our power to make chronological and psychological time coincide. For example, a tense moment while facing a terrifying event, such as an earthquake, can seem endless to us even if it only lasted a few seconds. On the other hand, a situation that takes up our whole attention because we are very interested in it can seem to last only briefly, even though it has occupied us for hours.

Mental time is related to thinking. Just as chronological time never stops, our thoughts don't stop, either. Whether we're paying attention to something or not, our minds never stop their activity. It's important to pay attention that to this fact when we are planning an efficient use of the minutes of the clock, for we rarely notice the great influence of our minds over what we do and express. What's certain is that the way we use our mental time determines how we use

chronological time—in other words, how we use our life. How we use mental time also determines our usual state of consciousness.

The ability to focus our attention on the present is indispensable for being successful at our studies, learning from our environment, and also for learning about ourselves. Therefore, it's good to learn to remain in the present, not trying to escape from it because we don't like something, or because we find it boring, or simply because we can't control our minds.

We aren't in the here and now when we get distracted, allow our minds to wander, or get wrapped up in memories. And when we get carried away by reactions like displeasure or annoyance, we tend to create imaginary situations in our minds that absent us not only from the present, but also from the awareness of ourselves and our context.

If we observe what goes on in our mental time, we see that we're in the here and now when we pay attention to what we are doing at that moment, to what's going on both in our surroundings and inside ourselves. But we can't always sustain that attention. Ordinarily, we pay undivided attention to something that interests us deeply—a movie, a book, an assignment—for as long as it holds our interest. In such cases we may be able to concentrate for a considerable length of time, but we're concentrated only on the very limited focus of our interest; we're in our own here and now, circumscribed by the scope of what attracts us at the moment. It is therefore good to do the exercise of paying attention also to the broader reality we share with everyone.

The question we could ask ourselves is: How well do we take advantage of our mental time, how alert are we in our everyday life, and how much do we expand our state of consciousness through the wise use of time?

Of course, most of us do allocate a certain amount of time for mental work, but that isn't enough for making the most of our mental time. Considering that the movement of the mind never stops, the portion of time we use to good effect is insignificant in relation to all the time our mind really has.

Good use of mental time implies controlling the movement of the mind to be able to develop attentiveness and clear thinking.

The Method of Cahf offers us exercises such as the retrospective examination and meditation for learning how to control and direct our minds and, especially, for developing our capacity to pay attention to what's going on at each instant, both within ourselves and in our context, so that we can be attentive to the continuum of life, which is the present.

Not all of us pass through time in the same way, even though we all measure time with the same hourly unit or the same calendar. That's why we need to pay attention to our objectives, to the meaning we give to our own existence, and to the way we use time to achieve those objectives.

A good way to begin to make the most of our time is to accomplish each thing within a reasonable time frame. Although eternity is before us, we have only our lifetime here on earth to fulfill our aims—our vocation. Remaining aware of that finite span moves us to use time well.

LIVING IN PEACE

13th. Teaching

“Sons and Daughters remember that world peace is built upon the peace of each individual, each family and each country.” *The Method, Chapter Two*

We are inseparable parts of the world in which we live, yet we are not habitually conscious of this reality. We commonly perceive the world as a stage, and human beings inhabiting it as actors in a play in which we are spectators. One of the consequences of this way of perceiving reality is that it produces a relationship of separativity and competition where the struggle to subsist and survive is likely to be ruthless.

We haven't yet developed a harmonious relationship among ourselves and with the global society to which we belong. Though we feel the need to belong, that feeling isn't necessarily translated into solidarity and mutual protection.

Remaining habitually aware that we are part of the whole of humanity and thinking and feeling according to that consciousness is not easy. This is because we tend to get so absorbed in our moods and daily events that whatever else happens is reduced to a backdrop of news that keeps updating itself. And when, upon deep reflection, we realize that we actually do participate with the whole of humanity, it is still difficult for us to act accordingly.

The teachings of Cafh encourage us to expand our perception of our situation in the world; the Method suggests the way to make our life reflect this expanding perception.

To help us understand our relationship with the world, we can begin by discerning two worlds: the world we perceive with our senses—the exterior world—and the world we have in our mind—our interior world. Let's then begin by trying to understand the relationship between these two worlds and the way these realities are integrated or in competition with each other.

On one hand, we perceive the world from what we see, hear, read and study. On the other, we are immersed in our reactions, interpretations and, especially, in the place where we tend to focus our attention: ourselves. What we feel, suffer, hope and want, what happens to us at every moment—and the memory of what happened to us—deeply affects our relationship with the outside world.

