

NUANCES OF PRAYER

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

First Teaching

“Let us enter the cell of self-knowledge,’ repeated ceaselessly the mystic Catherine Benincasa of Siena. May the Son of the Flame thus penetrate his own heart. It is the Divine Mother’s mysterious sepulcher. There She awaits the kiss of the true lover, who will awaken Her and oblige Her to reveal the eternal secrets to him. There he will learn the Great Alchemy, which transmutes the harsh metal of sorrow into the pure gold of peace and happiness.”
(Spiritual Unfolding, Second Teaching)

Inner life teaches us to pray and use our energy in an integral and spiritual way of life, which is centered in the Divine Mother of the Universe.

Certainly, intellectual training, material progress, and technological advancements help us develop, but they also tend to distract us from our true purpose, which is to expand our consciousness until we achieve union with cosmic consciousness: the Divine Mother.

There are times we are blinded by our power, and we forget the Divine Mother. When we do remember her, we equate her with ourselves, worshiping her in attributes which are the extrapolation of what we would like for ourselves, by turning the divine into a projection of ourselves—more powerful, more perfect—but in our image and likeness.

The Divine Mother is present in all creation, but before we can recognize her we must transform our bodies, minds and energy into instruments for unfolding our consciousness.

In the beginning, intellectual adherence to spirituality helps us, for at that point we are starting to understand the need to give a deeper and more universal dimension to our lives. The idea of connecting with the divine attracts us and gives us a good feeling. But if we stop there, at intellectual adherence, we soon lose our enthusiasm, or else we deceive ourselves into thinking we have achieved an expanded consciousness—while what we have really done is to fabricate an ideal world.

Daily life is a school, and experience is the environment in which we can learn and unfold. A method of life, persistent effort and love for our fellow human beings and the Divine Mother are the basic pillars of our learning.

Prayer plays a basic role in our unfolding by gathering our energy into a unifying force which enables us to fulfill our aim. It helps us keep alive our love for the Divine Mother. It helps us not to turn means into ends. And it helps us develop the necessary willpower to methodize our daily life to be in accord with our ideal.

Prayer has as many nuances, levels of profundity and variations as there are moments of prayer. It is good for us to cultivate a love for prayer from the beginning, giving ourselves to prayer without fears or impediments, without preconceived ideas which might inhibit

the search for our own way of praying. The important thing at the beginning is to become conscious of ourselves and our essential need to communicate with the divine.

A mind without a clear objective gets easily lost in a fruitless inner dialogue. But when we understand that we have a basic need for union with the Divine Mother, it becomes easy for us to speak to her of our love and deepest longings.

The practice of prayer intensifies our faith, nourishes our hope, and it trains us to center ourselves in our relationship with the divine.

Teresa of Avila said that to pray is to fill oneself with God and give it to others. Praying not only benefits us, it also benefits the people we relate with and for whom we pray. We often despair at so much suffering and misery in the world. It is fine for us to think deeply about and work to find material solutions for all the things which human beings lack. But we also need to remember that, if those solutions are to be real and lasting, they must be based on the love and compassion we develop in ourselves. There is where we learn to assist, to share, to work impartially, to use no more than what's necessary, to discover the divine spark in each soul.

Let us take an example: with the practice of prayer we can find a way to transform a critical attitude into one of acceptance. When we happen to be with someone whom we tend to judge, we try to avoid freely criticizing her by nourishing the idea that the way she acts (which bothers or displeases us) is her particular and personal way of expressing herself. Another example: we might feel badly about the injustice in the world without realizing how often we are unjust to those around us. In many cases, we are unjust to people we don't even know. We might be angry at economic systems, governments, at the injustice arising from social and economic differences, at everyone we think is wrong. But do we ever ask ourselves what we do, individually, in our own particular situation, to alleviate the injustice in the world? Prayer can be the fertile ground in which these small seeds of reflection are transmuted within us into concrete behavior which reflects our love and concern for the world.

Our love for the Divine Mother is expressed in the value we give prayer and the amount of time we dedicate to it. That is why we apply ourselves to practice prayer and nourish it with our love and effort.

HALLOW THE DAY

Second Teaching

“The Sons and Daughters of Cafh are to hallow their day. From morning to night they are to observe their obligations and exercise control over themselves. They will achieve inner liberation through exterior discipline.

“Upon awakening, may their first act be a fervent elevation of thought to the Divine Mother. They should then try to distribute their time so that they may amply dedicate themselves to the unfolding of spiritual life.”

(Rule of Cafh, Chapter One of the Method)

Daily life is already a discipline of effort, control and work. Why, then, do we need to practice an additional discipline? Why do we need to practice an asceticism¹?

Without a deliberate effort to have clear and concrete objectives and without the ultimate aim of divine union, we still practice a discipline every day. Our daily struggle to live helps us to resolve the urgent problems of existence. But it also dissipates our strength and creates its own limitations. The fact that all human beings choose their objectives without always taking into account the common good—or their own spiritual unfolding—causes interpersonal confrontations and the confusion and sorrow which have been so common throughout history.

If we integrate the asceticism of renouncement into our daily life, we can organize our efforts to be productive for ourselves and others. Making every act a conscious act helps us to live deliberately, centered on the objective of expanding our consciousness.

The first barrier we come up against when trying to adopt this asceticism which will promote our unfolding is our attraction to values which are contrary to that unfolding.

When we decide to adopt an asceticism of life to help us unfold, we have to be ready to face certain problems. Some of these problems are: Living in a perpetual race with time; not dedicating enough time to reflection; looking for immediate gratifications without measuring their consequences; avoiding stress through self-deception; thinking things will improve without having to make any changes in ourselves.

Since we are used to responding to imperative needs (i.e., I won't be able to eat if I don't go to work) and since these needs are many and various, we tend to postpone everything which doesn't fit into this urgency plan. This is how we find the time to rush, feel harassed, and spend our vital energy in efforts which don't go very far, while we don't have time to think, plan or make decisions, much less to discover who we are and where we're going.

¹ Asceticism means the effort we make and the limits we place on ourselves to know ourselves and expand our consciousness. It implies self-discipline and self-control.

A well-suited daily asceticism provides us with inner space and time for reflection, for observation of ourselves and our behavior. It helps us establish harmonious relationships and gives us an openness to understand what is happening around us. This can all be carried out in the setting of our daily obligations, if we methodically create spaces for prayer, and if we make each activity, obligation and recreation a means for self-knowledge and the expression of our deep desires.

We might think there is no time available for reflection, but have we considered the cost of impulsive actions? Have we considered the effort, waste of time and trouble which can result from heedless decisions?

Asceticism means the effort we make and the limits we place on ourselves to know ourselves and expand our consciousness. It implies self-discipline and self-control.

The ascetic effort to be conscious of our acts can seem tedious and bothersome, but have we thought about the time needed to solve the problems which result from imprudent behavior? When it is hard to find the time to stop and pray, do we wonder where we will nourish ourselves so that we will know how to act, and where we will draw the strength to face the challenges of life?

Asceticism helps us organize our time and activities so that our life has harmony and space for growth. Above all, it offers us a frame of reference for establishing priorities. Prayer is the indispensable pillar of asceticism.

Prayer is our strength, our source of inspiration, and also the anchor which keeps us calm in the sea of activity and tension. This why we resort to prayer systematically and consistently.

Prayer also prevents us from seeking shallow solutions. Sometimes we think, “I have been meditating for such a long time and I don’t get anywhere. . .” Prayer is not a magic solution. It is an operative attitude of humility, reflection, and love for the Divine Mother.

Oriented by our spiritual director, we establish a personal asceticism suitable for our characteristics and daily obligations, and also suited to the degree of our unfolding and vocational commitment.

It is very important to rely on the experience and knowledge of the spiritual director, for it is very easy to deceive ourselves and become self-complacent, vain or discouraged.

Asceticism as an exterior discipline—based firmly on prayer, the teaching and spiritual direction—is the necessary point of support for our spiritual unfolding.

UNFOLDING AS AN OBJECTIVE

Third Teaching

“Spiritual unfolding is a process based on understanding. First we understand, then we make decisions and then we act. Otherwise we would act motivated by impulses and reactions, to the detriment of our unfolding.”

(Full Moon Message of 1996)

What are we looking for in life? Happiness? Knowledge? Appreciation of beauty? Virtue? Is there an objective which could include everything we want to accomplish?

Perhaps the objective which has endured throughout the history of human experience is the desire to fulfill our destiny as human beings. Paraphrasing our Rule, we could describe it as being what we are: human beings with infinite possibilities.

The difficulty is not so much in accepting this objective of unfolding all our possibilities, but rather in figuring out how to fulfill it, knowing what to do to make it a reality.

How often do we hear it said: “Yes, when I was young I had ideals, but now. . . .” We find out that the test of time requires much more than an intellectual allegiance to a possibility. It requires giving one’s life totally to that end. The objective of unfolding doesn’t allow for halfheartedness or distractions. It is a work of love which takes up one’s whole life for the rest of one’s life.

Selfishness, stubbornness, the pursuit of pleasure and the rejection of suffering, are some of the barriers we encounter as we fulfill our aim. Without the ethical and spiritual capacity for distinguishing the good from the bad in relation to our unfolding, our path becomes meandering, slow, painful and unsure.

We need to become familiar with our temperament and its characteristics, the quality of our habits, and the drive of our nature. Above all, we need to discern clearly our viable choices. There are many alternatives and they all seem possible, but our love for unfolding classifies them as good or bad, better or worse, viable or non-viable. The greatness of our objective requires us to choose well.

This implies that we need a criterion for evaluating our choices. As Sons and Daughters of Cafh, our criterion is based on renouncement. In other words, renouncement is the norm we follow in order to know if our judgment is wise. Renouncement guides us in discerning our possibilities.

From this perspective, renouncement is an attitude which places us within increasingly broader contexts. It is the expectant attentiveness which opens our eyes to the environment in which we live, the honesty which leads us to be loyal to ourselves as souls, the passion for knowledge, the recognition of generosity as a value, the love for truth, and—

above all—the attitude of offering transformed into consistent action. Without consistent action there is no renouncement.

Action consistent with our objective of unfolding is a lifetime process which develops by stages. It is not difficult to look back so that we can distinguish these stages. At the beginning we find ourselves in a state of illusion and deception. We also see how our incipient love for truth gradually dissipated the cloud of ignorance, giving us a certain degree of discernment. Later comes the stage in which we understand much more than we can put into practice in our lives. We know how to distinguish the good from the bad in relationship to our unfolding, but we are still attached to selfish desires and impulses. The more we commit ourselves to our unfolding, and the more we reinforce our discernment through the choices we make, the less we fall into states of darkness and ignorance.

We keep our objective active by persevering in our purpose. In order to fulfill our objective of unfolding, we have to limit ourselves within a particular asceticism, ethic and consistent behavior, while at the same time freeing our mind from its ties to dogmas, opinions and ignorance. And that is why this objective commits our whole life for the rest of our life. Any type of scrimping distorts the effort. Could we choose to be “a little” selfish? Would it make sense to decide to be loyal to ourselves, except “sometimes”? Or to choose what we know will lead to suffering and misery? Or to want less than we need—and are capable of fulfilling—in relation to our unfolding?

