

MESSAGES V
2001 – 2004

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Introduction

In previous Messages we have paid special attention to the unfolding of our inner life. In these Messages we see how our inner life is so intertwined with our outer life that we cannot separate one from the other. What we think and feel affects—and usually determines—what we do and vice versa: what we do and the reactions that we generate not only influence what we feel, but also the way we think of ourselves, our priorities and our mysticism.

However, when we refer to our spiritual life, we usually think about our inner states and our practices of introspection, and we don't include what happens to us in our daily lives: our challenges, our problems and our setbacks.

So we sometimes reduce spiritual life to the small part of reality we think of as valuable, and which we tap into at brief moments, and then we submerge ourselves in the rest of life, which many of us think of as ordinary, material, and painful.

We can unfold more easily and swiftly if we integrate the moments that we dedicate to our spiritual life with all the time of our daily life. For that, we need to pay special attention to the external aspects of our life and work on them, so that we can harmonize them with what we think and feel during our moments of introspection.

Let's remember that our state of consciousness is expressed by the boundaries of our context and, especially, by the nature of the relationships we establish within it.

At this very moment we are connected with the whole world, but this does not mean that our personal world—our context—has this dimension. Though the boundaries of the world we imagine may be sweeping, the boundaries of our actual world may be very reduced.

If we were to look only at ourselves, perhaps our context would not be greater than our body, our immediate interests, our pleasures, and sorrows. If we are more inclusive, our interests and objectives

also expand. But these aspects can expand not because we are more inclusive but out of ambition and a thirst for power. We can take advantage of our remarkable facility for widespread communication to disproportionately increase our possessions, take advantage of others, or engage in struggles for dominance and conquest.

The truth is that our present vision of the world opens the door to a universal consciousness; however, this is only a potential possibility. The challenge of this potential centers mainly on our ability to recognize the nature of the relationships that we establish within our context, and to improve the quality of those relationships until they are not only harmonious, but spontaneously so.

How can we respond positively to this challenge?

Let's start by acknowledging the limits of our particular context. To our way of thinking, this context is the basis on which we can work on our unfolding.

However small our context is—our family, our circle, our community—let's honestly uncover the quality of our relationships with the people who comprise it, and our relationship with our surroundings, as well.

To evaluate the quality of our relationships, let's start by imagining our context as an organism and remember that the health of an organism depends on the degree of harmony among its parts as each fulfills its functions. We could imagine that harmony as teamwork toward a common goal. In the case of the human body, we can imagine that the goal is bodily health. In the case of the body of humankind, the goal would be its integral unfolding, both in consciousness and knowledge. Let work as a team, then, as we pursue the objective of achieving that harmony.

Working as a team keeps us aware that, from humanity's point of view, spiritual unfolding is the development of humankind as a whole. Each of us is responsible for the harmony of our context so that this unfolding can take place. To the extent that we understand

this, our spiritual moments transcend those of retrospection, prayer or reflection, and encompass even the smallest details of our daily relationships. When this happens, the limits of our context open within us and spiritually expand our state of consciousness.

We then understand how artificial it is to speak of material life and spiritual life. Life is not divided; it is we who divide it by the way we act and relate. It is up to us to unite it with our work to uphold the harmonious relationships inherent in living spiritually.

Teamwork in all the areas of our relationships influences the idea we have of ourselves. Every time we expand our state of consciousness a little, we also expand the way we think of ourselves. Our independent and isolated childhood view of ourselves tends toward a view of ourselves in which we are interconnected and participate with all that exists. Keeping this process in mind helps us leave behind, one by one, the preconceived ideas we have about ourselves, just as one takes off the peel to get to the fruit.

The unfolding of the way we think of ourselves also influences our priorities. To a child's way of thinking, a priority might be getting a toy. For an adult, the priority would doubtless be something more permanent.

To keep alive this process of unfolding, it's good not only to say that we're seeking a transcendent good, but to hold that goal in our minds as a fundamental priority. In this way, all the other circumstantial goals of our life become meaningful, and our whole life is spiritual.

This is how we come to live our mysticism.

From this point of view, we can say that we are living mysticism when we spiritualize our whole life, when each of its moments is illuminated and guided by our fundamental priority: the fulfillment of our spiritual vocation.

1. Teamwork

Let us keep our method in mind so that our spiritual work will be consistently well focused.

The method of Cafh acknowledges the fact that our interior and exterior lives are inseparably intertwined and that we unfold spiritually in relationship to others and the world.

The method organizes the reunion of souls of Cafh into groups, and these groups into Tables.

The objective and work of the groups of Cafh is to build the kind of relationship with each other that we wish for all humankind, and to build it now. This common purpose is what creates a team.

