

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

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Chapter #1

Chapter title: The dangers of success, the agony of the ego, and the gate of heaven

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IT IS BETTER TO LEAVE A VESSEL UNFILLED, THAN TO ATTEMPT TO CARRY IT WHEN IT IS FULL.

IF YOU KEEP FEELING A POINT THAT HAS BEEN SHARPENED, THE POINT CANNOT LONG PRESERVE ITS SHARPNESS.

WHEN GOLD AND JADE FILL THE HALL, THEIR POSSESSOR CANNOT KEEP THEM SAFE.

WHEN WEALTH AND HONOUR LEAD TO ARROGANCE, THIS BRINGS EVIL ON ITSELF.

WHEN THE WORK IS DONE, AND ONE'S NAME IS BECOMING DISTINGUISHED, TO WITHDRAW INTO OBSCURITY IS THE WAY TO HEAVEN.

Life is not plain mathematics. Rather, life is an enigma. It is also not a logical arrangement. Rather it is a mystery. The path of mathematics is straight and clear; riddles are never straight and clear. The solution of logic lies hidden in its seed. Logic never leads to anything new. Mystery always goes beyond itself.

Lao Tzu is investigating this mystery in these sutras. We can understand it in two ways. If we were to imagine a person traversing a path which is absolutely straight, we can see that he will never return to the starting point of his journey. But if his path is circular, he is bound to return to the point from where he began. A circular path leads back to the beginning of the journey.

Logic believes life to be linear. Mystery contends that life is circular. The logic of the West which has influenced the consciousness of man so deeply, does not view existence as circular. In the East, where efforts have been made to understand the mystery of life, whether it was Lao Tzu or Buddha or Krishna, existence has always been viewed in the form of a circle. "Circle" means we return to the starting point.

Therefore, the mundane world has been described as a wheel. Samsara means wheel. It means a circle. Nothing in this world is straight, whether it be the seasons of the year or life itself. Life ends in death at the very point from where it started at birth. When a child is born, his very first step into life begins with his first breath. A child begins to breathe only after he is born and a man stops breathing only when he dies. Life ends with the out-going breath. The point from which life's journey begins is the very point where death takes its place. Life is a circle. If we understand this in the right perspective, we shall be able to follow Lao Tzu.

Lao Tzu says: "Do not take success to its ultimate end or else it will become failure." If you carry your success to its last point, you will have turned it into failure with your own hands. If you draw the circle of fame, it can only be completed in infamy. If life flows in a straight line then Lao Tzu is wrong, but if its course is circular, then he is right.

The East never wrote its own history whereas the West did, because the West believes that whatever event takes place is never repeated. Each happening is a unique occurrence and hence unrepeatable. Therefore Jesus can be born only once and never again. A new birth is impossible. Hence, all history is dated from the time of Jesus. It is either before Jesus or after Jesus. We do not date our history before Rama or after Rama. The first thing is, we do not even know when exactly Rama was born. This does not mean that when his whole life was chronicled such an important event as his birth was left out. This is an interesting fact, worthy of our consideration. The East never believed in noting down events of history, because the East believed firmly that nothing was inimitable and all things were bound to be repeated. Rama is born in every age and he will be born again in every age. His name will change, the form will be different; but the original, the basic happening never changes. It will keep on being repeated.

There is a story that illustrates this point. It is said that the sage Valmiki wrote the RAMAYANA much before the birth of Rama. Nowhere in the world would this be believed that Rama could be born long after Valmiki wrote his epic. But the birth of Rama is a circular happening from the eastern point of view. Just like when a wheel rotates one part comes up and then the other and that part which was up goes down and that which was down goes up. The event and the narration follow each other along the circumference. The Jainas believe that their Tirthankaras, all twenty-four of them, will come in every age. The names, the forms will change but the circumstances will keep recurring. Therefore the East did not think it necessary to write down historical events.

The East wrote the PURANAS. Puranas mean that which is the essence, that which always will happen again and again. History is a record which will never happen again. If life flows in a circle there is no need to chronicle the dates of the birth and death of Rama. As long as we keep in mind the meaning behind the life of Rama, his intrinsic character, it is enough. It becomes meaningless to record secondary matters like when he was born and when he died. We endeavour to conserve in writing only that which will not be repeated again. What happens again and again need not be recorded.