The attitude of renouncement allows us to see our naked reality: a succession of choices, minute by minute, second by second, which progressively give our lives shape, depth and direction.

EXTERIOR DISCIPLINE

Fourth Teaching

“Through our inner work we progressively disengage ourselves from the mental and emotional confusion which cloud our vision of the spiritual ideal, block our understanding and mar our relationship with ourselves and others. Above all, we work on our habits of self-satisfaction, self-pity and self-justification.”

(Messages III, Second Teaching)

“If I had only known. . . .” “If I had only realized. . . .” These after-the-fact reflections help us understand what happened but rarely help us to prevent painful mistakes. The habit of reflecting becomes activated with pain, failure or problems. When everything seems to be going well we tend to think, “Who needs reflection?” We also sometimes think we don’t need asceticism at all, that experience is enough to teach us. But the unexpected death of a loved one, a serious health problem, the loss of a job, or any other crisis, causes us to lose our serenity, or even the discernment we could have had.

Experience always teaches. Sometimes through endless repetition, other times because it forces us to a disattachment we were not prepared for. Other times we are confronted with situations which make it evident that the way we live is erratic. But what do we get out of all this? How much do we really learn from what experience teaches us? What system do we use so as not to repeat the same fruitless experiences again and again, so as not to crystallize such repetition into a way of being, so as to be able to give what life asks of us without having to have it dragged from us by force, submerging us in pain and despair?

If we make a habit of reflection and develop a program to put into practice what we learn from reflection, it is possible we can free ourselves from the chains of blind experience.

Our asceticism is made up of the following practices and all that they imply: Meditation exercises, study of the teaching, spiritual direction, looking at our behavior, accepting feedback, having strategies in place to avoid repeating situations which lead nowhere. The more continuous our exterior discipline is, the surer will be its results.

On the other hand, we can’t underestimate the moments of stopping during the day, “taking a snapshot” of oneself at any given instant, observing ourselves, taking a moment for recollection amidst the whirlwind of work, of celebrations, while out in the street or in the car.

A Son tells of how he once used the practice of the discipline of “taking a snapshot” of himself. It was at a moment when he found himself criticizing a family member very bitterly and disdainfully, for his habit of making destructive judgments on his relatives and friends. The Son tells of how that “snapshot” was much more valuable to him than years of working to know himself. He realized many things about himself as he saw himself in

that moment, but he learned especially that he was doing exactly what he criticized the other for doing. He didn't see his own separativity because it was hidden in his arrogance of thinking himself above others. No matter how obvious this cover-up is, we don't recognize it until we decide to see ourselves as we really act, think and feel.

One thing is to "think" we are this or that way, another is to take the "snapshot" and see ourselves without the filter of justifications.

Whether we repeat the Divine Mother's name, elevate our thoughts with the intention of assisting the sick, make a short prayer in a free minute or two, or "take a snapshot" of ourselves, all these are acts of presence which give us knowledge about ourselves and deepen our love for the Divine Mother and for souls.

Self-control gradually becomes spontaneous as we practice exterior discipline. Since we know the effort it has cost us to achieve this continuity, we encourage those who make the same effort, we are charitable to those who fall along the way, and understand those who still see no need for discipline. Since we could also find ourselves in any of these situations at any moment, we practice tolerance, charity and understanding with ourselves, too. Ascetic discipline thus develops love and compassion when it is practiced out of love for spiritual unfolding. Asceticism would have no meaning if it didn't help us understand human nature, with its weaknesses and greatness.

Besides its qualities of reflection and prayer, exterior discipline also extends to reverence for our Delegates and companions, our relatives, all humankind and all creation; to faithful fulfillment of the Rule and loving experience of the Method.

We don't find shortcuts on the spiritual path, nor do we take great leaps to achieve unfolding. We carry on a work which is continuous, loving, serious and reflective, which unites us with souls little by little, and which allows us to live in peace in the Divine Mother's presence.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Fifth Teaching

“We need to recognize when we are strengthening our acquired personality and when we are opening new avenues in our unfolding.”

(Messages II, Fourth Teaching)

Many centuries ago, Socrates taught: “Know thyself.” He also said, “I only know that I know nothing.” With these very simple assertions he set forth a way of freedom, self-control, and a love for truth and knowledge. It is very important to note that he didn’t say, “Know others,” “Judge others,” or, “Others know nothing.” The first-mentioned focus leads us to wisdom. Practice of the other ones would lead to arrogance and ignorance.

Freedom is the most precious thing we have as human beings. All other rights are based on the right to freedom. The more advanced a society is, the more it guarantees individual freedom. However, society can only guarantee exterior freedom. The way we use that exterior freedom and whether we achieve inner freedom depend on us.

In order to exercise our freedom, we have to have mastery over our will, know our inner strength and cultivate it, know our limitations and make the effort to overcome them. We also need to know how to respect the freedom of others. This is not an easy task, since it presupposes self-knowledge, the desire to learn and to know, and the development of our sense of responsibility.

There are many things which constantly restrict our freedom: our instincts, desires, the things we don’t know, the things we think we know, ambition, selfishness, and all the passions which dominate and control us generally. Our ordinary upbringing prepares us for a certain degree of self-control which allows us to function in society: we control laziness to go to work; we sit to study for hours at a time; we clean the house instead of going out to have fun, because we care about what others think of us. Even so, these acts of self-control don’t make us feel freer. We repeatedly complain about the burden of life in society and in a family, about all the sacrifices we have to make to fulfill the obligations of daily living.

The self-control which liberates us is based on self-knowledge, not the knowledge that comes from repressing natural tendencies in order to respond to society’s demands. The latter sort of self-control takes place at the same level as our passions, so it generates inner struggles and emotional problems: since we identify with the passions we are combating, we feel that by controlling ourselves we are attacking ourselves. This puts us in a vicious circle of triumphs and failures. We triumph and fail simultaneously—triumphing by achieving self-control, but failing in our effort to attain a freedom we are never able to understand. So we sometimes find ourselves wanting to change the past, wishing we were adolescents again, or wanting to go back to childhood, or change our family situation, or any other escape to heal the wounds which result from what wasn’t—or isn’t—how we

would have liked things to be. In this state of consciousness, freedom is an illusion. In order to rise above this situation we need to change our point of view.

The foundations for self-knowledge are: the understanding of our life and our particular circumstances; the recognition that we “don’t know;” the desire to know; the need to love with our whole heart. If we practice asceticism, it is not so that we will get something (keep our job, get a degree, clean the house, be better people, be perfect). It is so that we can know ourselves and thus exercise our freedom, the highest goal of which is the freedom to unite with the Divine Mother. That is, we transform what we previously thought was a goal (working our way up in our profession, or having an attractive house, for example) into a means. And we create a new goal: to know ourselves and achieve the inner freedom which will allow us to unite with the Divine Mother. From this perspective, every act of the day, every thought, every feeling is a means to realization.

This change in perspective has very broad and deep ramifications, and it affects our whole life. What was previously an obligation becomes a liberating experience. What was previously a repression becomes self-mastery. What previously made us feel suffocated becomes a labor of love. The habit of looking outward and criticizing is exchanged for a habit of self-knowledge and acceptance. The law of renouncement is our law, we embrace it with awareness and joy. We learn to open our hands and give instead of keeping a low profile and hoping that life will not notice us, not take away all that we hoard as if it were ours.

Perhaps the secret of liberating asceticism lies in the fact that it frames experiences within the law of renouncement and the way that law is lived: our aim being Substantial Union with the Divine Mother. Our means are: accepting our human condition and fulfilling our possibilities. This focus leads us to be diligent in working on ourselves and in accepting others without wanting to change them; without criticism, but with a reverent and generous love. How can we talk of spiritual unfolding if we are continuously looking outside ourselves at what others are supposed to be doing? The spiritual unfolding we are able to generate is in our own lives. Our possibility to create a better world is to do the work we have come to this earth to do: unfold as egoent² individuals. The way to help one another is to learn to love each person without judgments, without prejudices, to accept all just as they are, and to place an emphasis on our own change. It is learning how to dialogue so that we can share what we think and feel, and learning to receive feedback so that we can have a fuller appreciation of the way we are.

² Egoent: “Egoence means perfect individuality identified with the cosmic consciousness. . . . Egoence has nothing to do with the development of a super-personality. On the contrary, to be egoent is to transform oneself into pure nothingness, in order to identify with the universal consciousness, with the Divine Mother.” (Spiritual Life of Cafh, Seventh and Twelfth Teachings)

INCLINATION TO PRAYER

Sixth Teaching

The Full Moon Message of 1962 tells us clearly and concisely how important it is to know and master our feelings.

“ . . . Gain profound control over yourselves. . . . Feelings escape out of a person’s hands and hide. Without knowing what one really feels there is no self-awareness, there is only awareness-reaction.”

Emotion occupies a central place in individual development as well as in society as a whole. Many emotions have the same meaning all over the world—both for individuals and whole social groups. Fear, joy and anger in human experience seem to be archetypes with the same meaning for everyone.

Our upbringing, as well as art, literature, and philosophy, help us to understand our emotions. Without realizing it, from a very early age we learn to identify emotions and give them meaning. A three-year-old child can look at a picture of someone crying, identify the emotion, and conclude that the person is sad.

We know that our emotions can be activated automatically and unconsciously. We know that we often experience emotions without knowing why or analyzing where they came from. We also know that this has an influence on the way we perceive, think, judge, remember, imagine and adapt to circumstances.

Research in developmental psychology and neurology bear out this aspect of popular wisdom and goes even further. It suggests that there are two ways of activating emotions which are highly important for behavior and the acquisition of knowledge. Automatic sub-cortical processing of information provides the data for an immediate emotional response. Information-processing of a higher order, taking place at the neo-cortical level, produces the emotions necessary for adapting to complex situations.

Bio-social research and constructivistic theories agree that perception, thought, imagination and memory are important causes of emotion. They also agree in suggesting that once an emotion is activated, emotion and cognition influence each other. What we think has an effect on what we feel, perceive and do, and vice versa.

The development of empathy, altruistic behavior, moral conduct, personal characteristics, as well as what we learn, remember and know, are deeply influenced by our emotional states.

What does all this mean in connection with our path of unfolding? It means that a deep knowledge of our emotions is of utmost importance, and so is the work we do on our emotional responses. Given the fact that our emotions have a great influence on the way we perceive, feel, think and act, we need to be aware that what we feel—and what we do

with what we feel—determines to a great extent our degree of participation, understanding and love.

How can we work on our emotions? Our method of life highlights some of the means: external discipline, the discursive meditation, the affective meditation, vocal prayers, spiritual reading and the study of the Teaching.

In one sense, external discipline is like a mirror which reflects each action in our consciousness. By being aware of our actions we can trace their origin, discover motivations and expose the emotions inciting us to act.

The exercises of the discursive meditation and the affective meditation work specifically on our emotions.

The discursive meditation allows us to see ourselves as we are. It teaches us to allow our deepest and most unknown emotions to bloom, and to look at ourselves without concealing anything, and without justifications or explanations. We are face-to-face with the Divine Mother and we open ourselves to Her without filtering what we say. We leave aside our self-image—what we want to appear to be. We are what we are and we acknowledge the Divine Mother as our witness.

This self-acceptance is a very simple and effective way to place ourselves in conscious contact with our emotions. Many psychological problems originate from people denying their emotions.