As members of Cafh we re-unite in groups; we re-form our mutual connection based on an awareness of participation.

The aim and work of the Table is to nourish and support the spiritual unfolding of its members, providing each group and each member of each group with the best environment for attaining this objective. This work of the Table is also a form of teamwork.

All human beings are united with each other, even though we are not always aware of this union. Teamwork awakens, maintains, and increases this awareness.

We all have different backgrounds, life histories, ethnicity, beliefs, and characteristics. To prevent these differences from separating us, we engage in teamwork with the purpose of unfolding spiritually and understanding and loving each other.

Individual development and the development of the group are interdependent. We balance and attune our individual work with our work in the group. Each of us works on him or herself while simultaneously working as part of the group. As an entity which is re-

sponsible for its members, the group works both on itself and on its common purpose.

The group is the necessary field in which we apply and evaluate our inner work on ourselves. Through our participation in the group, we can verify whether the subjective impression we have of our spiritual life in moments of introspection really matches the way we act.

Inner work is liable to subjective evaluations in which we are both the judge and the one who is being judged. Relationships in the group let us evaluate our inner work more objectively. How meaningful would our spiritual work be if it did not result in progress in our relationship with the group and our relationships with each of its members?

Affection among group members is the result of each member's acceptance and respect for the others, and of individual actions which are consistent with that attitude.

We generate love by accepting differences, feeling what others feel, sharing joys and sorrows, supporting each other, working together, and striving to grow in mutual understanding and participation.

When we find ourselves in conflict with someone in the group, or with the group itself, how can we improve the way we respond?

Teamwork is based on an open attitude free of misgivings and defensive self-justifications, so that we can receive feedback. It is based on a firm sense of commitment which supports us when difficulties arise.

Each of us is an integral part of the group. The mistake or success of any given member of the group is the mistake or success of all of its members.

Our love for all the members of the group is the channel through which the strength that fuses and gives life to the group flows. Each of us is responsible for the group and all of us are responsible for every group member, so we need to listen, validate and persevere in teamwork.

The group that works on itself as a team faces the same challenge as society at large in overcoming antagonisms and disagreements among its members. In other words, the group has to deal with the same competitive, aggressive and individualistic impulses that each of us brings from our past history and our milieu.

The two most common reactions to a conflict are to assert our way of thinking over the person we think has caused the conflict so as to discredit and invalidate him or her, or to leave the group, attempting by this action to undermine its validity.

Asserting ourselves over others or discrediting them might make us feel successful and well, but it dis-integrates the group. If we allowed ourselves to be led by this impulse, we would destroy whatever good we had been attempting to build.

To leave a group when a conflict arises is to run away, to escape from a reality that we have neither the desire nor the ability to assimilate and overcome, but which will continue to exist, showing us the way we refuse to take.

If we want to improve these responses we need to view every conflict as a challenge, a difficulty that we need to overcome if we want to continue developing as a group and also as individuals.

Let's remember some of our means for overcoming conflicts:

- Self-analysis
- Objective observation of the group
- Dialogue
- Constructive strategies reached by consensus

Being an integral part of a group implies having an implicit commitment to the common goal. We need to make it explicit by developing an ability to accept the personal characteristics of our group mates and the inner strength to see what we need to work on in ourselves in order to harmonize well with the group.

If we want to unfold spiritually, we need to exert ourselves and squarely face every situation that arises, especially the relationship difficulties that require us to recognize our own limitations.

Working as a team is, in practice, learning how to live in harmony. This may be the objective of our existence in this world. Material progress can allow us to live longer and more comfortably, but it's obvious that this can't be the reason for the tasks life gives us. As a matter of fact, we can learn to live in harmony whatever our material condition is. In order to do this, we need to acknowledge first that we share life with all human beings, and then that we need to learn to live as inseparable parts of the great body of humankind.

Let us work, Sons and Daughters of Cafh, for the health of humankind and the happiness we can all achieve. Let us begin by learning to live harmoniously in our spiritual group, in our family, and in our society.

Mystical union will be the consequence.

2. Know Thyself

“Know thyself” is a well-known aphorism, and wisdom is its aim. Not only does it show us the process to attain such wisdom, but it also tells us where we need to begin: in the here and now.

As a parallel, we could say that working to expand our state of consciousness—and, consequently, deepen our mysticism—means not only acknowledging the ideal that moves us and the process needed for living up to it; it also means *acknowledging the unavoidable point of departure: that is, the state of consciousness we are currently operating in*. This recognition is a firm foundation on which we can base our work of unfolding.