As these two worlds are realities that we cannot ignore, let us pay attention to how we relate to each one of them and, in particular, how we connect one to the other.

If we focus our attention on ourselves, external reality loses significance for us. It only matters to us to the extent that it affects our personal world. Consequently, we reduce our lives to the

vicissitudes of what happens to us. Although we may show interest in what goes on outside us that interest reflects our concern regarding how it may positively or negatively affect us, or it simply satisfies our curiosity or covers up our boredom.

If we focus our attention on what happens outside of ourselves at the expense of self-observation, we lose the objectivity to recognize our interpretations, attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, the shift towards the exterior is usually an escape from our inner reality.

The Method of Cafh encourages us to open our interior to the outside world; to bring into our lives the lives of others, with their light and shadows; and to feel as our own the pain, anguish, tragedies and needs, as well as the joys and achievements of everyone. It also encourages us to pour our love, our solidarity and our capabilities upon those around us. When we think about ourselves, we do so as members of humanity. We practice connecting the feeling we are experiencing at any moment with the feelings of others. When we picture our future, we practice seeing it as an integral part of the world that we yearn to build with all human beings.

We also practice being companions to everyone. As an exercise, we apply this sense of participation where we live: in our home and our society.

The sense of participation, nourished by meditation, reflection and an orderly life helps us to make our home a source of unfolding. But this is not always easy to accomplish; in many cases it requires us to be attentive and careful about how we relate. Differences between spouses, different ways of seeing and resolving issues, the tendency not to assume the unifying role the family group needs of each one of its member often prevent the relationship from being participatory and family members end up leading separate lives. Let us remember then that the love that we usually profess does not eliminate our personal shortcomings. We find it hard to see what may bring happiness to another person and still harder to recognize what can make an entire group happy, beyond the successes and mistakes that each of us may make. And the same is true of those who live with us. Recognizing this fact leads us to be humble in our relationships, not to demand of others what we ourselves find difficult to do, and to collaborate lovingly with everyone to attain an increasingly more harmonious and rewarding relationship.

Attaining harmony in our family life and settling spiritual and material problems at home in a healthy way is a seed that we pray everyone can sow in the world. And we strive to do so. We can hardly hope to solve the problems of many if we are unable to solve our own. The permanent work of recognizing, improving and making the relationship with our family more open and genuine is the foundation of a fruitful and lasting peace for us and also for society.

As we work on our relationship with our family, we also work on the relationship that our Table, our group and we ourselves have with the Stability Radius where we live and with its people, their needs and their projects. While mobility for work or family reasons has significantly changed the way we perceive belonging to a place, becoming rooted in the place where we live is a simple and direct way to feel part of the world we live. This is because we form emotional ties

and working bonds with our social, cultural and environmental milieus. If we take care to maintain these bonds, they will move us to deepen our sense of being an integral part of humanity and will accelerate the process of expanding our consciousness. The experience of members of Cafh who have emigrated, taken roots and developed a new sense of belonging is an invaluable teaching in the history of Cafh, since it confirms this process of participation.

The practice of the Method of Cafh helps us to transcend the ideological, racial, economic, social and cultural positions that we find in society as well as in ourselves. A good start on the path toward participation is acknowledging the patronizing attitude that drives us to feel so superior to others that we have no hesitation in judging their opinions and even their lives, as if we knew better than they how things are, who is right and who is wrong. It is precisely, this illusion of superiority over those we believe have to learn from us that we need to overcome to truly unite with all souls and promote peace and harmony in the world.

The basic rule of participation with society is to respect and comply with the laws of the country and the norms of the place where we live. While respect for the rights of others, codes of relationship, and principles of solidarity help us integrate into society in a healthy way, the ethics implicit in the Method of Cafh move us beyond complying with what rules say we can or cannot do. That is why we are careful not to take advantage of others simply because what we want to do is not prohibited. Each one of us knows our possibilities and decides how to behave. Maintaining an open attitude, thinking, feeling and working for the common good, while not doing it at the expense of the welfare of others, are practical ways to promote in ourselves a participatory and expansive consciousness.

This process of expanding our consciousness follows the rhythm of our lives. If we want our effort to expand our consciousness to also motivate those around us, it's helpful to keep in mind that we use less energy, make better use of time and solve the issues we face faster when we respond to the small demands of our daily work--whether we are producing, creating or relating--in a responsible, efficient and persevering way. Just as a house is built brick by brick, so great works are carried out with firm, short and sure steps in the direction that has been chosen.