The affective meditation teaches us to feel at will, to manage our emotions to produce responses that are increasingly better suited to the various situations of life. It teaches us to generate the emotions which are necessary at each moment to live the way we choose to live and respond at the highest level of our consciousness.

Vocal prayers also work on emotion and cognition. They do it by means of the persuasive power of words, positive and rich images, and the strengthening of faith and hope.

Spiritual reading, on well-chosen subjects, leads us to nourish our thinking with images and ideas that are in harmony with our desire for good thinking. Such reading gives us concepts to work on to understand ourselves better, and to understand souls and the world around us.

Study of the Teaching is also a way of working on our emotions, because it connects us with the source of our strength and discernment: vocation, which is our deepest feeling.

Let us master our feelings so that we may master our lives.

DIFFICULTIES IN PRAYER

Seventh Teaching

“The spirit is strong but the flesh is weak.’ Many people would like to give up the coarseness and paltriness of life, but inner enemies and the lack of spiritual exercises and a suitable environment continuously block the way of the most well-intentioned person.” (Spiritual Unfolding, Third Teaching)

What we like and don’t like to do depend to a great extent on our habits, education, personality type, time of day, age and countless other factors.

If we are not used to classical music, it can be an ordeal to sit through a long symphony, even if it is a masterpiece. By the same token, jazz or electronic music might really get on our nerves if we haven’t been trained to appreciate it. If we have sedentary habits, it is a struggle to exercise. If we’re very active, sitting down for any length of time is a torture. Speaking generally, young people enjoy noise and activity. When we’re older we are more attracted by peace and quiet.

A taste for prayer also depends on countless factors. But whatever our personal idiosyncracies are, a taste for prayer is developed by practicing prayer, making a habit of it.

We may encounter some difficulties as we develop the habit of prayer, especially with the meditation exercises. If we have a strongly extroverted personality, we will find it somewhat difficult to be alone in silence with ourselves, while it won’t be hard to find words to express ourselves in prayer. If we have a strongly introspective personality, it might be easier to sit down to pray and be alone, but we might have more trouble expressing ourselves.

And then a fear of the ridiculous—even when we’re alone—shyness, limited experience in introspective work and mental or physical hyperactivity are also difficulties we might encounter as we try to acquire the habit of prayer.

The first step in becoming familiar with our difficulties in prayer is to prepare for prayer. We do this by finding a time and a place to be recollected, be in silence, and to practice the exercises. The second step is to persevere in the exercises of prayer. Little can we know what will happen when we do something unless we do it and then observe what happens and how it happens. The third step is to take the results of these experiences to spiritual direction and receive orientation on the technique of the exercises.

A deeper difficulty than those mentioned above, and which usually comes up after practicing meditation exercises for a while, is a product of our expectations: If we expect prayer to change us from one day to the next, or to magically alter the circumstances we live in, we will surely get discouraged and not be constant in the practice.

Moreover, if the exercise is not genuinely related with our reality, sooner or later we will feel bored or perturbed, or we will think that the exercise is irrelevant in our lives.

If we create an ideal image of ourselves when we meditate—a prototype of perfection or imperfection—we might end up being bored, doing an exercise which is not related at all with what happens to us. We might not find subjects to meditate on, since by not referring the exercise to our own lives we would soon run out of material for reflection and begin to repeat and to stereotype the themes. The exercise could also produce a facade which would displace even more deeply the center of our inner conflict. We could have the false idea that we were facing our difficulties and overcoming them when were really ignoring or repressing them. For example, we might meditate on human selfishness from an ideal viewpoint and abhor it, without ever reaching the surface of our own selfishness or its consequences in our life and the lives of those around us.

Therefore, while it is indispensable to master the technique of the exercises, it's also indispensable to develop the capacity to be sincere with ourselves, to recognize our limitations and have the courage to face our difficulties.

Other situations which tend to hamper the exercises include: an extreme wordiness which makes us lose sight of the point; a poverty of words which limits our thought; an incapacity for abstraction to represent situations mentally and be able to analyze them.

All these difficulties are correctable if we persevere in the exercises and if we seek the appropriate guidance to identify and work on them. The important thing is to commit ourselves to working sincerely on ourselves.

THE DISCURSIVE MEDITATION

Eighth Teaching

“Meditation is the soul’s inner strength and the exercise of meditation is the habit to attain it.” (Rule of Cafh, Chapter 12 of the Method)

The discursive meditation leads us to become close to the Divine Mother, to learn to express our deepest needs and desires. It helps us to see ourselves as we are and accept that reality.

Daily life engulfs us in the most pressing cares and concerns. We rarely have the opportunity to face our inner reality and spiritual needs spontaneously. Our hectic daily lives rob us of the opportunity to create deep relationships with our family and friends. We live almost semiconscious about ourselves and our objectives. We get used to not seeing ourselves, not reflecting, trying to forget the hurts and focusing on what’s most pressing at the moment.

It usually takes painful situations or tragedies to make us stop and reflect. Perhaps this is why we unconsciously think, “I don’t need to stop and meditate unless I have problems.”

Yet there is always the latent need to become close to and know ourselves, along with the yearning to unite with a fuller reality than the closed circle of our desires. Much of the discontent in a hurried life comes from not satisfying this basic need, but we can begin satisfying it with the discursive meditation.

The discursive meditation exercise usually takes 15 minutes, distributed in three steps.

Before beginning the first step the meditation, the theme and effect are announced three times, intoning the words, if possible, on the note of F:

“Discursive Meditation, Theme. . . , Effect. . .”

- The Black Veiled Lady. Effect, Abhorrence
- The Abyss. Effect, Desolation
- The Two Roads. Effect, Disattachment
- The Standard. Effect, Election
- The Golden Temple. Effect, Consolation
- The Veil of Aheia. Effect, Joy
- The Resurrection of Hes. Effect, Bliss

Each of the steps is also announced: Invocation, Waiting, and Response. In the Invocation, we open our soul to the Divine Mother, learning to repeat her name, and ask for her help, her light. We show who we are without reticence and without embarrassment.

It is like emptying ourselves inwardly to see what’s really left, the bare reality of our soul. In this way, little by little, we not only show what we are but also discover our needs, our deepest desires.

In the Waiting period we remain expectant, without desiring, without awaiting anything but the Divine Mother's word. It is like suspending all judgment, all movement.

In the Response we receive the Divine Mother's word, which reaches us through our silence, honesty and openness.

We might not feel comfortable during the step of the Response, since a response from the Divine Mother might seem unreal. This tends to happen when we haven't been really sincere and open in the Invocation, having spoken from the facade, from the mask which covers our true being—for the response comes to us from that same level of consciousness. When we are able to do the Invocation as a total revealing of ourselves, and in the Waiting time we leave aside our usual discourse, the Response rises by itself, from the depth of our consciousness.

The seven themes in which we frame the discursive meditation cause us to enter subconsciously into contact with the universal symbology and then be guided by it to knowledge of the secrets of the human soul.

In The Black Veiled Lady, we learn a new, more universal description of reality.

In the Abyss we learn to compare and contrast our state of ignorance with the spiritual ideal we begin to glimpse. Patience, faith and hope solace us in Desolation.

In The Two Roads, we learn to discern between what leads us to unfolding and what limits us, so that we may attain it. In the Two Roads we also learn to discipline ourselves.

In The Standard we learn to want, to nourish our will with love and truth.

In The Golden Temple, we learn to love, to find consolation in offering; here we discover the secret of renunciation.

In the Veil of Aheia, we learn to love divine manifestation in all its aspects, without rejecting anything.

In the Resurrection of Hes we learn to remain in the Divine Mother's heart; here we discover the love which moves the universe.

The discursive meditation fulfills an essential role in our spiritual unfolding. It opens us to our subconscious and unconscious. It teaches us to accept ourselves, to understand our inner processes, and it prepares us for the work of the affective meditation.

Before beginning to work on our emotions in the affective meditation, we need to know and accept ourselves without judgment, without self-condemnation. We need to recognize our insignificance with regard to the totality which surrounds us, so that this recognition is a force which moves us to expand our consciousness and love for the Divine Mother.

CEREBRAL-SPINAL EXERCISES

Ninth Teaching

“All the ascetic exercises, even the meditation as it was correctly taught us, need to be, above all, muscular, phonetic, suggestive, cerebral-spinal exercises.” (Full Moon Message of 1962)

We may have heard ourselves saying, “If I think logically about it, I understand it. But when I am carried away by emotion I lose control and don’t remember my reasoning in the least.” There are several factors operating when we lose control and—at a moment of intense emotion—do not remember what seemed logical when we were calm. This Teaching will touch upon only one of the possible factors.

Emotion is an extremely important subject, so much so that the authors of universal literature, prophets, philosophers and artists all throughout history have given it a prominent place in their reflections and works.

Today, also, science is putting a lot of effort into understanding the neurological and psychological foundations of emotional processes, along with their structure and functions.

Emotions have components which range from chemical stimuli and processes affecting the brain to expressions in our behavior and the way we are. In merely describing someone we can see upon analysis that a large component of his or her qualities are emotional attributes.

Expressing our emotions helps us communicate and helps motivate us. The physiological component of an emotion has an influence on its duration and intensity, and emotional experiences have a great influence on behavior and cognitive processes.

How is emotion activated in us?

We have already spoken of this in the Sixth Teaching, but it is so important that we will explore it here again more extensively.

According to studies that have been carried out on mental functioning, emotions are activated through the individual’s inner processes, or through a combination of inner and outer processes. For example, we might feel anger or self-pity if we look at ourselves in a mirror and find ourselves unattractive. If we hear that someone has been criticizing us, this exterior stimulus might also make us feel angry or sorry for ourselves.

Another question which might come to mind is this: What part of the brain is involved in the formation of emotions? Scientific research speaks of circuits.

The information which comes from the primary perception receptors (in the systems of vision, touch, hearing, etc.) travels through nerve networks to the limbic system: first to the thalamus and then to the amigdala, which evaluates the incoming information. The

emotion which has been activated through the limbic system is the result of a rapid, minimal and automatic evaluation process which does not involve the cerebral cortex.

However, another kind of cerebral circuit is required to activate emotions by analyzing the quality and character of a stimulus, thought or memory. In that situation, the information would have to travel from the thalamus to the cerebral cortex. It is believed that this circuit is the neurological basis for the evaluation and appraisal of events.

This data is very important in terms of our spiritual unfolding. First, it indicates that we are able to experience emotions—emotions which have the power to motivate our actions—without involving our reason at all. Second, it indicates that emotions aren't unmanageable. There is another way to process incoming stimuli, i.e., making the information received by the thalamus travel to the cerebral cortex.

In earliest infancy, a great many emotions derive from processes in the limbic system, with minimal participation of the cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex and the amigdala-cortex circuit are activated to the degree that the child's cognitive capacity develops as a result of learning and neurological maturation. When children develop language and their long-term memory, they are able to process events through the two circuits. The limbic system (the thalamus-amigdala circuit) specializes in events which require a rapid response. And the thalamus-cerebral cortex circuit specializes in providing evaluative information for one's understanding, and the complex strategies for adapting to situations.

We have sufficient evidence to show that our emotions influence the way we perceive, think, remember and understand, and that they also influence our moral conduct, ethical discernment and even our degree of altruism.

What can we infer from all this?