The concept of the East is to view life as a circular flow. This understanding is very significant. All movements are circular, be it the movement of the stars or the moon or the movement of the earth, or the life of man. No movement is straight anywhere in the Universe. When all things move in their own orbit, life cannot be the only exception.

The circle has its own logic, its own mystery and that is: it ends where it begins. No matter how far we travel, we return to the same point from where we started. When we strive to go further and further, we are little aware of the fact that in this very act of going further we have already started the process of going back to the starting position.

In a way, youth is the very opposite of old age. Life cannot end otherwise. So as a person progresses in youth he is heading towards old age. This is exactly what Lao Tzu means when he says, "IT IS BETTER TO LEAVE A VESSEL HALF-FILLED THAN TRY AND DRAG IT ALONG WHEN IT IS FULL," -- for when a thing is full, its end begins. This is true for anything, not just a vessel. The vessel is only an illustration. When anything is full it begins to end.

So Lao Tzu says, "If you wish to understand the truth of existence, remember, it is propitious to keep all vessels half-filled." But this is very difficult, because everything in life is designed to be filled. When you begin to fill your coffers, it is difficult to stop half-way. Leave aside wealth -- when you begin to fill your stomach, it is difficult to stop half-way. When you love someone, then too it is difficult to stop half-way. When you strive to be successful, it is impossible to stop mid-way, because ambition cannot rest half fulfilled. The fact actually is that ambition becomes strong and alive only when it reaches mid-way, for then it is confident of reaching the goal. But the faster we try to fulfil the goal, the quicker it begins to be destroyed. So whenever an ambition is fulfilled we find it has become extinct.

Lao Tzu says, "Stop half-way." To stop half-way is forbearance. But moderation is very difficult, To stop mid-way in all avenues of life is sobriety. This is very very difficult and requires great sacrifice because when we reach the mid-point, we are assured and encouraged that now the goal is near; now there is no sense in giving up. When you have crossed all the hurdles and are about to ascend a throne, to stop is impossible. It is easy to stop in the initial stages for then we can say: perhaps it is not worth our while. Then the arduous journey can be spared. Distraction and apathy can help one to hold back. The possibility of struggle and the lack of courage could also have come in one's way.

Man can stop at the very first step, but when the goal is in sight -- one more step and the throne is yours! -- then Lao Tzu says, "Stop!" because the ascent to the throne only leads to descent. What will you do after you have seated yourself on the throne? When the fruit is fully ripe it must fall. When success is complete, death is inevitable; when youth is at its zenith, old age sets in.

As soon as a thing reaches completion, it means the circle is complete; we come back once again to the starting point. An old man becomes as helpless as a newborn baby. A life full of fruitfulness leads back to the non-effectual state of the child. In a way, an old man becomes more helpless because the child has his parents to care for him, he is not even aware of his helplessness. The old man, however, has no one to fall back on, and the sense of helplessness is difficult to bear. This is the result of all the successes he has had in life! All his life man evolves ways and means to save himself. But his life's labour is lost when ultimately he finds himself more helpless than a child. Verily, we move in a circle, but we are unaware of this.

"IF WE KEEP ON FEELING THE EDGE OF THE SWORD, IT LOSES ITS SHARPNESS." This is the second part of the same riddle. The first part is: "Do not take things to their logical end for then you destroy them. You become the destroyer of the very thing you set out to complete. Halt! Stop mid-way before the wheel takes its full turn." The second part of the riddle, Lao Tzu says is: "By feeling a thing again and again, you cause it to lose its sharpness. If you keep on feeling the edge of a sword, to be sure if it is sharp, the edge becomes blunt." But this is what we do in life! If I am in love with someone, I try to confirm my

affection several times during the day. To this end I try all means, direct and indirect. But a thing that is experienced time and again loses its effect. It is the lovers themselves who kill love.

Not only is this true in the case of love but in all facets of life. If you are conscious of your wisdom at all times, you deaden the intellect. If you are aware of your greatness all the time, you are instrumental in wiping it out yourself.

How is it that the thing we keep feeling constantly is made extinct? There are reasons for this.

First and foremost, we only feel that thing repeatedly of which we are not sure. We know within our heart of hearts that the feeling of confidence is missing. In trying to assure ourselves, we constantly keep trying to have the same experience. But each effort only causes the feeling to lose its edge. The sharpness of the edge is acute only in its first impact. Each experience takes away a little of its sharpness.