Although we think we know ourselves, and although we are confident that we perceive and interpret reality as it really is, these subjective judgments are not enough to reveal our real state of consciousness to us. The limitations of our perceptive abilities—together with our tendency to deny what we don’t want to recognize, and to justify what we don’t want to accept—calls into question our subjective interpretations about the way we are, what happens to us, and what happens in the world at large.

Our state of consciousness is not automatically evident to us.

What can we do about this?

Let us observe the state of the world today.

The world is not outside ourselves; we are the world. There is no basis for thinking that our relationship with God could be better than our interpersonal relationships. The mysticism we may experience can’t be of a different nature than the relationship we have with humankind, which we are part of. What we observe in others as discrimination, injustice or privilege reveals what we have inside us. There is no “outside” in life, no “other.” Everything is integrated, however much our false perceptions and defense mechanisms tell us something different. If we observe the world around us, we will

receive evidence of the state of consciousness we and all human beings are living in.

But it is not enough to observe the world. It is very easy to escape by saying, "I am not really like that." Let us recognize that we share this general state of consciousness, no matter what we think about ourselves and our mysticism.

To leave the endless look of self-deception and be able to recognize our present state of consciousness, we also need to rely on the evidence with which our life provides us.

What might this evidence be?

Let us be aware that to live is to interact, and that everything we do affects us, those around us, our society, and the world we live in. These effects are expressed in new interactions, and so on and so forth. Relationship is what we call this succession of interactions, and these are facts. Our relationship with life is what supplies our evidence, and this is expressed in our daily actions.

How are we to evaluate this evidence? So as not to remain stuck in an abstract interpretation of the facts, let us consider the effects that our actions produce.

Let us observe, analyze and evaluate impartially the reactions we produce around us and find out what level in the process of unfolding we are in: in other words, our present state of consciousness.

To recognize our conduct, let us broaden our perspective and observe the two components that inform us about it: what we think we say or do and what our surroundings perceive that we say and do. Let us then validate the milieu's response. Next, let's compare and contrast those two perspectives and, finally, draw our conclusions. If we hit a window, it is not our hand but the glass that shows us whether the blow was light, or whether it was hard enough to cause a break. If we hurt ourselves when we broke the window, it's senseless to blame the window, since we were the ones who hit it in the first place.

Let us also observe the milieu's responses to different types of behavior. When we think we know everything and give opinions about all and sundry, when we stop at nothing to get what we want, when we measure others with much stricter standards than those we apply to our own conduct, when we seek privileges, invoking rights that we deny others, when we demand justice by accusing others without foundation, when we only validate those who think like we do and form separate groups with them, we receive very different answers from our milieu than when we take our place as one among many with an open attitude to learning, when we are conscious of what we produce in our surroundings and, above all, when we also act consistently with that consciousness.

Let us observe what is evident in the way we live.

To what extent do we provide for our needs, emotional as well as material, and for the needs of those who depend on us? Do we accept our troubles and problems, or do we unload them onto others? Do we evade our conflicts or do we make ourselves vulnerable? Do we open ourselves to communication and assume our responsibility for those conflicts? How constructive is our participation in the groups we belong to? Are we supportive?

Let us observe the influence we exercise on our surroundings and the quality of the family ties we create, as well as the quality of our friendships and our relationships with coworkers. Do we have an encouraging or a depressing effect on others? Do we generate fear, anxiety, oppressiveness, or joy and companionship? Do we accept feedback and generate harmony, or do we feed on self-justifications? Do we limit our relationships to the small circle of those who give us unconditional approval?

Let us observe our attitude as we relate to others, and draw the obvious conclusions.

If we tend to be aggressive and competitive in daily life, we view interaction in terms of winning and losing. We treat life as a battlefield where, in order not to lose, we have to win at all costs.

If we tend to be passive in daily life, we think life owes us material things and happiness, and we interpret what happens to us in terms of luck or misfortune. We might even blame others for what happens to us, and use this perspective to explain our problems and the negative reactions we cause in others.

If we have a collaborative attitude in daily life, if we are determined to give our best for the sake of the common good—while respecting each other’s space and without being invasive—we promote a similar response in our environment. The capacity for mediation, for generating benefits and well-being, and even the capacity for leadership, are usually the result of generous and proactive attitudes.

Our attitudes clearly evidence the degree of our integration in a group and to what degree our state of consciousness encompasses our surroundings.

How do we experience our relationship with God—our mysticism—when we live centered in our personal problems? In all likelihood we mentally place ourselves at God’s side, contemplating a world that is foreign to both of us. Such a relationship with God means we are in denial of our reality, and especially in denial of our responsibility for that reality.

What happens in our relationship with God—our mysticism—when we work on opening ourselves to our surroundings and recognizing our state of consciousness? We start, here and now, by taking seriously our spiritual work on our relationships.