We could conclude, in the first place, that we can train ourselves to create new and more efficient circuits in the brain, so that the emotional responses in which reason is not involved are more and more limited to situations in which a quick response is indispensable. And, in the second place, we could deduce that we can continue unfolding throughout our entire lives instead of stopping the maturation process at childhood. In other words, we can train ourselves so that the stimuli which require complex responses travel with increasing frequency from the thalamus to the cerebral cortex, instead of traveling from the thalamus to the amigdala, causing us to react without thinking. The strict and methodical practice of the training to deepen our emotional responses will eventually make them automatic, without causing them to lose their quality of efficient adaptation to complex situations.

Cafh offers us an expert means to carry out this uninterrupted process of maturation: the cerebral-spinal exercises. Following are some notes from Encarta Encyclopedia on the component parts of the brain and how it functions.

Brain

Portion of the central nervous system contained within the skull. The brain is the control center for movement, sleep, hunger, thirst, and virtually every other vital activity necessary to survival. All human emotions—including love, hate, fear, anger, elation, and sadness—are controlled by the brain. It also receives and interprets the countless signals that are sent to it from other parts of the body and from the external environment. The brain makes us conscious, emotional, and intelligent.

Anatomy

The adult human brain is a 1.3-kg (3-lb) mass of pinkish-gray jellylike tissue made up of approximately 100 billion nerve cells, or neurons; neuroglia (supporting-tissue) cells; and vascular (blood-carrying) and other tissues.

Between the brain and the cranium—the part of the skull that directly covers the brain—are three protective membranes, or meninges. The outermost membrane, the dura mater, is the toughest and thickest. Below the dura mater is a middle membrane, called the arachnoid layer. The innermost membrane, the pia mater, consists mainly of small blood vessels and follows the contours of the surface of the brain.

A clear liquid, the cerebrospinal fluid, bathes the entire brain and fills a series of four cavities, called ventricles, near the center of the brain. The cerebrospinal fluid protects the internal portion of the brain from varying pressures and transports chemical substances within the nervous system.

From the outside, the brain appears as three distinct but connected parts: the cerebrum (the Latin word for brain)—two large, almost symmetrical hemispheres; the cerebellum (“little brain”)—two smaller hemispheres located at the back of the cerebrum; and the brain stem—a central core that gradually becomes the spinal cord, exiting the skull through an opening at its base called the foramen magnum. Two other major parts of the brain, the thalamus and the hypothalamus, lie in the midline above the brain stem underneath the cerebellum.

The brain and the spinal cord together make up the central nervous system, which communicates with the rest of the body through the peripheral nervous system. The peripheral nervous system consists of 12 pairs of cranial nerves extending from the cerebrum and brain stem; a system of other nerves branching throughout the body from the spinal cord; and the autonomic nervous system, which regulates vital functions not under conscious control, such as the activity of the heart muscle, smooth muscle (involuntary muscle found in the skin, blood vessels, and internal organs), and glands. Cerebrum

Most high-level brain functions take place in the cerebrum. Its two large hemispheres make up approximately 85 percent of the brain's weight. The exterior surface of the cerebrum, the cerebral cortex, is a convoluted, or folded, grayish layer of cell bodies known as the gray matter. The gray matter covers an underlying mass of fibers called the white matter. The convolutions are made up of ridgelike bulges, known as gyri, separated by small grooves called sulci and larger grooves called fissures. Approximately two-thirds of the cortical surface is hidden in the folds of the sulci. The extensive convolutions enable a very large surface area of brain cortex—about 1.5 m² (16 ft²) in an adult—to fit within the cranium. The pattern of these convolutions is similar, although not identical, in all humans.

The two cerebral hemispheres are partially separated from each other by a deep fold known as the longitudinal fissure. Communication between the two hemispheres is through several concentrated bundles of axons, called commissures, the largest of which is the corpus callosum.

Several major sulci divide the cortex into distinguishable regions. The central sulcus, or Rolandic fissure, runs from the middle of the top of each hemisphere downward, forward, and toward another major sulcus, the lateral (“side”), or Sylvian, sulcus. These and other sulci and gyri divide the cerebrum into five lobes: the frontal, parietal, temporal, and occipital lobes and the insula.

The frontal lobe is the largest of the five and consists of all the cortex in front of the central sulcus. Broca's area, a part of the cortex related to speech, is located in the frontal lobe. The parietal lobe consists of the cortex behind the central sulcus to a sulcus near the back of the cerebrum known as the parieto-occipital sulcus. The parieto-occipital sulcus, in turn, forms the front border of the occipital lobe, which is the rearmost part of the cerebrum. The temporal lobe is to the side of and below the lateral sulcus. Wernicke's area, a part of the cortex related to the understanding of language, is located in the temporal lobe. The insula lies deep within the folds of the lateral sulcus.

The cerebrum receives information from all the sense organs and sends motor commands (signals that result in activity in the muscles or glands) to other parts of the brain and the rest of the body. Motor commands are transmitted by the motor cortex, a strip of cerebral cortex extending from side to side across the top of the cerebrum just in front of the central sulcus. The sensory cortex, a parallel strip of cerebral cortex just in back of the central sulcus, receives input from the sense organs.

Many other areas of the cerebral cortex have also been mapped according to their specific functions, such as vision, hearing, speech, emotions, language, and other aspects of perceiving, thinking, and remembering. Cortical regions known as associative cortex are responsible for integrating multiple inputs, processing the information, and carrying out complex responses. Cerebellum

The cerebellum coordinates body movements. Located at the lower back of the brain beneath the occipital lobes, the cerebellum is divided into two lateral (side-by-side) lobes connected by a fingerlike bundle of white fibers called the vermis. The outer layer, or cortex, of the cerebellum consists of fine folds called folia. As in the cerebrum, the outer layer of cortical gray matter surrounds a deeper layer of white matter and nuclei (groups of nerve cells). Three fiber bundles called cerebellar peduncles connect the cerebellum to the three parts of the brain stem—the midbrain, the pons, and the medulla oblongata.

The cerebellum coordinates voluntary movements by fine-tuning commands from the motor cortex in the cerebrum. The cerebellum also maintains posture and balance by controlling muscle tone and sensing the position of the limbs. All motor activity, from hitting a baseball to fingering a violin, depends on the cerebellum.

Thalamus and Hypothalamus

The thalamus and the hypothalamus lie underneath the cerebrum and connect it to the brain stem. The thalamus consists of two rounded masses of gray tissue lying within the middle of the brain, between the two cerebral hemispheres. The thalamus is the main relay station for incoming sensory signals to the cerebral cortex and for outgoing motor

signals from it. All sensory input to the brain, except that of the sense of smell, connects to individual nuclei of the thalamus.

The hypothalamus lies beneath the thalamus on the midline at the base of the brain. It regulates or is involved directly in the control of many of the body's vital drives and activities, such as eating, drinking, temperature regulation, sleep, emotional behavior, and sexual activity. It also controls the function of internal body organs by means of the autonomic nervous system, interacts closely with the pituitary gland, and helps coordinate activities of the brain stem. Brain Stem

The brain stem is evolutionarily the most primitive part of the brain and is responsible for sustaining the basic functions of life, such as breathing and blood pressure. It includes three main structures lying between and below the two cerebral hemispheres—the midbrain, pons, and medulla oblongata. Midbrain

The topmost structure of the brain stem is the midbrain. It contains major relay stations for neurons transmitting signals to the cerebral cortex, as well as many reflex centers—pathways carrying sensory (input) information and motor (output) commands. Relay and reflex centers for visual and auditory (hearing) functions are located in the top portion of the midbrain. A pair of nuclei called the superior colliculus control reflex actions of the eye, such as blinking, opening and closing the pupil, and focusing the lens. A second pair of nuclei, called the inferior colliculus, control auditory reflexes, such as adjusting the ear to the volume of sound. At the bottom of the midbrain are reflex and relay centers relating to pain, temperature, and touch, as well as several regions associated with the control of movement, such as the red nucleus and the substantia nigra. Pons

Continuous with and below the midbrain and directly in front of the cerebellum is a prominent bulge in the brain stem called the pons. The pons consists of large bundles of nerve fibers that connect the two halves of the cerebellum and also connect each side of the cerebellum with the opposite-side cerebral hemisphere. The pons serves mainly as a relay station linking the cerebral cortex and the medulla oblongata. Medulla Oblongata

The long, stalklike lowermost portion of the brain stem is called the medulla oblongata. At the top, it is continuous with the pons and the midbrain; at the bottom, it makes a gradual transition into the spinal cord at the foramen magnum. Sensory and motor nerve fibers connecting the brain and the rest of the body cross over to the opposite side as they pass through the medulla. Thus, the left half of the brain communicates with the right half of the body, and the right half of the brain with the left half of the body. Reticular Formation

Running up the brain stem from the medulla oblongata through the pons and the midbrain is a netlike formation of nuclei known as the reticular formation. The reticular formation controls respiration, cardiovascular function, digestion, levels of alertness, and patterns of sleep. It also determines which parts of the constant flow of sensory information into the body are received by the cerebrum.

THE EXERCISE OF THE AFFECTIVE MEDITATION

Tenth Teaching

“In order for the soul to achieve a close union with the spirit, she must free herself from all obstacles and inner impositions. . . . Therefore, it is indispensable for her to practice exercises, according to her individual disposition and characteristics, which prepare her to receive superior teachings when the appropriate moment arrives.” (Spiritual Unfolding, Third Teaching)

The exercise of the affective meditation consists of five steps and a summary: An Invocation, Imaginative Picture, Sensations, Purposes, Consequences, and Mystical Summary. It lasts approximately one half-hour.

Since it is a phonetic and cerebral-spinal exercise, it is very important to articulate it in a voice which is well-modulated, deliberate and evocative. It is also important to be seated in a relaxed, erect posture. Our hands are joined together at the fingertips, and either held in front of the torso or laid in the lap. Another alternative position for the arms is to cross them, laying the hands flat along the arms.

We begin by announcing the meditation as we do for the discursive meditation. We repeat three times:

“Affective Meditation, Theme. . . Effect. . .” We also announce, each of the steps in the same tone of voice:

“Invocation,” “Imaginative Picture,” and so forth.

After having announced the theme and effect three times, we leave a brief moment of silence and then announce the Invocation and begin the exercise. This step aims to center us in a higher state of consciousness than usual, awakening a sharpened perception, centering our attention and focusing our emotions on the Divine Mother. From this activated state of consciousness we bring forward, for our own consideration, and with the Divine Mother as witness, an aspect of our soul or the world around us which we want to penetrate and know more deeply. It is like creating a space in which an aspect of our existential, significant needs may open up.

It helps if the language we use is simple and direct, if the aspect we bring under consideration is relevant to our lives, and if our disposition is totally open and receptive. Like all the steps, this one lasts approximately five minutes.

For example, we can choose the theme of The Two Roads and focus the Invocation on our deep desire to disattach ourselves from the indifference which makes us forget those who suffer, when we focus it on our deep desire to help and assist.