People come to me and say, "We had a deep experience in our very first meditation, but now there is nothing!" They are eager to feel the same experience again and again. The sword loses its edge on constant feeling. So does meditation. In fact, the very effort to repeat an experience makes it stale; and because it is stale it loses its sensitivity. If you wear only one type of perfume every day, everyone but you will be aware of its scent. Daily repetition causes your nostrils to lose all sensitivity towards that particular scent. If you see some beautiful colours day in and day out, you will become unresponsive towards their beauty. This happens not because of the colours, but because of the fact that your eyes are no longer sensitive to them. Life becomes stale when we demand and strive for repetition. Life becomes dull and dead.

Our lives have become stale and dead. No morning seems to rise in our stale existence, nor does the sun send out new rays. No new flowers bloom, no birds sing a new song -- everything is stale and rancid. What is the reason behind this staleness, this rancidity?

In our attempt to renew an experience again and again, we tend to kill the sharpness of the experience. If I hold your hand lovingly today, tomorrow you again expect me to do the same. If I too find the experience pleasing, I shall attempt to hold your hand again. Thus we both will make this experience of joy ineffective. Our hands will meet but something will be missing; and the joy that was experienced in the first meeting will no longer be there. Then we tighten the hold of our hands and desperately try to regain the first feelings and find the joy getting less and less. Each attempt to conserve the experience becomes the cause of its extinction. This is how we destroy all our happiness. We strive like mad to relive each experience and kill it in the very process. Life is very strange. It is strange in the sense that contrary happenings take place. One who makes no effort to attain the same joy again finds himself experiencing it every day. And one who does not worry about the edge of his sword finds it sharp always.

It is said that one day there was great confusion in a famous dramatic company in Russia. The main actor, who was to act the role of a stammerer, fell ill. The show was about to begin and the management did not know what to do. But then someone suggested that the son of a rich man in the

village had stammer that was incurable. The boy was brought and after a little briefing was prepared to go on the stage. But then a miracle took place. The boy could not stammer, try as he would! What happened? Psychologists say that if a person becomes fully conscious of a thing, that thing is lost.

I was in a town where a youth was brought to me. He was a teacher in the university. His trouble was that while walking he would suddenly begin to walk like a woman. He had gone through all kinds of treatment but the malady prevailed. It was very embarrassing for him, more so since he was a teacher. I could think of only one cure for him. I told him that whenever he found himself walking like a woman, he should consciously and knowingly walk like a woman and not restrain himself. Up 'til now he had consciously forced himself to walk like a man, but unconsciously he walked like a woman. Now he should do the opposite: whenever the feeling came, he was to give it full expression.

He broke out in loud protests: 'As it is, I am in trouble. And this is what you suggest? I shall be walking like a woman all the time!' I tried to console him and by way of encouragement asked him to try and walk like a woman right before my eyes. But try as he would he could not.

One rule of the mind is, when you try very hard to do something, that something loses its edge. This is how we lose the edge of our happiness. What happens is instead that the edge of our unhappiness remains razor-sharp. We suffer so much misery in the world not because there is so much misery but because there is a fundamental error in our way of life. We do not want to touch unhappiness so its edge remains razor-sharp; and we are so eager to touch happiness that we blunt its edge in the process. In the final analysis we find nothing but misery all around and no sign of happiness anywhere. Then we say, "Happiness is difficult to come by. It is only a dream. Life is a long stream of misery."

This flow of misery and pain is entirely of our own making. One who keeps feeling the edge of misery and does not worry about happiness at all gradually finds that the edge of misery becomes dull and all of life becomes a fountain of joy. Whatever you touch is destroyed; whatever you desire is lost. You never attain what you run after. Life is not a mathematical equation but a riddle that defies solution. He who takes it to be a calculated science finds himself in difficulty. He who looks upon life as a riddle, a mystery masters all its secrets and attains the highest existence.

Lao Tzu says: "WHEN THE HOUSE IS FILLED WITH GOLD AND DIAMONDS THE OWNER CANNOT PROTECT IT."