What we are today is the only possible point of departure from which we can move toward union with God. Our relationship with God is also nourished by what we are today and is expressed in our dialogue with daily life.

Since our dialogue with life shows us the effects of our interactions—and this is our point of departure—why, then, don’t we put into practice the norms that make dialogue fruitful to our relationship with life?

Let us observe, listen, validate and *assimilate* the answers we generate through our relationships with others.

To be fully conscious of the message our surroundings give us, it is not enough to listen and validate. We need to assimilate that message. It is one thing to be informed of something, but very different to incorporate that information into our understanding. Our state of consciousness expands only when, besides receiving information, we assimilate what that information tells us and translate it into consistent behavior. As we assimilate the responses of the surroundings, they are organically incorporated into our understanding and, as a result, influence the way we act.

This doesn't mean that we need to be weak, cowardly, or managed by others. On the contrary, when we assimilate the message of our surroundings, we know enough and have enough self-mastery not to act out of reaction, to take the reins of our life firmly in hand and assume responsibility for our conduct.

Let us then ground our mysticism in daily life. Let us participate effectively by assimilating the responses of life in our actions, beginning with the ones in our immediate environment. Once we have achieved this nucleus of participation, there will be a wave of consciousness capable of expanding. Thus we will salvage from the world of dreams the idea that we can attain a broader and more inclusive state of consciousness.

We have to plant the seed before it can take root. Let us plant our mysticism in daily reality, so that it may assimilate the nutrients from our relationship with life. Ordinary life, everyday life—the life we are familiar with—is the only concrete means we have to develop our state of consciousness and, consequently, our mysticism, in order to participate with humankind, and to unite with God. This is why we say that there is no spiritual life separate from life, there is only Life.

3. Priorities

The situation of the world today causes us difficulties. We have to make a great effort to manage our immediate problems, we are distressed at the suffering of so many human beings, and we are filled with anxiety about possible future events. Over time, and without our realizing it, the pressure of these feelings and the stress under which we live establish the pattern of our priorities.

This pattern of priorities exercises a great influence over our behavior, and it perpetuates whatever problems we may have.

It is essential that we reorder our priorities. The very possibility that we can do this assures us that we will be able to overcome our conflicts.

How can we reorder our priorities?

Let us first acknowledge what's positive about our situation.

We realize that there are conflicts because we are aware enough to be able to identify them. Also, it's possible for us to overcome this situation because the solution to these conflicts in most cases depends on us—that is, on human beings.

So let us assume responsibility for what happens to us. Let us discern the course of action that brought us to this point and work to overcome the problems currently afflicting us, and not only ourselves personally but society as a whole.

To understand where we are, let us begin by asking ourselves what attitudes and behaviors led to this situation in the first place.

What do we see? On one hand, we claim to have high values: responsibility, solidarity, and love. On the other, we often ignore these values. Our relationship with those we love is not always friendly, and our relationship with those we consider strangers or guilty of our suffering is clearly conflictive or even openly aggres-

sive. People we formerly said we loved feel like strangers now. We are constantly exposed to multiple examples of individual, collective and institutional behavior that substantiate these views.

From the spiritual perspective, what can we expect of our mysticism if we continue having these opposing positions and conflictive attitudes? Would our spiritual practices be considered mysticism?

Mysticism, as described by our teaching, presupposes a consistency between values and behavior, as well as clear and congruent objectives.

The road we travel from here on out will depend much more on the priorities we choose and what we do about them than on what we profess to believe and the values we profess to hold. We're not going to resolve conflicts with attitudes but with upstanding behavior, guided by objectives that stem from our vocation of unfolding and participation with all human beings.

Therefore, let us observe our words, actions and achievements. Let us seek the thread that unites our personal successes and conflicts, values and objectives with the social and global problems we are currently experiencing. This quest will lead us to ask ourselves what really matters to us, what we really want; in other words, *what our priority is*.

Our priorities are behind what we do and direct what we do. Our purposes derive from our priorities and our accomplishments derive from our purposes. This is the basic motivation that has marked the promising course that we have followed up to now and which we will continue to follow from now on.

How can we make sure to keep our course clear, the course of unfolding that we claim to have chosen? We can do so by learning how to evaluate our course, especially in terms of the kinds of priorities that move us to act.

What we call priorities are our personal objectives that precede in time or value other possible objectives.

How can we generate priorities that become purposes and guide our unfolding?

From the moment we are born, we absorb from our environment the objectives we use to decide how we will act, while simultaneously generating personal objectives according to our most prevalent tendencies. This is how our life goes in a direction that isn't necessarily the one we want it to take and which, in fact, often doesn't satisfy our need for meaning.