The next step is the Imaginative Picture. In this step we describe visually, verbally, aurally—or in the way which most motivates us—a situation or image which represents the as-

pect we have singled out in the Invocation. In the example we are using here, we can visualize a dirty, malnourished child who begs for help in the middle of a street crowded with people—including us—who walk by quickly, without looking around. This image comes out of the Invocation—which has been directed by our deep desire to become conscious—and out of the symbolic strength of the meditation Theme of “The Two Roads, Effect Disattachment.” It therefore leads us to connect with images which are unconscious, primordial, and archetypal, which orient and unify our emotions and ideas, giving the picture depth and scope. The child is a symbol of possibility, of growth. He or she is also a symbol of unprotectedness, of vulnerability. The dirtiness is a symbol of all the ways society burdens him or her with its indifference. Malnourishment is a symbol of the consequences of that indifference. Our walking quickly is a symbol of our life in the fast lane. We move very quickly but we don’t very well know where we’re headed. We could continue to explore the symbolism of this imaginative picture. But these few reflections are enough to indicate how an archetypal image can show in a flash something that would take hours of mental work to elucidate. And the emotional process in this case isn’t from an immediate limbic reaction but is established at the level of the cerebral cortex. Idea-emotion is what typifies the step of the Sensations.

In the Sensations we experience the idea-emotion which arises from the image, “the child who needs our help,” from the attitude we’re looking to attain, “commitment to society, disattachment from our indifference” and from the chosen emotion: compassionate love.

Commitment is the flip side of indifference. By disentangling our emotions from our usual indifference—which we have in the first place because we are defensive about and resistant to being in a state of awareness—reality is no longer a dichotomy between being indifferent or committing ourselves. It is the totality of things, it is feeling and understanding the attitude and response in all its consequences.

The Purposes flow naturally from this totality-making process of experience. Attitude, image and emotion come together to form a new awakening of consciousness; they mobilize an energy which is transformed into an operational response. In our example here, we don’t need to propose to love that destitute child. The energy in the idea-emotion of the Sensation dilutes our state of indifference by surmounting the repressive barrier which initially created the indifference. The purpose is not a willed response which forces us to disattach ourselves from indifference. It is an integral response, generated by consciousness. Will is not the generating motor of the purpose but its executor. This mobilization of energy has the strength of the here and now. Being, being here, feeling and seeing are expressions of a unity. It is like coming into contact with global reality. There is neither outside nor inside, there is no dichotomy. There is reality. This is how we are able to operate a change in how we perceive our relationship with what is around us.

In the Consequences we explore this new vision and elaborate on what it signifies in our lives. The first intention of responding to an essential need for meaning is concretized

into a feeling, an idea and an action. In our example here, our essential need for meaning is to nourish, love and deepen the understanding of our commitment to society. In archetypal terms, it means responding to the need of the one who suffers. In terms of idea-emotion, it means being in union with all souls. In practice, our small world becomes part of the background. The main thing is the need of those who surround us.

In the Mystical Summary, we review the five steps of the meditation, but we do it in synthesis, taking only what is central in each step. Thirty seconds dedicated to each step is enough. The summary is a way of making the experience cohesive, of completing the cycle, and gradually preparing ourselves to begin another cycle. We fix the essential points of the experience of meditation and prepare to open ourselves to becoming, with new experiences. Another element of the summary is also to recognize the preeminence of the here and now. Experiences close, have an end, and this end opens the doors to a new experience.

At the end of the exercise, we say: “Peace.”

Through the Affective Meditation we overcome the states of emotion-reaction that have been produced by the stimuli which are processed through the limbic system. We also overcome the contradictions of the irreducible pairs of opposites: love and hate; generosity and selfishness; being good and being bad; helping and being indifferent. Our limbic system-based interpretations come out of our desire to avoid a reality which can create imbalances in our perception of how things are: a reality capable of wounding us with the pain of existence; of engulfing us in a happiness which is so overwhelming it terrifies us; of placing us in a position where we must make commitments. If, on the other hand, we process our emotions through the cerebral cortex, the seat of our discernment—assisted by the archetypal ideas of the meditation themes, and opening our eyes to our essential needs—then, instead of pairs of opposites, we see a unique reality which includes and resolves dichotomies. In our example, we understand that it is not an “either/or” question of committing oneself or being indifferent. We are a totality with all souls and are committed by that fact: it is a reality. We understand that there is not really a struggle between committing ourselves and being indifferent but that our state of pain and ignorance is such that we submit to indifference as a way of quieting our conscience. We understand that indifference isn’t a choice, an emotion, or a feeling, but a result of denying feeling in ourselves.

The affective meditation connects us to our emotions and helps us to integrate them with our knowledge. In short, it teaches us to connect with our reality and respond to our essential needs.

THE BLACK VEILED LADY

Eleventh Teaching

“Evil is what is personal: it is what is compound and wishes to have its own life, disassociating itself from what is simple. This impossible-to-fulfill illusion alienates one from what is real and creates infinite phantasmagorias.” (The Spiritual Life of Cafh, Twelfth Teaching)

Each of us has an underlying description of reality with which we are so identified that we take it for reality itself. We think a show of good sense means being sure that we perceive reality correctly, and that everyone agrees with that perception. But this agreement doesn't allow us to analyze what vision we have of reality and whether or not that vision is reality, or really only the product of thousands of years of conditioning, which causes reality as it is to escape our understanding.

The vision of reality to which most of us subscribe places us at the center of everything that happens. It is as if we occupied the earth's position in a pre-Copernican system. We believe everything revolves around us. We think of ourselves, from ourselves and for ourselves. We believe that everything we need has to come from outside. We tend to think that happiness means gratifying our desires, that living our whole potential means getting and doing what others say must be gotten and done. We find ourselves in an obsessive race to have more things, do more things, be more, and in the process we create a great dissatisfaction in our hearts. We let the fundamental issues fall by the wayside and run after an illusion.

When we avoid reflecting about life, death, happiness, constant becoming, we are conditioning our life and becoming atrophied in a constant repetition of experiences. The same happens when we avoid reflecting on how we understand ourselves and how we explain our sufferings, and when we yield to our compulsions, to our most superficial habits, and to standards of conduct which blind us more and more. This is the Black Veiled Lady's reign, and this is where we need to work spiritually if we aspire to find peace and wisdom.

To expect we will get what we believe will make us happy leads us to disillusionment. Since fantasies are rarely fulfilled, disillusionment leads us to reject life as it is. This cycle perpetuates itself and submerges us in the pairs of opposites: seeking pleasure, we find pain; seeking to win, we feel like losers; seeking praise, we are corroded by a fear of blame; seeking others' approval, we find shame; requiring others to change so that our problems will be solved, we don't see what is within our power to do.

How can we get out of this repetitive and alienating cycle?

Perhaps we have already taken the first step. We recognize our vocation: We have come into contact with the ancestral and archetypal need which drives our unfolding. We have

also recognized the Teaching as a truth beyond our knowledge. The third step leads us to include the Teaching in our description of reality, to break out of the illusory balance in the way we understand ourselves and life. It is not enough to study the Teaching to achieve this. We have to assimilate the Teaching in such a way that it alters our illusory description of reality, that it gives us a new point of view to understand ourselves and reality.

However it is not easy to adopt a new description of reality. Old attachments, a false sense of security, the desire to perpetuate what we know and reject what is new, the impulses in ourselves which we haven't mastered—all these rise to maintain the idea that we are the center of it all.

Abhorrence is the spiritual strength, the generating energy necessary for change to make way for new knowledge.

Sometimes we react against what seems repressive and negative in the theme of The Black Veiled Lady. Our conditioning tells us that the happiness we should be aspiring to excludes the aspects of our life which we need to work on and develop. Temptation also leads us to excuse pursuing our satisfaction as if we were engaged in exercising our freedom. We want to concentrate on the illuminative themes; we want to seek love, not abhorrence.

But what happens if we don't meditate on the Black Veiled Lady?

Our illusory description of reality remains intact. We don't understand why we suffer or why we remain in ignorance. We follow the cycle of alienating and repetitive behaviors which cause us more and more pain.

In this state, however much we glimpse the summit, however much we hope to give love and unite with all human beings, we will keep on being bound by the cause-and-effect chain of ignorance-suffering. The desire to be happy, the desire to love, are not enough to be able to be happy and to love. The hindrance is our ignorance, our blindness, our vision of ourselves as if we were the center of existence.

It has often been said that saints make saints suffer! The intention of giving and receiving love has counterproductive effects if we don't expand the idea of what we are. We need to comprehend, understand in general, and understand ourselves. We need to know the root of suffering and how to get out of it.

Meditation on the theme of the Black Veiled Lady is a very suitable tool for this purpose.

We bring to our meditation exercises the aspects we intellectually understand inhibit our unfolding. We observe them, delve into them to find out about them, with all their burden of illusion and misery, and we learn to abhor them.

The meditation on the Black Veiled Lady helps us penetrate the meaning of our life and listen to the Divine Mother's call:

“Listen at midnight, o Wayfarer, to the song of the celestial spheres! . . . Dress in your linen tunic and cover your face with the white veil, o Son of the Flame, if you do not wish to die!’ From the Mansion of Death, the Mother’s soul is calling her Sons.” (Archaic Symbology, Second Teaching)

The meditation on the Black Veiled Lady as it manifests itself in our lives is indispensable for acquiring a vision of reality which is in agreement with what happens in general, and what happens to us, so as to reconcile our actions, feelings and thinking with that reality. This effort is the indispensable condition for our spiritual unfolding.

We will not very well be able to disattach from an illusory state, from a description of reality which exists nowhere but in our narrow vision—limited as it is by ignorance—if we are not able to see the fallacies in that interpretation and the way it makes us suffer.

What happens when in The Black Veiled Lady meditation we seek abhorrence of our ignorance, our selfishness, or any other manifestation of the illusory state we live in? What happens when we learn to feel aversion for the state of ignorance? We create a distance between ourselves and what we abhor; we dis-identify ourselves. We understand that we are not what we abhor, which is something which has adhered to us, something we have adopted without realizing and which we think we are but really are not. And even more than that: We create an inner space to see reality with other eyes. Looking through those eyes, we seek to accept the imbalance we cause when we prove that the description we thought certain and immovable is really part of becoming and evaporates when we remove the energy of our identification with it.

It has taken humankind centuries and great effort to drop the notion that the earth is the center of the universe. We still have leftover expressions such as, “the sun is setting,” or “the sun is rising.” How much harder it is for each of us to discover and understand our ideas about our importance and central role in existence! It is much easier to see how others deceive themselves than to see how we deceive ourselves. The strength of this attachment, this illusion, doesn’t dissipate by intellectually adhering to another theory. We need to work on our whole being: the way we feel, think and act. We need to generate a new description of reality and live in accordance with it.

“The human being is a measure. Far from being the measure of the universe, he or she is only a measure.” (Messages II, Eleventh Teaching)

THE ABYSS

Twelfth Teaching

“We human beings need a spiritual measure which goes beyond our limitations. Without that measure we cannot unfold.” (Messages II, Eleventh Teaching)

With the new description of reality which The Black Veiled Lady meditation gives us, we are able to place ourselves inside a greater context than that of our individual situation. We understand that everything we thought we knew about ourselves and our reality has to be reconsidered. This is how we prepare to explore the depths of our souls, trying to unknot the bonds of instinct and dispel the darkness of ignorance.

“Arise, oh Conqueror of the Flame, and commence your way. The Divine Mother awaits you.

“Leave the pit of death and despair, and cut with a firm hand the hard umbilical cord which binds you to the rotten placenta of your torpor and bestiality.