Peace in our soul and peace in the world are two sides of the same coin. One feeds the other, one defines the other. That some do well and many others do badly, that some have much while many have little may appear, at first glance, as something good for the privileged and bad for those less fortunate. However, when we understand the dynamics of life on Earth and see that each of us is part of a larger whole, we understand that real and lasting peace is based on love, goodwill and the advancement of all. The Method of Cafh shows us the path toward that shared good.

OPEN-MINDEDNESS

14th Teaching

“Those who exercise the right to participate in the reunion of souls of Cafh develop the capacity to respect the opinions of others, to avoid criticizing, to be willing to work as a team and to acknowledge the right of others to express themselves. More than virtues, these are essential requisites.” *Method of Cafh, Chapter One*

“They are alert to the common tendency of criticizing those who seem different. Mental openness allows them to consider things from various points of view and to enrich themselves with the experience of other persons, cultures and ethnic groups. They do not reject the ideas or contributions of others out of prejudice, or simply because they do not want to hear anything that is painful or that contradicts their own opinion. It is good for Sons and Daughters to remember what history proves: that intolerance, rejection and indifference are destructive forces that cause pain, misery and misfortune; while tolerance, acceptance and love are constructive forces bringing peace and happiness to individuals and society as a whole.” *Method of Cafh, Chapter Sixteen*

Spiritual doctrines describe the relationship between the soul and the divine, expound theories on the origin and fate of humankind, and mark the various stages that the soul traverses in the process of unfolding. Ascetic-mystical schools teach students different physical and mental exercises, prayer and meditation methods, and techniques for elevating the soul to a supernatural state. However, up until now, neither the various ways of describing the soul’s relationship with God nor ascetic and mystical practices have made it possible for human beings to learn how to live in peace and harmony with each other. In our meditations, we love everybody and when we pray, we do it for the good of all, but we clash with each other in our actions. The great spiritual masters taught that love for God is expressed on earth in the love of human beings for one another, and that the perfection of love consists in giving one’s life for what one loves. They demonstrated this teaching with their own lives. But those of us who believe we follow their teachings tend to persecute each other in the name of that love. Human history sadly abounds in massacres and persecutions carried out in God’s name.

Before we can benefit from the spiritual assistance and guidance that we need for unfolding, we have to first recognize that we do need to unfold. Teachings and spiritual guidance show us the aspects we need to work on; but our open-mindedness is what makes us recognize that we do need help.

We need to learn to live together and accept each other, if we want our faith and will to unfold to foster a harmonious spiritual development that is free from mystical fantasies and rigid ideas that make us clash and divide into conflicting groups.

Speeches on love do not always lead to satisfactory results, nor do considerations about the fact that often trying to do good brings about suffering. It is not up to us to say who should suffer the consequences of what we call love. Thus it is preferable not to interpret love, but rather to live it simply, that is, to give love through offering. Interiorly, we offer our life to the Divine Mother. In practical terms, we offer it by working in a positive way for the good of all beings, beginning by working on our relationships with them. Let's remember that we express love in the way we practice the acceptance of diversity.

We, souls, are not something abstract and mysterious on earth. Instead, we are human beings with virtues and defects, and diverse opinions, lifestyles and ways of working. We are persons who still clash and fight with each other. Since this is the reality of our situation, we work on our relationships with others and society and transmute our negative energy into acceptance, tolerance, and understanding instead of adding more violence to what already exists. We strive to generate harmony in the place we live and unfold. This work requires strength and a capacity for sacrifice. It is easy and comfortable to take sides in different conflicts, but how do we take sides if our focus is the good of everyone?

We begin to accept other human beings when we show concrete gestures of friendship, solidarity, and respect, without discriminating against people with different ideologies, or different social, intellectual, or religious positions. We begin to develop this attitude in our relationships with our family, spiritual companions, and co-workers; in other words, with those who are closest to us in our daily world.

As soon as we pay attention to the quality of our relationships, we understand that we need to work on our habits of criticism and gossip in order to internalize an attitude of acceptance. We understand that if we don't overcome criticism, we will sooner or later vent our anger on others. Moreover, we can see that our criticism only serves to make us feel superior to the object of our criticism.