Life by itself doesn't express its meaning in a way that matters to us: its very reason for being. It's up to us to give meaning to our existence.

Regardless of the theoretical meaning we give to our life, it's our underlying priorities that give real meaning to what we do or attempt to accomplish in life. These priorities also establish the objective we're heading toward. As a result, these are what reveal the real and concrete meaning we give our life.

We can tell the difference between our elementary priorities—which are basically spontaneous—and our chosen priorities, which are mainly based on discernment and will.

Elementary priorities derive from the instinct to preserve our species.

The blind instinct to survive generates our automatic reactions of defense and attack, of competition and the struggle to prevail. It also generates the way we defy uncertainty and death by trying to obtain wealth, power, or both.

But the impulse to prevail is not always in keeping with a purpose of collaboration. The impulse to win at any cost is not in keeping with a purpose of participation. The impulse to please ourselves is not in keeping with the purpose of acting selflessly for the good of others.

However, we find it difficult to differentiate the impulses that influence us. The same capacity for reasoning that gives us discernment turns against us when we use it to argue for the desires that come

from rudimentary impulses that lead in the opposite direction to the expansion of our consciousness.

Our chosen priorities derive from the self-awareness we have developed and from the willpower that permits us to apply those priorities. The kinds of priorities we really choose depend on the level of our development and the extent of our willpower. The broader our awareness is, the higher will be our priority to continue developing that awareness. The stronger our willpower is, the more likely we will be able to keep this as a high priority.

The task of unfolding consists basically in separating and channeling the impulses generated by rudimentary priorities so that there will be room to develop our awareness along with the willpower to put our free will into practice. We take our first steps to doing this when we choose an objective that transcends mere survival and then reorder our priorities to match that objective.

But we need something more than an objective and a theoretical reordering of priorities if we want to lead our life toward that objective. We cannot erase the imprint of the species from our unconscious. Rudimentary priorities generate impulses that operate in tandem with our intention to find transcendent values and, in many cases, go against our effort to unfold. As happens with all members of our species, there is a force in us that drives us to prevail and to avoid personal suffering. We do not choose that impulse; it is intrinsic to our nature. But if we give it free rein, if we don't differentiate and guide it, it is unlikely that we will advance much beyond the natural awareness that is proper to our species.

Let us sincerely ask ourselves how far we interpret our rudimentary priorities in a positive light, and how far they control us. It's important for us to determine this, since our mastery over the impulses of these rudimentary priorities and the direction we give that energy also establishes the nature of our relationships—with persons, resources, possibilities, or with ethical and spiritual values.

In short, our basic priority and the willpower we apply to fulfilling it are what determine the quality and real meaning we give our life.

Let us not therefore mistake rhetoric for reality. By telling others and ourselves how elevated our ideal is, we could actually be unaware of the gap between our ideal priorities and the real priorities that we apply every day. Therefore, besides paying attention to the great yearnings we claim to have, let us focus on our will to make that ideal our priority, not only theoretically or abstractly but also in a living way through our thoughts and actions. And let us take decisive command of our process of unfolding.

Let us put our rhetoric aside; not only that which we reserve for others but also that which we speak to ourselves. Let us examine our real and present priorities, recognize where we are headed and reorder our priorities as needed.

We don't need sophisticated methods to help ourselves, just simplicity and honesty in the way we assess the process.

Upon awakening in the morning and considering the day ahead, let us draw open the curtain of our upcoming commitments and look at what is behind them. Let us make clear to ourselves what we are seeking behind the unforeseen circumstances we will face; our primary objective behind our worries and occupations. Let us make this the content of our meditations.

During the day, let us ask ourselves what priorities we are paying attention to. Are we seeking gratification? Are we feeling sorry for ourselves? Are we struggling to impose ourselves? Above all, do we ask ourselves these questions when we make decisions, when we get into arguments or disputes, when we have to decide whether we will honor our commitments or not? And let our answer be honest.

Let us not be afraid of uncovering the personal ambition in our agenda, if that's what we detect. Let us observe our priorities so that we can fine-tune our course and make sure that our life retains a transcendent meaning.

Before going to sleep at night, let us go over what we have done; let us meditate on the priority that motivated our decisions and responses to the demands of the day. Let us check that priority against the ideal we profess to have.

Let us remember every day that what we habitually seek reveals our basic priority and this is where we're headed, that this is the real meaning we're giving our life.