“Follow the luminous trail before it disappears from your sight in the dense darkness.

“Do not forget the sound you have perceived; do not confuse it amid the turmoil of the Abyss. Fix your eyes on the distant tongues of fire, before you become blinded by the glowing fires of passions.

“Do not fear the monsters who block your way, for they cannot see. Keep crawling along the escarpment, for the encircling edge of the Abyss is near, like imperturbable rocks which surround the shifting waves of the ocean.”

(Archaic Symbology, Fourth Teaching)

The Abyss is as much a symbol of the heights as it is of the depths. The depth cannot be discerned without height as a reference. And this discernment is the origin of desolation.

Contrasting the depths of instinct with the possibilities of spiritual liberation is how we generate the necessary understanding and strength to initiate the long descent to the unknown in ourselves. The strength of desolation, the nostalgia for our intuited fate, makes us fix our eyes on our possibilities for liberation, and gives us the daring to remain submerged in the abyss of unknowing and to cut the ties of the instincts which bind us to endless repetition of the same experiences.

Desolation expresses equally the feeling of abandonment and loss of what we thought we were and what we know we could achieve but still don't have. On the one hand, everything we thought we were, everything we thought we had, becomes evident as the tumultuous, abysmal flickering of our illusion. On the other hand, the divine promise of union is only a bright trail which is lost in the distance.

This is a very delicate moment on our road, since it is very easy to get lost in the dark and forget the light we once glimpsed. This is why spiritual directors recommend that we cul-

tivate patience and resignation: Patience, so as not to become desperate with pain; resignation, so that we can accept our reality, and absorb the demands of our instinctual nature, which doesn't want to lose its hold over us. Resignation also helps us not to look back and not to want to escape despondency. It helps us concentrate on experiencing the devastating abyss of our ignorance in all its depth.

“Abandon, too, the garments made with the memories of your exile. Plunge into the healthful waters of the Eternal, in the calm and hospitable lake of oblivion. Put on a new white seamless tunic, roomy and simple, like simple Faith, sure Hope and tolerant Love.” (Archaic Symbology, Fourth Teaching)

The tunic symbolizes the soul, the garment of the spirit. Seamless means without the scars of the wounds produced by the ties of the past. White—the sum or absence of all colors—is the symbol of death and rebirth, of the being's mutation from the state of darkness to the state of light; absence and presence; absolute silence and divine word.

Faith, Hope and Love are our stronghold. However deep the abyss, the light of the heights can always be glimpsed. Desolation is not desperation. Faith in the Divine Mother's infinite grace, the hope for freedom and tolerant love which comes from the experience of pain, gives us the certainty that the road leads to the summit. And no matter how steep it is, if we concentrate our eyes on the bright trail, we will reach the heights of beatitude and Love.

“Awaiting you are more favorable waters, other clothes not made by human hand, another balm by which to anoint you King.”
(Archaic Symbology, Fourth Teaching)

THE TWO ROADS

Thirteenth Teaching

“Unlike the leaf which falls into a river and is subject to the tendencies of the current, a human being decides how to convey him or herself in the flow, whether into the channel which moves toward the horizon or through the shallows which end up in the backwash.” (Messages III, Fifteenth Teaching)

Having developed a description of reality which positions and orients us toward transcendence, and having descended into the depths of our instincts and conditioning, the Divine Mother calls us to consolidate our achievements and to walk with sure steps. There is no knowledge, there is no lasting awakening if we don't ground it on the road we travel every day. Our feet can invalidate what our minds understand.

The Two Roads are the “yes or no” stage (notice that we don't say “yes and no”). It is the black and white stage (notice that we don't say black, white, and shades of gray). It is the stage in which we become a little dogmatic with ourselves in order to align our footsteps along the good road.

In The Abyss we still retain our attachment to our appetites, to the satisfaction of our desires. We understand that the attachment to our instincts brings us desolation. But we don't yet know how to love above all things the new world we are discovering. In order to learn how to love this new world we have to die to the old world of illusion.

The task of dis-attaching ourselves, being dis-inclined, losing our taste for that world of phantasmagorias, demands a certain degree of discernment. We have to learn to distinguish between the road of countless experiences and the direct and simple road of renouncing to ourselves and of love for the Divine Mother.

- The fire of our love will burn up selfishness.
- The diamond of our offering, with its countless facets, will reflect the Divine Mother's light and illumine our understanding.
- Concentration on our spiritual vocation will give us strength and determination.
- The asceticism which purifies our thoughts and feelings will open the doors to a new birth.

Love, offering, concentration on our vocation, and the asceticism which purifies our thoughts and feelings are the signs which indicate the road to liberation. And we remain on that road by daily practicing saying yes to what sustains us on the road and no to what parts us from it; by seeing as good what strengthens our determination to unfold and bad as what weakens that determination.

Discipline must be ironlike if we want to triumph, for we have to defend ourselves from the lust, arrogance and greed which guard the entrance to the Temple. We say “Yes!” to that discipline.

Arrogance, rage, and unlicensed attachment to appetites and riches, are the stones which pave the slow and winding path of suffering and ignorance. We say “No!” to these excesses.

One doesn't have to be rich to be attached to riches. One doesn't have to have power to be arrogant. One doesn't have to have authority to be blinded by power. One doesn't have to burst into shrieks to be riddled with rage. One doesn't have to be poor to suffer from the greed of wanting more and more. The roots of a disorderly life are insatiable appetites and their consequences: a lack of mental clarity and discernment about the road to follow. This is what we call evil.

Life lived at the service of our attachments is a deviation from our desire to unite with all beings and all things. It means believing that we will be more by acquiring more, by giving free rein to possessiveness. It means misconceiving having for being, exterior achievement for self-mastery. It means mistaking the gluttony of filling ourselves from outside with the capacity for creativity and work.

Our road of unfolding teaches us that we have to dig in our own garden, that a keenness for possession is our enemy, that the food we need is all within our reach, in our own hearts. This is what we call good.

From among the infinite paths we could take, we take the one that leads us to seek the Divine Mother, to live the Teaching, to give and receive assistance from our spiritual companions. This is the most appropriate path for receiving the light and energy we need to fulfill our deep desire for union with all creation.

How do we apply these principles in our daily lives?

We are applying them when we:

- dream of a world of peace and well being
- think before speaking
- get angry with someone, we imagine him, for example, with the Divine Mother's light pouring over him
- are working and get bored or tired, we think that this is our last opportunity to do a service for someone we love
- would like to complain, we express sincere thanks instead
- are restless we move carefully, attentively
- share a recent moment of joy
- are flexible, even when we feel like not giving in
- generate joy, even when we have reasons to be sad
- listen, even when we feel inclined to discredit the speaker
- study diligently, even when overcome by mental lethargy
- reflect, even when we feel like acting impulsively

- generate positive thoughts, even when we are tempted by a destructive impulse to be critical
- know how to receive what we are given, even if it wasn't what we were expecting
- celebrate the triumphs of others
- pray for all beings, even those who harm us
- revere our companions on the road
- revere all human beings
- smile frequently and happily
- play with children
- laugh easily
- let our creativity run free
- forgive, even when we feel hurt
- forget grievances
- accept what bothers us
- revere our body by caring for it as the temple of the spirit
- make ourselves useful, even when we are tired
- work diligently for the good and the support of humankind
- are attentive to the need of others
- strongly nourish good feelings
- contribute with good works
- simplify our needs a little more each day
- trust in human kindness
- ask much more frequently than explain
- try to learn something new every day
- cultivate friendship with an air of respect and reverence
- are increasingly more inclusive
- cultivate serenity
- don't give importance to unimportant things
- respond to what places demands on our attention • observe the way we act and the effect we produce in others
- deprive ourselves of something every day, to prove our restraint
- take positive advantage of our setbacks
- give priority to our spiritual work
- give ourselves to the Divine Mother, a little more each day

If we are to leave the valley of hardship, we need the Divine Mother to teach us the road of beatitude: the road of disattachment from illusion and selfishness.

THE STANDARD

Fourteenth Teaching

“The dark, deep and stormy Lake of Ixdoubar lies at the Wayfarer’s feet. A red light illuminates the waters: it is the luminous reflection of Anhunit’s crimson mantle. She carries the Mother’s Standard on Hanou’s barge, which is drawn by the swan Tammuz, and advances slowly.” (Archaic Symbology, Eighth Teaching)

The Standard is a symbol of protection. The one who lifts it raises it higher than his or her head. In other words, symbolically the standard flies above one’s reason. It is a kind of appeal to establish a bond between the heavenly and the earthly, between the soul and the divine.

The three previous Meditation Themes, The Black Veiled Lady, The Abyss and The Two Roads, led us step by step to see with other eyes, to analyze the deeds of our life and our interpretation of them, using our vocation as a guidepost. The Black Veiled Lady does this by teaching us a new way of describing reality; The Abyss, by creating comparison and contrast between the fleeting light at the outset of our vocation and the instinctual and selfish life; The Two Roads, by showing us—through “yes” and “no”—that life at the service of our attachments is a deviation from our vocation of union with all things. Through these three Themes we have learned to abhor what moves us away from our road of unfolding. We have learned to feel desolation on finding ourselves at the mercy of our instincts, passions and ignorance. And we have learned to feel disattachment from the winding road of suffering and endless experiences.

However, our pilgrimage to unfolding is far, very far from finished.

Have we, perhaps, learned to move from disattachment to liberation? Is disattachment liberation? We can dare to state, without fear of being mistaken, that disattachment is not liberation but simply a step in the right direction, and we still have much to do to become liberated.

Disattaching ourselves from our bonds means, in one sense, training ourselves to think and feel that we don’t want what binds us. This training takes a lot of our energy. It is hard for us, and we are not always perfectly convinced that the object of our attachments is limiting. This work of disattachment is within the scope of the pairs of opposites. In order to discern the Road we have divided reality in two, and have learned that some things are on one side and some on the other. As an exercise of discernment, as a training to be able to act conscientiously, this is indispensable and necessary. But it is not the endpoint of the Road.

What is the next step?

Let us go back to our symbology to enlighten ourselves on this.

“Anhunit presented Ihes with two Divine Keys, one of steel and the other of platinum. With these the human being can open and close the gates of hell and heaven, the gates of sorrow and of love.” (Archaic Symbology, Eighth Teaching)

The Divine Mother gives us the Standard of Love, a love so sublime it is not subject to reason but reigns over it. She also gives us two Keys, one of steel and the other of platinum, so that we may use them to harmonize the pairs of opposites of spirit and matter, good and evil, what's individual and collective, without losing sight of our aim of union. Now that we know how to abhor what separates us from Her, how to feel desolation for our state of ignorance, now that we can disattach from our ties, we have enough inner strength to use our vital energy harmoniously and in a liberating way.

The human mind can take in wisdom, but it is not wisdom itself. The mind in reflection invites and cultivates wisdom, but it is not wisdom's master. The mind breaks down and analyzes emotions, sensations and ideas. The mind understands and reasons but does not know. In order to know one must commit one's whole being: mind, feeling and action. When the mind acts alone it runs the risk of getting lost, of elaborating reasons and excuses in order to satisfy needs which it is unable to manage. It can fall into materialism, incredulity or sophistry. It can even fall into separativity, into harsh selfishness. This is why the Divine Mother gives us a Standard which flies much higher than our reason, a Standard which doesn't bow to anything: Love.