If we want to discover how loving we are, we need to observe how accepting we are. If we notice that we are critical, we know that we need to become more accepting. The aim is not to agree with everyone, but to develop the capacity to evaluate without allowing prejudices to influence our discernment. This acceptance is the key to improving interpersonal relationships.

Sometimes when we try to establish a spiritual relationship, we confuse the theme of our conversations with the nature of the relationship we seek. We don't realize that the nature of our relationships is not determined by the subjects we talk about. Our relationship is spiritual when we are moved by the desire to give ourselves, when we are not waiting to see to what extent the other person lives up to our expectations. Otherwise, our relationships would be no different from any other conflict of interests. For example, if we didn't receive what we expected in return for our love, we complain, criticize, or reject those whom we said we love. It is not unusual to feel lonely in those cases, since such an attitude isolates us from our world. Our relationship

becomes spiritual when we see people as souls who reflect the beauty of their individuality; when we open ourselves to understand, accept, and love them.

Therefore, if we are to unfold, we have to consider our relationships as a unity. When we say that we have a lot of problems in relationships, we probably don't completely understand our attitude since problems in relationships are rarely isolated. We can't overcome them if we deal with them separately. Conflicts that seem different are usually aspects of the same mental attitude. The great problems that humankind currently suffers from are mainly caused by problems in relationship. Until we decide to work on our state of consciousness, we will continue suffering from the hunger, persecution, destruction, aggression, death, and suffering that we cause. Complaining about this is ignoring the real root of the problem: our lack of open-mindedness in learning to relate harmoniously and inclusively with our environment. From this point of view, spiritual unfolding could be understood as a process of unfolding relationship.

The quality of our relationships shows the degree and type of union that exists between people. Instead of referring to relationships as good or bad, it would probably be more accurate to talk about the type of union that the relationship reveals. That union can be superficial or deep, expansive or limiting, negative or positive.

We usually understand relationship as the way people interact with each other. Relationship is something much deeper; it is the bond between people. We can consider interaction in many ways, for example, as good or bad. However, the bond between us can be of a very different nature. Some relationships help us unfold; others inhibit our spiritual growth.

Our task of perfecting relationships would be endless if we tried to separate our relationships into different groups. For example, if we say we have good relationships with everyone except with a particular person, we need to admit that we need to improve our relational skills. We might not have yet recognized our need to improve these skills if it is only one person who contradicts us with words, opinions, or attitudes. If someone else did the same, we would also have a conflict with him or her.

The unfolding of a relationship leads to integration between people. We have one relationship with those we love the most, and another with those we love less; one relationship with our friends, and another with our acquaintances and with others whom we do not know at all. And all of this is based on their particular characteristics, habits, and tendencies. However, when we think of a great spiritual master, we consider that he or she has a harmonious and excellent relationship with everyone. This should be our ideal. Although we are aware that we can't reach this ideal in a single day, we can do a lot to attain peace and harmony in our relationship with others. This, in turn, will rapidly impact our own inner peace and harmony.

When we love souls, we accept them as they are. However, we often want to change those around us so that they may think and feel the way we do. Instead of union, this creates rivalry. Obviously, we don't want to fall into disinterest or become indifferent to what others might need.

Our desire to help has a noble origin, but helping others is not turning them into our own image and likeness. We can begin to help them unfold according to their own characteristics and personal aspirations. If we are to help them, we have to understand their characteristics and aspirations; in order to do this, we have to begin by accepting them.

If our intention is to help, let's begin by recognizing that we can't help others very well if we don't know how to live with them, accepting them as they are. It is easy to get along well with those who are tolerant or friendly. But the quality of getting along well is put to the test when we have to live with someone who does not agree with how we think or with people whose characteristics we find unpleasant.

When we love souls, we try not to get impatient or irritated with them. If we notice that we could lose control, we wait in silence until we have gained control before saying something that could hurt them.

When we love souls, we respect them. We don't intrude in the lives of others, either with our opinions or advice. We know that we have enough to correct in our own lives. If someone asks us for our advice, we remember that we can make mistakes, and we don't confuse our opinion with the truth. We remember that only advice based on love and humility can be good advice.

When we love souls, we help them live in peace. We don't add our own anger or annoyance to the violence that already exists. We are aware that where there is violence there is unconsciousness, and we only work to awaken consciousness.

When we love souls, we love them all. True peace arises when we don't make differences between souls.

We relate to life through the events of life. And these events are linked to other human beings. By observing our relations with others, we know the state of our soul, our spiritual unfolding and the open-mindedness that moves us to act.