Of course, these reflections are not enough to attain what we aim to accomplish, but we should not let that discourage us. On the contrary, our growing capacity to recognize our defense mechanisms and reactions reveals that we are advancing. There is naturally always a distance between the point at which we are now and the horizon that moves us to expand our consciousness. Our current plenitude is nourished by the certainty that we are doing all we can to expand our consciousness without self-deception, however hard it may be to accommodate our behavior to our chosen priorities.

If everyone's priority were the good of all, it would be easy to achieve a coexistence that would motivate us to remain aware of the big picture of life and make evident the transcendent objective that gives meaning to human life. It would also be easy to end hunger, war, violence and mediocrity.

For the good of all to become everyone's priority one day, let us begin by making it our priority and acting that way decisively and with strong willpower. This will also root our mysticism in reality and we will open the way to divine union on that basis. When our mysticism takes on reality our meditations become vital, and we revitalize our love for delving ever more deeply into what we now think we know. When our mysticism takes on reality we see that it is within our reach to find and apply solutions to our problems and the problems of humankind.

Let us discern the priorities that mark the road we are opening in our consciousness; let us reorder them according to the inner clarity that we are achieving step by step, and let us concentrate our will

on retaining the meaning that the basic need of unfolding reveals to us. Today this unfolding urges us to unite with all human beings. We arrive at the threshold of the divine through the human field of action.

If we keep our fundamental priority alive, and if our willpower is consistent with that priority, we can be sure that we are giving our life transcendent meaning. And we can be sure that we will make the possibility of loving and living in peace and harmony with all human beings a reality. This achievement will clear the way to divine union.

4. Mysticism

Traditionally speaking, when we refer to mysticism we mean the experience of union with God. From this point of view, mysticism represents the aim of what we commonly call spiritual life.

Within a broader context, the concept of mysticism includes the progression that leads us to union with God. This is how we come to associate spiritual life with a mystical path. Using this approach, we can identify two main aspects in mysticism: mystical experiences and the mystical process.

When we say we've had a mystical experience, what we're referring to is a temporary—usually brief—perception of a sphere of consciousness that is greater than our habitual one.

Although strictly speaking a mystical experience is union with the divine, in practice mystical experiences cover a broad range of events, from moments of emotional exaltation to deep experiences of contemplation. Since the latter require intense and prolonged practice in a regimen of ascetic practices tailored for that purpose—a regimen that few of us can or want to follow—we're usually content to associate our mysticism with the emotions we experience from spiritual talks, readings, images, chants, or ceremonies related to subjects we consider spiritual. These emotional moments stimulate our devotion and reverence for the divine. However, let's be careful not to transform them into the ultimate aim of our mysticism, not to mistake a stimulus for an objective.

Since these mystical experiences are subjective in nature, and since we tend to think that they are what mysticism is, we tend to place mysticism in opposition to our cognitive processes. This leads us to the extreme of believing that what can be explained, reasoned, and pondered is alien to mysticism.

However, it is because of those very cognitive processes that we can understand our relationship with what is around us, develop

empathy, and open ourselves to more inclusive spheres of consciousness. Mysticism is not alien to these processes; on the contrary, it gives them meaning and direction.

The progressive expansion of our state of consciousness, which connects us with increasingly broader spheres of existence, takes place through what we call a mystical process.

The mystical process encompasses all aspects of human potential; among these, the cognitive capacities that we develop and the experiences that we undergo are indispensable for the evolution of our self-awareness and sense of participation.

A process implies changes in our state; in mysticism, it implies changes in our self-awareness. In the first years of life, we develop our self-awareness up to a certain point through interaction with our environment. Over time, we consolidate this self-awareness with the feeling of belonging. Then the pace of this development begins notably to diminish. In order to reverse this situation, the need for meaning has to appear in our consciousness, and this need must be imperative. Then it also becomes imperative for us to have the means at our disposal that will allow us to satisfy that need.

From this perspective, mysticism can be thought of as an ascetical-mystical process. By asceticism, we mean the avenue by which we foster the development of our state of consciousness; mysticism refers to the nature of that avenue and how we express in our lives what we attain through it.

The mystical asceticism of Cafh is based on its Doctrine, and is made up of the Asceticism of Renouncement and the Mysticism of the Heart.

We give the name Asceticism of Renouncement to the systematic work we do in making our mental processes, emotions, behavior, and decisions more conscious. This work is based on our sense of participation.

We give the name Mysticism of the Heart to the idea of our destiny of union with God, the intention that motivates our awareness of participation, and the attitude and behavior that express that awareness. Our conscious intention shows us the road to real love; our conscious attitude and behavior are steps along that road.

In our habitual state of consciousness, the way we spontaneously identify with the sphere of our immediate interaction sets the level of our state of consciousness. Our self-awareness derives from that sphere, as well as the place we assign for ourselves in our perception of the world. Our sense of identity and belonging are confined to the sphere with which we are identified, independent of whatever theories we might hold about human beings and the world.