The steel and platinum Keys represent an enigma to solve. In our case, the pairs of opposites represent that enigma. It is interesting to remark here that a key has the function of both locking and unlocking. It can unlock the doors of realization to us as well as lock them. The symbol itself speaks to us of the pairs of opposites.

The steel Key symbolizes invincible strength, the firm solidity of our love.

The platinum Key symbolizes the unalterable, ductile and tenacious character of our love.

This love leads us by the hand in silence through the play of the mind, allowing us to elucidate, understand, harmonize; always guarding us from the serpent hiding behind the fruits of the mind.

The serpent is one of the most important archetypes of the human soul, for it is linked to the source of life and imagination. It is a symbol of original life, of the vital energy of instinct. And this is the moment in the unfolding of our soul to harmonize spirit and libido, matter and energy, law and freedom, reason and intuition.

Einstein developed the formula which identified matter with energy: $E=mc^2$. All bodies have a certain quantity of “matter at rest” which is potentially available for conversion into other forms of energy. Moreover, the relationship of mass to energy implies that if energy is liberated from the body as a result of that conversion, the mass of the body decreases.

Spiritually, we can think of ourselves as all having a certain quantity of “matter at rest” and that we can transform it into energy through our experiences. But these experiences aren’t cost-free. The mass of the body decreases. Wisdom, then, would be knowing how to use beneficially the energy we have available, since it is not unlimited.

How should we use our energy?

In the Course, Science of Life, Fifteenth Teaching, we read:

“If human beings could harmonize the atoms of which they are constituted, (ponderable and dynamic), they would be truly gods upon earth, free and happy beings. . . . They would unite pain with pleasure in such a way that for them pain would never reach the point of desperation, nor pleasure the point of paroxysm. Instead of clashing, by a divine antinomy these two forces would harmonize with each other. Since neither excessive pain nor pleasure would exist, human being would have the continuous stability of peace and happiness.”

Antinomy means a contradiction between two laws. What does “divine antinomy” mean, then? A contradiction between what divine laws? On one hand we have laws of the natural world as we know them, and as they are expressed in our lives—laws which move us to satisfy the impulses of biological conditioning. On the other hand, we have laws which also govern us and motivate us to transmute, unfold, thereby overcoming our biological conditioning. Could it be that this antinomy between our biological conditioning and our divine destiny are resolved with a higher-level law, Renouncement? Could Renouncement be what contradicts the contradiction and resolves it?

Could our renouncement to the personal as the reference point of our life free us from the incompatibilities of the laws which rule pleasure and pain? Could it be that, by renouncing the quest for personal happiness, we overcome the law of being conditioned to suffering? Could it be that, by renouncing the satisfaction of desires, we find the answer to our ancestral yearning for freedom?

“. . . We understand that renouncement is the law of life: that having nothing—surmounting the avidness for possession—is wealth; that gaining nothing—surmounting interested action, ambition and the avidness of imposing ourselves—is serenity; that being nothing—surmounting the avidness of being noticed—is to achieve our identity, to be in the Divine Mother through all souls.”
(Messages III, Thirteenth Teaching)]

The Standard of Love leads us to the very door which opens with the Key that was placed in our hands by the Divine Mother: Renouncement. Our actions are no longer based solely on the yes or no of The Two Roads. Our decisions are not determined simply by moral discernment about good and evil. We learn to discern based on knowledge of the consequences of the use of our energy. We learn to become responsible for what we do with a life which is not ruled by independent laws but by the law of Renouncement, the law which takes from the complex to the simple, from selfishness to participation, from igno-

rance to union with the Divine Mother. The choice is always one and only: the wise use of our energy.

We adopt Renouncement because it is the Law which rules over us, and we commit all our energy to living under that Law. But have we arrived yet at the Divine Mother's Temple?

THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

Fifteenth Teaching

“Don’t look back! Don’t stand at the edge of the precipice. You would surely fall over it, enveloped in the terrifying whirlwind which rhythmically disturbs the avid breathing of your Enemy. “Tomorrow you will certainly return, to kill her once and for all! Then the Divine Mother, awakened by your victorious kiss, will entrust you with the double-edged sword of iron will.”

(Archaic Symbology, Fourth Teaching)

These are the words we heard when we found ourselves in The Abyss. At that point on our Road we were hovering between good and evil, between our state of ignorance and our divine destiny. We could either have overcome the trial of The Abyss and continued onward or fallen victim to our instinctual forces and sunk further and further into darkness. That is why we had to remain still in The Abyss, absorbing the feeling of desolation. Our will had passion and was subject to the vacillations of our desires. We were poor Wayfarers at the mercy of our compound self.

Later on, in The Two Roads, when we were able to discern between good and evil and achieved a minimum of control over our passions, we understood the value of not always satisfying our instincts. Armed with our discernment—the fruit of our capacity for self-mastery—we lifted the Standard of Love and transformed ourselves into Pilgrims. Our steps were destined with certainty and became more self-assured. Our Election appeared in all its clarity: to use our energy wisely. We had left our days as Wayfarers behind us.

As Pilgrims, we are now ready to receive the “double-edged sword of iron will.”

What is the significance of this sword?

The sword, a weapon of destruction, is also an instrument for good when it is used to fight against evil. The double-edged sword of iron will thrusts with the power of love and truth. The will is no longer nourished so much by determination. The will becomes iron because love, truth and will are a unity.

Love and truth begin to reveal the secrets of the riddles of illusion-reality, love-selfishness, light-darkness. Once in possession of the double-edged sword we will not return again to the world of ignorance. We have cut through the dense darkness with the light of love and the bright glow of truth. The Road of Renouncement appears starkly before us.

The composite elements of our soul have stopped struggling to prevail. Our mind is under the control of consciousness, which seeks only the Divine. Our symbology represents this mental mastery when it says:

“(The Pilgrim) cast off the dark habit of religions to dress instead in one of three colors: red, blue and yellow.” (Archaic Symbology, Tenth Teaching)

We stop relying on dogmas, on what we receive from outside, and we achieve mastery over our minds so that we can discover the truth and nourish our love. Yellow is the symbol of eternal life, of faith. Red is the symbol of the flame: ardent love for God and our fellow human beings. Blue is the color of the far-off sky, and evokes the abode of the potential. These are our garments: faith in eternal life, ardent love and the yearning for Hes.

We grasp this reality which appears before us, absorb it, and enter the Golden Temple.

The Golden Temple is a symbol of the ideal place, the perfect and luminous world where the human and divine converge. There we watch over the treasures we have discovered, the light we have glimpsed, the consciousness we have developed, and we get ready to rest. We leave outside all that we hoarded when we lived in the dark. We learn how to bring heaven down to earth, to fulfill in ourselves the ideal we so yearn for. We create a sacred space-time. There, we fervently believe, the Divine Mother dwells, there we welcome her, there we invite her to remain forever.

Renouncement is the law we embrace with complete consecration. Our love for this Golden Temple, presumed dwelling of the Divine Mother, incites us to leave aside “the poor person’s sack of bread,” to consummate the sacrifice of total obliteration.

Yet here we are in the Golden Temple, without the object of all our love. The Temple is empty:

“Now the realization is about to be consummated. But lo! The Temple is empty! The Tabernacle is abandoned! The Mystical Body of our Lady has been carried away!” (Archaic Symbology, Tenth Teaching)

But we are not alone. We are no longer the Pilgrim, at the mercy of the risks of the road. The Divine Mother is not in that heaven we had made for her, but gives us a message, gives us help, consoles us in our sorrow by showing us the road of love for her Creation, the road of Renunciation:

“Hes weeps, sobs, and this sorrow has its outcome. . . . All has been useless! All is lost! The priestesses, dressed in black and white, the two colors of the Spirit, approach him: the root of desire must be extirpated; Supreme Renunciation must be reached.” (Archaic Symbology, Tenth Teaching)

Sorrow is both bitter and sweet. It is bitter because it is born of detaching oneself from a last illusion. And it is sweet because it invites us to delve into reality, which is revealed to us when that last illusion falls. We feel rested and alleviated of the pain, of the fatigue of a long road. We feel consoled to have reached a state of equilibrium in the transfer of energy: from our desire to feel loved to learning to love boundlessly; from our desire to reach the Divine Mother’s embrace to our ministry of assistance to souls; from our desire to receive to our intrinsic need to offer.

The Golden Temple doesn't offer us the consolation we expected. It gives us the Consolation of participation with all souls.

The Golden Temple leads us to Supreme Renunciation: a boundless, unconditional love for the divine manifestation.

“The Priestesses cover (Ihes's) head with a square white cloth.”
(Archaic Symbology, Tenth Teaching)

The square cloth covering Ihes's head symbolizes the Veil (which is active, material manifestation) which covers Hes (the potential of that manifestation). The color white is the color of the being who will change his state: the Pilgrim becomes Ihes.

The Divine Mother descends from the altar of Supreme Sacrifice and everything disappears. Only She and Ihes remain.

At that moment we are ready to extirpate the root of desire, to unite with the Divine Mother forever.

But there is more of the road to travel. We have to experience abnegation, sacrifice and compassionate love. We have to re-cognize the Divine Mother in the everyday world and in our own hearts.

And the three will be One: the Wayfarer, the Pilgrim and Ihes. The variations which were present at the start disappear as antagonistic aspects of our being. The division among the instinctual, mental and spiritual dissolve. We achieve wholeness.

But the Divine Mother asks much more of us:

“. . . Perfect Union of the individual spirit with the Cosmic Spirit: Ihes and Hes. This union cannot take place without renouncing the separativity of the I and thou.” (Archaic Symbology, Eleventh Teaching)

THE VEIL OF AHEIA AND THE RESURRECTION OF HES

Sixteenth Teaching

“It is necessary to give everything to Love, absolutely everything.” (Rule of Cafh, Chapter Twenty-four of The Method)

The pilgrimage from our vocational awakening took us through different stages.

In the so-called purgative stage, we adopted a new description of reality, learned to feel desolation for our ignorance, and developed the capacity to classify our possible actions from the viewpoint of good and evil and to act in consequence.

The stage of purification of the will taught us the wise use of our energy, and to nourish our will with the strength of love and truth.

The illuminative stage begins with The Golden Temple, when we learn that our true consolation is to love boundlessly, to embrace life and offer ourselves to the service of all souls.

But what does it mean to embrace life and offer ourselves to the service of souls?

In order to be able to offer our life, we must first possess it, have mastery over it, get on top of it. In order to be able to offer ourselves we must free ourselves.

Our Rule tells us what is not liberation: neither materialism, idealism, nor dogmatism will lead us to freedom. It also tells us how to find liberation: by being what we are, human beings, with infinite possibilities.

What are those possibilities? How can we discover new fields of possibilities not only quantitatively but also qualitatively?

“Despite the possibilities Cafh offers its members, many Sons and Daughters do not move beyond the Union of the Senses. The offering was made, the contact was consummated and the Gifts of Cafh were bestowed on the Son or Daughter. But the soul, who due to previous habits conditions her efforts to the results she obtains with them, is predisposed to convert all inner value into a personal gain. She thus limits her possibilities to those she is capable of conceiving.”