ASCETICISM

15th Teaching

“The discovery of the soul’s spiritual vocation is accompanied by an awakening of the deep yearning to fulfil it. But one needs to commit oneself formally to one’s vocation if one is to sustain and carry out that yearning.”

Method, Chapter Nineteen.

When we commit ourselves to fulfilling our vocation, we adopt a method that helps us to realize it. The Method of Cafh gives us guidelines and recommendations. These form an asceticism that helps us to live in accordance with this purpose. In these recommendations we find practices that guide us toward becoming aware of our behavior and its influence on ourselves and on our surroundings. When we acknowledge this influence, we are able to discern how to channel our behavior in a way that promotes our spiritual unfolding.

In the ascetic practices proposed by the Method, we distinguish exercises, routines, and habits.

Exercises deal with the body and the mind.

The exercises that relate to the body focus on health. They include physical exercises as well as exercises that involve behavioral changes, such as choosing what to eat and do to lead a healthy life.

Promoting our health is a personal as well as a social responsibility. On the personal level, we depend on our body throughout our lives. If we treat our body responsibly we will achieve our goals. On the social level, lack of preventive measures, inadequate diet and unhealthy or careless habits lead to sicknesses, disabilities or even premature death. Our family, our community, and even society as a whole bear the cost.

Mental exercises develop our capacity to use our minds for our own benefit and that of our surroundings. As we control our minds we not only control our emotions, reactions and behaviors but also gradually acquire enough freedom to distinguish our options and sensibly choose both our objectives and the conduct to follow.

Our mental exercises include prayer, discursive and affective meditation, the retrospective examination, spiritual reading, study, and dialogue.

We relate intimately and freely with the divine through prayer. The practice of prayer leads us to become conscious of our place in the context of eternity and keeps our vocation of spiritual unfolding alive. Cafh members usually use the words “Divine Mother” when they invoke the creative force of the universe.

The discursive meditation is a front door to enter our inner world. Its simplicity encourages us to express ourselves without hesitation, excuses, or fear of judgment or condemnation. Thus, we can gradually delve more deeply within and learn to discover, rather than choose, what we really seek for in life. We can then decide what we are willing to do to achieve it.

The affective meditation teaches us to contemplate a situation serenely and objectively. Through visualization we can generate the feelings we want to experience in that situation. Thus, we gradually gain control over our emotional reactions and consequently over our behavior. This leads us to efficiently channel our energy.

The meditation, in its diverse forms, allows us to begin our day by reflecting on how we are going to live it and where that way of living will lead us. Then, throughout the day, the meditation is the means to become conscious of ourselves and what we are living.

Dialogue is an interactive exercise. It teaches us to listen, control the impatience that moves us to interrupt others, respect the time of others, validate them, think before giving an opinion and express ourselves without criticizing. Besides, since dialogue shortens our time to intervene it encourages us to acquire conceptual and synthesis skills.

The retrospective examination helps us review what happened during the day so that we may gather the fruits of the experience lived. Because we don't judge what happened, we can understand our experiences clearly and draw conclusions that we can use to foster our unfolding.

Spiritual reading gives us living examples that help us better understand our own experience. It also provides us with topics for reflection that inspire us and encourage our effort to unfold.

Study keeps us up-to-date. It also teaches us to discern between the possible and the verifiable, between opinions and facts, and between theories based on interpretations and descriptions upheld by evidence. Consequently we avoid falling into extreme points of view and non-negotiable positions. We can then learn to think and recognize what is factual and what is possible, what is important and what is inconsequential.

Routines are programmed activities carried out in a habitual way over a course of time, such as weekly reunions and retreats described in the Method.

Weekly reunions enable us to meet with companions of the path to work toward a common spiritual objective and relate as souls, in spite of our different backgrounds, positions, and affiliations. Instead of dividing us and antagonizing with each other, these differences enrich us by offering us diverse viewpoints and experiences. We especially grow in the weekly reunions as our common transcendent objective helps us develop mutual respect and affection. Weekly reunions also provide time to deepen into prayer and the understanding of the teachings, consider different ways of interpreting life and understanding what happens to us, as well as finding appropriate ways for facilitating our unfolding.

Retreats offer us the opportunity to step back from our everyday life. During retreats we can recollect and reflect on what we have done and on our current relationship with our vocation and our objectives. As retreats place us in a context, rhythm and routine that differs from those we are accustomed to, our habits, preferences and prejudices become evident. We are then able to discern and evaluate them and to establish the basis for working on them in the future.