We can say that we have advanced in the mystical process when, after deliberately and systematically working on ourselves and our relationships, we are able to reach a state of consciousness that is habitually more expansive than the state we would have achieved without that work. If we continue with the same work, and progressively achieve more expansiveness in our habitual state of consciousness, that will be a new advancement in the mystical process.

However, it's not easy for us to effect such change. Though it's evident that life is change, it's hard for us to accept the changes that seem to jeopardize our conception of what we are and the place we occupy in the world. We may even reject these very changes of the mystical process, since they make us reconsider what we think and feel about ourselves.

It is also difficult for us to accept changes that affect our identification with our surroundings. Although a specific identification can mean we have empathy with a particular milieu, it can also promote a defensive, protective attitude of our sense of identity and belonging, and of our own conceptions of that milieu. When we completely identify with a milieu, everything else seems alien to us.

In order to overcome our unconscious defenses and promote our unfolding, the Asceticism of Renouncement offers us a method of life as an instrument of unfolding.

Our method of life arises from the consciousness that we participate with all humankind. We discern our needs and options on the basis of present-day circumstances not only of the group we feel part of but also of the situation that the majority of human beings are currently experiencing. Not only that, but our moral and spiritual decision-making goes beyond the needs of today to include our commitment to care for the environment and future generations.

The guidelines of the Mysticism of the Heart—intention and attitude, which are linked to participation, love and empathy—give direction to our method of life. The more inclusive and less selfish our intention is, the greater is our participation. The more open and receptive our attitude is, the deeper and more effective will be the unfolding of our love and empathy.

Our method of life includes exercises, practices and a guide for conduct.

Exercises include, for example, prayer, meditation, and introspection.

Prayer keeps us aware that we have a place in the universal context. It fosters in us respect for all human beings as well as reverence for the divine mystery and its expressions in life.

Meditation gives us mental mastery and teaches us to direct our thoughts and feelings according to the meaning we give our life.

Introspection develops our capacity for self-analysis and evaluation of our behavior.

Practices include, for example, retreats and regularly recurring reunions.

Retreats give us a time for reflection at some distance from our habitual milieu, which makes it easier for us to understand our life and the course it's taking.

Regularly recurring reunions fulfill three basic functions: learning, practice, and the harmonizing of relationships.

As learning, they are a forum in which we share concepts that expand our vision of life and ourselves.

As practice, our recurrent reunions have two aspects: to carry out exercises that teach us to master and direct our thoughts and feelings, and to find ways in our daily lives to apply the concepts we have learned.

The relational aspect of the reunions is based on the fact that the individual mystical process is inseparable from the mystical process of the group. From this perspective, the purpose of the recurrent reunions is to move forward the mystical process of the group as a group. Its immediate objective is harmony in the group. The relationship among those in the reunion shows the level of the state of consciousness of each of its participants. The commitment of each member of the group to harmonize the relationship with everyone in the group also shows that individual's commitment to his or her own unfolding. The fruits attained in the relationship with the group show the individual fruit obtained by the ascetic exercises that the members practice. The purpose of teamwork in the groups of Cafh is the spiritual unfolding of the group as a group and the contribution to society of the spiritual benefits generated by the group.

From the point of view of participation, our recurrent reunions are particularly beneficial when they are inclusive; that is, when the group is composed of members from different milieus and, especially, when the group gathers with the intention of loving, understanding, participating, and learning from each other.

A guide for conduct assigns a meaning to our behavior. By conventional standards our actions may be irreproachable, and yet we may be selfish and antagonistic in our relationships. As a practice, our guide for conduct shows us two concrete and immediate steps that, if we were to take them, would powerfully move our mystical process forward: to work as a team and to harmonize our relationships

not only in our groups in our recurrent reunions but in all the groups of our milieu: family, work, social and spiritual group.

The Asceticism of Renouncement and the Mysticism of the Heart give us the guidelines for the mystical asceticism of Cafh; they also give us the necessary frame of reference to become familiar with our own individual mystical process.

Let us begin by evaluating the phase we are in right now.

The simplest and most direct way to evaluate where we find ourselves in our mystical process—i.e., what our state of consciousness is—is to discern the quality of our relationships.

How can we evaluate this? Although our mystical state is subjective, we may evaluate it objectively by seeing how we express it in our milieu, including the activities we consider spiritual, such as recurrent reunions, retreats, and private conferences.