(The Spiritual Life of Cafh, Sixteenth Teaching)

In order to expand the field of our possibilities qualitatively, we have to go beyond what we can conceive: to renounce to ourselves as entities who are separate from the rest of reality.

Many levels of reality, in constant interaction, come together in the human being. In our daily lives the physical, mental and spiritual come into play. There is also a confluence of the waking state and the dreaming state. On the one hand we work with the consciousness of the waking state, and on the other we are very deeply influenced by our unconscious, even during our waking hours. We also participate at the level of mineral, vegetable, an-

imal and spiritual life. And the great alchemy of all these levels— in which our spiritual unfolding is effected—takes place in our consciousness. And the reign of our consciousness goes as far as the cosmos, and Substantial Union with the Divine Mother.

By a life of discipline and a series of direct mystical encounters with reality based on renouncement to ourselves, we give strength to this alchemy and adopt development of consciousness as the sublime work of aid to humankind. Our love for the divine manifestation and our ministry of service to souls is developed at this level.

It is not our job to force the world to change from the outside. Our job is to expand our own state of consciousness, making the change from within. This process is slow and laborious and it requires the total commitment of our lives. But it is what gives lasting results. And our mission is to contribute this good to all humanity.

To this end we apply ourselves to the arduous work of purifying our means as well as our ends.

“Truly, the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing, for the lust of personal satisfaction has been vanquished.” (Spiritual Unfolding, Eighth Teaching)

Self-deception, vanity, impatience and justifications can make us waste the effort of a lifetime if we don't know how to use them for self-instruction, learning about ourselves and placing them, each time they appear and however minuscule they seem, at the Divine Mother's feet.

The Seven Meditation Themes accompany us from the beginning of our mystical life till our death, since we understand that we are unable to achieve anything conclusively.

We contribute a great benefit to the evolution of humankind with our dedication to spiritual unfolding. This dedication doesn't isolate us from the world, but it keeps us from what is worldly. It doesn't lead us to reject the world but to love it with all our hearts.

Humankind has passed through the Stone Age, the Iron Age and the Bronze Age. We have passed through the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary ages. We have learned to conquer sea and space. Why don't we dare to think that we are entering the age of the intentional evolution of consciousness?

Our Teachings talk to us of Om Hes as the city of Love. They also speak of our Inner Tabernacle. To make either of them a reality we need our inner work, our companions on the road, all humankind. We need to learn to love our fellow human beings unreservedly, we need the feedback of those around us, we need to understand our reality: being in souls. Perhaps the survival of humankind depends on our understanding this in all its magnitude, and on our becoming aware of our responsibility in all this.

The Veil of Aheia leads us to the cardinal virtues which bring happiness in the relationship among human groups: impartial love, solidarity, compassion, and the appreciation of beauty in all creation.

Our offering of love gives us substantial knowledge and, eventually, spiritual knowledge. Our Teaching tells us:

“Upon emerging from the water, the Pilgrim knew that She was Beatrix, and that She had revealed to him the secret of all things: the Veil of Aheia. “And the Dragon was killed, and the Pilgrim was bathed in its blood, so that he could descend to the place of death.” (Archaic Symbology, Twelfth Teaching)

The Veil of Aheia is a symbol of Spiritual Wisdom. However broad a person’s knowledge might be, it is not able to cover all of reality. Therefore, spiritual wisdom always leaves open the possibility of a broader knowing: it includes the potential knowing which will become evident as we unfold. Beatrix is a symbol of Substantial Wisdom—that is, the knowledge we grasp incorporated to our consciousness as an integral part of our being. The Dragon is the guardian of the treasures of human knowledge and must consequently be sacrificed to be able to possess the secrets it hoards.

When we understand the limits of the knowledge that reaches us from outside, we also understand the need to reach the essence of knowing. This opening-up shows us that our habitual state of consciousness is a very small world compared with the world we live in. To achieve substantial wisdom is to enter this dynamic state: every knowing that we incorporate is a death to the previous state of consciousness and a birth to a new field of possibilities. The acceptance of our limitation in terms of what we know and perceive is what opens up our consciousness so we can grasp the immensity of reality.

Therefore, to descend to the place of death symbolizes the experiences we must have before being born to the new life of union with the divine. Death to one level is the condition for life at a higher level.

A veil which covers something doesn’t let us what it is covering. The Veil of Aheia covers Hes. That is, the active aspect of manifestation doesn’t allow us to see its potential aspect. From that point of view, such a Veil might seem negative; however, there is something very positive to it: living in Aheia’s domain is what allows our unfolding. In this simple play of points of view we will perhaps be able to begin meditation on the meaning of joy in this Meditation Theme.

“Unfortunate are those who believe some things are agreeable and others are awful and unpleasant, and who seek only what satisfies them! They will never be happy, for there are no ugly or beautiful things. All things deserve to be known, and they give plenitude when the attentive eye of the observer discovers the spirit which activates them!” (Spiritual Unfolding, Eighth Teaching)

What does it mean to enjoy? In current usage, it means possessing something, savoring something, having a good time, taking pleasure in something. Enjoyment is pleasure, joy. It is an inner movement which is evidenced in well-recognized signs. It is usually associated also with what is beautiful, with pleasure, with what is attractive. And here we find ourselves in the pairs of opposites. Who decides what is pleasant and what isn’t? What’s

beautiful and what's ugly? What is pleasurable and what's distasteful? Remember the image of the dragon, which conceals the enigma of human knowledge, the pairs of opposites. In this context, what does it mean to kill the dragon and bathe in its blood? It means loving the active manifestation of the divine so deeply that we rise above the polarity of attraction-rejection of the pairs of opposites and take pleasure in the knowledge of all creation, both what causes pain and what brings joy. There is no unconditional love if we establish differences between what we like to enjoy and what we want to reject.

Our Teaching exemplifies this in the fifth degree of Renunciation:

“One cold, windy, rainy night, two humble friars, barefoot and poorly dressed, were walking along the road to Assisi. Francis of Assisi, the smallest and skinniest, following behind his companion, who was a tall, strong young man, suddenly broke the silence and said, ‘Friar Leo, lamb of God, listen closely. If you knew the secret of the Universe, the secret of all worlds, of all things, would you be perfectly happy?’ And he went on listing all the things people consider great and beautiful, ending always with the same question. Since the humble Friar Leo didn’t answer, Francis said, ‘If we were to arrive at our monastery and not be recognized by Brother Porter, who left us out in the elements, cold and hungry, like two vagabonds, I tell you that would be perfect happiness.’ The saint told him this because happiness is based on knowledge of all things, the good as well as the bad.” (Spiritual Unfolding, Eighth Teaching)

When we embrace active manifestation in all its plenitude, when we grasp substantial wisdom, we know “all the material secrets”: we understand that there are no pleasant and unpleasant things; that to run away from what we don’t accept is to plunge into sorrow; that all is beauty and all is love when we learn to accept and understand. Joy is having knowledge, it’s knowing, it’s uniting to the whole in its multiple active manifestations.

But immersing oneself totally in active manifestation—that is, using substantial knowledge as the source of knowing—has the effect of dividing and fragmenting. The Veil of Aheia is not the last Meditation Theme. There is one step left to unite with Hes. It is necessary to die in order to be reborn: die to multiplicity to be reborn in unity.

“Everyone can come to possess the wisdom of Beatrix. However, in order for the secret of all things to be revealed, and in order to achieve Divine Wisdom³, it is necessary for Her to submerge the Pilgrim in the Eternal Fountain.

“The Fountain, eternal spring of wisdom, teaches that human beings can achieve Beatrix’s wisdom through their own means. But in order to achieve the wisdom of Aheia, they must suspend their senses and obtain it through ecstasy and renunciation.” (Archaic Symbology, Thirteenth Teaching)

³ In the course Archaic Symbology, spiritual wisdom and divine wisdom are used interchangeably.

John of the Cross tells us:

I entered—I know not where,
and I remained—not knowing,
—all science transcending.

Entréme donde no supe,
y quedéme no sabiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.

And in another gloss:

The Sum of Perfection:
Forgetfulness of created things,
remembrance of the Creator,
attention turned toward inward things,
and loving the Beloved.

Suma de la perfección
Olvido de lo criado:
memoria del Criador;
atención a lo interior;
y estarse amando al Amado.

The Course on Spiritual Unfolding tells us about bliss:

“In the eleventh ray of love the soul reaches ecstasy.

“There is no longer any degree between one love and another, between one form of love and another. Any expression of love, even the smallest and most insignificant, ignites such a flame in her breast that it melts the soul in divine love through ecstasy. The beauty of the sky and a bird in flight caused the young Ramakrishna to fall into ecstasy. Seeing a child in the street caused John of the Cross to remember the beauty of the Child Jesus and he entered an ecstasy of love so intense that his face lit up as if in flames.”

The Veil of Aheia leads us to the consummation of knowledge of active manifestation and to experience the joy of the beauty of all creation.

The Resurrection of Hes leads us to suspend ourselves in the divine presence and experience there the bliss of Real Love. It leads us to Spiritual Wisdom.

Why is it important to meditate on the Resurrection of Hes? Because it reminds us that what we know and perceive as active manifestation needs to be completed with what is potential before it can be total reality. Our Founder Grand Master Knight said, “Cafh is a window open to eternity.” This connotes the attitude we cultivate with the meditation on the Theme of The Resurrection of Hes: opening a window to eternity.

There is continuous interaction between the active and the potential, between Aheia and Hes. Any expression of active manifestation causes a consequence in the potential state which, in turn, expresses itself in a manifested action. So reality includes both the active and the potential. Our limitation consists in the fact that we only directly perceive the active aspect of reality. That is, we perceive Aheia. When it comes to the potential aspect, Hes, we are only able to intuit it. This intuition of Hes expresses itself in our conscious mind as a sense of eternity, which we experience in an approximate way. The way we experience bliss is by remaining inwardly present before the eternity of Aheia-Hes-Aheia-Hes.

Our mystical greeting is: Aheia ote Hes, eret Hes ote Aheia (which literally means: Aheia is Hes; Hes is Aheia). This reminder, along with the meditation and the inner work we

do, helps fix our eyes on Eternity. Eternity isn't the opposite of the present, of the here and now. It is the sum of all times; it is the meeting place of the past, present and future; it is Aheia and it is Hes; it is the active and the potential.

When we fix our eyes on the here and now as opposed to the past and future, our vision is distorted. We don't understand the future consequences of our actions, nor do we learn from our past. And we run the risk of falling into selfishness, into immediate gratifications—that is, into the cycle of ignorance-pain.

A sense of eternity saves us from this danger and centers us in Love.

“The Sons’ and Daughters’ vocation is to attain—with all the strength of their lives, vocation and sacrifice—the ideal of renouncement, and to offer that realization to human beings as continuously renewed nourishment, by blazing the trail and yielding what they have achieved. This is the destiny of the Sons and Daughters of Cafh.

“This is also the commitment of the Sons and Daughters in the world and, at the same time the greatness of their lives. Their endpoint is not a goal, their fulfillment is not their own. They have given their lives beforehand to the souls to whom they are beholden. And these souls are all souls. They are the Sons and Daughters, it is the world.” (Messages II, Fifth Teaching)

“It is necessary to give everything to Love, absolutely everything.” These words could summarize our mission in this world, and our Road as well.