The Method recommends practices that deal with our behavior in various life circumstances. These practices encourage us to become conscious of our conduct and habits in order to discern which are beneficial and which need improvement. If we consider a habit to be harmful, we remember that the most effective way to overcome it is by replacing it with one that is more beneficial.

The Method presents ascetic exercises that complement aspects of behavior established by the Ceremonial. These behaviors teach us to exalt significant moments in our daily life. For example, we acknowledge, validate and respectfully greet each person we meet and value our encounters with our loved ones and our companions of the path. We acknowledge the good fortune of being able to be nourished with food for our bodies as well as our souls with the blessing of the table. And we imprint in our mind crucial moments in our unfolding with versicles and ceremonies.

In summary, the recommendations from the Method lead us to shape our behavior in accordance with our vocation, so that what we do, in the course of time may lead us to our longed-for realization. The Ceremonial, through living daily actions ennobled with respect and reverence, reminds us at each step of our vocation of divine union.

MYSTICISM

16th Teaching

“The Sons and Daughters of Cafh hallow their day.”

“May their first act upon awakening be a fervent elevation of thought to the Divine Mother.” *Method, Chapter One*

These words of the Method help us to put into context the recommendations that we find throughout the text.

The practice of the ascetic exercises undeniably helps us to lead a healthy and reasonably ordered life. Physical practices keep the body agile and relatively energetic. Healthy dietary habits contribute to preventing illnesses. Mental practices help keep the mind clear and prevent, or at least postpone, the decline or loss of intellectual faculties.

Leading an ordered life promotes harmony in the home and increases efficiency in activities. Habits of reading and studying expand our surrounding vision of the reality. Common sense in managing resources prevents economic problems and also conflicts in interpersonal relationships.

Following the Method develops the capacity to give order to our life, an order which we choose according to our values and spiritual objective.

The effort to follow this order develops the control we have over ourselves and especially over our mind.

This control stimulates us to remain conscious of each thing we do, thus keeping our awareness in the present without forgetting the past or ignoring the future.

If we take the recommendations of the Method only as instructions to live, it is obvious that we will live better. But the objective of the Method is not only to live a healthy and useful life but also to stimulate our unfolding towards divine union. In other words, the purpose of the Method is mysticism.

Framing our days by elevating our thoughts to the Divine Mother helps us to remain present in an expansive way not only at this very moment and place, but also in life in its totality.

The Method recommends us to remember the greater context of our life and reflect on our behavior, diet, work and relationship with sickness, death, etc. These reflections and the way in which they influence our behavior center us in our vocation. In other words, we learn to live in a

participatory way not only in our relationships with those around us but also with society, the world and life.

At the same time, when we fulfill the Method with our intention centered on our vocation, we remain conscious of the fact that all of us share everything, what we enjoy as well as what makes us suffer. Learning to be in the present and participate stimulates us to go beyond our personal limits and allows us to be drawn into the immeasurable eternal present. As the Method points out so well in chapter twenty-four, “When seen from a window, the sky is a small fragment; but when viewed from outside, it extends farther than the eye can reach. By renouncing to one’s small world, by renouncing to one’s personal problems, the soul gains access to the immensity of reality: one’s soul is in all souls.”

It is our daily activities enriched by meditation, spiritually stimulating reading, periodic reunions, retreats, study of teachings and interaction with our spiritual companions that give force to this expansion.

It is our intention of union with the Divine Mother that keeps us open to revise our concepts and habitual attitudes in order to be able to correct and expand our interpretations that have become outdated as our perception became clearer and as human knowledge advanced.

Our effort to attain divine union is centered on unfolding our state of consciousness. The fulfillment of the Method stimulates us to reach this expansion through simple norms appropriate to our life. The Method guides us to make our life extraordinary through ordinary actions, rather than to seek extraordinary mystical experiences. Thus, our consciousness expands surely and simply.

Asceticism without mysticism leads to a limited and partial perception of ourselves. Mysticism without asceticism submerges us into subjective illusions. The union of both helps us to unfold in a harmonious and expansive way.

If asceticism is conduct, mysticism is attitude. If asceticism is order, mysticism is love. If asceticism is effort, mysticism is joy.

The union of asceticism and mysticism keeps us aware of the true nature of existence. It expands our consciousness so that we can perceive this reality with increasing depth and may fully realize the possibilities that life offers us. This brings peace to our mind and fulfillment to our heart.