The reactions that we cause in others let us know how they perceive our intention, attitude, participation, love, and empathy. In other words, they tell us how those individuals evaluate our mysticism. Their evaluation doesn't always match our own. Objective evaluation of ourselves by those around us provides us with moderating information for our self-analysis, if we take the input from others seriously. If we don't, we remain stuck in the vicious circle of judging subjectively a state that is likewise subjective: we are both judge and interested party at the same time.

For example, the way we treat the places and things we use demonstrates fairly objectively our love, participation and empathy for the milieu we live in, as much to others as to ourselves.

By following these simple guidelines, the objective evaluations we make from now on will show us the direction of our mystical process.

In making this contrast and comparison, let us first verify whether our fundamental priority coincides with the aim we want to give our life.

Let us bring to light the basic purpose of our motivations: What moves us to act as we do and decide as we do? What occupies our time, mind, and feelings? What are we really looking for? This is how we will know what our actual fundamental priority is.

That which we seek in the successive “now” reveals the meaning—underlying our day-to-day decisions—we give to life in general and to our life in particular. The mysticism we experience and the way we understand it depends on that meaning; it is in this meaning that the daily meditation, the study of the teachings, the reunions and, in general, all the aspects of our method of life take shape.

Let us also verify whether the changes characteristic of the mystical process are taking place in us. Although this is not a linear process, in the interest of analysis let us try to imagine it as a line that begins at closed egocentrism and ends at the union of the individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness.

In the extreme of closed egocentrism, what really matters is the life of the individual; how she feels and what she achieves for her own benefit. Ideas about life in general and its fabric of relationships don't greatly affect her behavior. Her self-awareness is that of a separate, independent being who is free to act according to her ends, and with that self-awareness she places herself within the human context and seeks to unite with God.

As the individual advances toward the other extreme on this continuum, he changes his perception of his relationship with his milieu, and also his relationship with the good he can do and the nature of his responsibility and freedom.

Just as we realize that we can't take ourselves out of the picture of life, we also understand that we can't remove ourselves from the field of humankind; that good for the individual includes the good of the whole and vice versa; that the union of an individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness opens the way for humankind to attain this union.

By developing our empathy and sense of participation, we allow ourselves less latitude to decide and act independently. Our level of participation shows us the necessary acts and decisions that will place our own good within the good of the whole.

In the same way, our sense of responsibility develops from the extreme of rejecting every commitment to that of recognizing that we are committed by the mere fact that we exist within a whole. This awareness moves us to exchange the idea that we are free to live our life as we please for the idea that we need to confirm our existential commitment through actions and decisions that are consistent with that participation.

This mystical process shows that the idea of freedom is also in process. It shows us that the freedom human rights gives us is as important as the way we make use of those rights in the light of our inevitable commitment to live in relationship. When we place individual freedom and individual rights in that context, self-analysis and self-mastery—the ascetic aspect—and the love centered in the good of all—the mystical aspect—take precedence when we decide how to exercise our rights and what use we make of our freedom.

The mystical process also teaches us that isolated mystical experiences expand our consciousness when they form an integral part of a systematic spiritual work within the framework of daily life. This expansion is measured by how these experiences influence our daily life. For example, to what extent do they broaden our points of view, dissolve our prejudices, and develop our empathy? And not only that, how do we express those advancements concretely in our relationships? If our mystical experiences do not broaden the milieu we identify with, they will not develop our sense of participation and we will not express that development in our behavior. No matter how gratifying those experiences might be, they won't move our unfolding forward. On the contrary, they would give us the illusion that we were living mysticism when, in reality, our thoughts and feelings and, particularly, our attitudes and actions, would be showing the contrary.

What role does renouncement fulfill in the mystical process?

According to the Doctrine of Cafh, mysticism is not only based on renouncement, it takes it for granted.

Every step we take forward means leaving the last step behind us. But our underlying fear of the uncertainty of life makes us cling to the supports that promise security. When we feel a strong enough basis of support to think we are secure, we identify so strongly with that security that we feel it as a sort of dispossession—a renouncement—when we advance another step in our unfolding.

But if our imperative is to unfold, we give an expansive meaning to our renouncement; it ceases to be dispossession and becomes liberation.

We renounce because to live is to renounce; in situations that evolve, we cannot stop the flow of life or crystallize our attainments and conquests.

We renounce so that the tools provided us by the Asceticism of Renouncement keep us open to learn about ourselves and our relationship with life and the world. If we did not renounce, using those tools would reinforce the state we're in now, and yet we would think that we were advancing by the mere fact that we were using those tools.

We renounce so as to free ourselves, to love without attachment, to participate without asking for anything, to develop a self-awareness that is not constrained to pre-determined limits, to expand our consciousness toward union with God, in whatever ways the divine may be revealed in us.