This is contradictory. Actually, a man can protect his treasures only when he is poor, only when it is just enough to be guarded by a single person. When a man requires the help of others to guard his wealth, then only can he be called rich. And when this need arises, the fear of losing it also sets in because wealth in the hands of others is never safe. For this very reason, a unique happening is witnessed in the world: a poor man sleeps without a care, as if all the world belongs to him; whereas a rich man passes sleepless nights. The beggar lives with the majesty of an emperor while the emperor's life is worse than a beggar's. He has to entrust others with what is his and hence his worry.

Genghis Khan died. His death is significant. It is only natural for a man like him to be afraid of death. He killed millions so that he could remain alive; but the more he killed, the more fearful he became. He

feared that someone was bound to kill him because he has made many enemies. His nights were sleepless because death was more possible in the darkness of the night. His fears lead him to doubt all his guards, so he kept guards to guard the guards and another set of guards to guard these. He kept seven lines of guards to guard his tent. He was sure that these guards who stood guard on each other could not possibly be friends.

Each time, he added one more line of guards for more security.

Genghis Khan slept in the afternoons and never at night, in spite of the elaborate precautions. But one night he was so tired that he fell to sleep. His sword was always by his side for an emergency. It happened that one of the horses tied outside his tent got loose. There was Pandemonium all around. The guards began to shout and run. Genghis woke with a start. Sword in hand, he rushed out, sure that the enemy had taken advantage of the dark. His foot slipped and he fell, face downwards. The peg of the tent pierced his stomach. This peg, this tent, was part of the arrangement for his safety. No one had come to kill him. His own fear killed him -- he had run out to save himself.

Such happenings take place all throughout life. Man builds a house; then he keeps a sentry to guard the house. He amasses wealth; then he has to make arrangements to protect it. This web spreads further and further till he finally forgets that the person for whom he has toiled so much has turned into a mere watchman.

In the biography of Andrew Carnegie, the American millionaire, it is written that two days before his death, he asked his secretary if they both were reborn again, would he like to be his secretary or would he like to be Andrew Carnegie? (At the time of death, he was worth ten billion rupees.)

His secretary replied, "Forgive me Sir for saying so, but I shall never make the mistake of asking God for such a wealth. Had I not been your secretary, I would perhaps have died with the desire of becoming Andrew Carnegie in my next life; but now no." Andrew asked him the reason why. He said, "I have been witnessing your everyday life and have come to the conclusion that no one can be more destitute than you. You cannot sleep well, you cannot talk or move freely, you have no time for your wife and children. You arrive first at the office. You are there by 8.30 a.m. Even your lowest worker does not come till 9 a.m. Your clerk arrives at 10:30, your manager at 12.00 and your director at 1:00. I see your director leave by 3 :00 in the afternoon, your manager by 4:00, your clerk leaves by 4:30 and your lowest worker by 5:00. But I have never seen you leave the office before 7:00 in the evening. All those who work for you are taking care of someone else's interests for the sake of earning their livelihood, whereas Andrew Carnegie has to guard his own interests."

Lao Tzu says, "When the coffers are filled with gold and precious stones, the owner is not capable of guarding them." And when the owner cannot protect his treasure, he is no longer the owner but the slave to his wealth.

We never know when we become slaves to our fortunes. Our efforts are always towards greater ownership. We forget that we have already become slaves to that which we sought to own and possess. The fact is that whoever tries to be the owner of anything in this world becomes its slave. It is said that

life is a great mystery because only one, who does not insist on his ownership of anyone or anything, is an owner in the real sense of the word.

This is not the case with human beings only. If you try to possess even inanimate things, they will possess you! When you have to leave your house, it is not the house that cries at the separation but you. Objects also become the owners. The possessor becomes the possessed. The master becomes the slave of the very thing he possesses.

"WHEN ARROGANCE ARISES, DUE TO SUCCESS AND HONOUR, IT IS AN ILL-OMEN FOR THE PERSON CONCERNED. AND WHEN THE WORK IS DONE, AND ONE'S NAME BECOMES DISTINGUISHED, TO WITHDRAW INTO OBSCURITY IS THE WAY TO HEAVEN."

The doer must withdraw into obscurity as soon as his work is done so that arrogance has no chance to arise. Otherwise success leads to great failure. There is no hell greater than the hell of success. Our own success becomes poisonous for us. We weave a web of our own entanglements in much the same way as a spider. Then we bewail our lot and struggle to find ways and means to get out of our self-inflicted imprisonment. This prison is of our own making, but it happens in such a way that we become aware of it only when it is already done. From this sutra, we have to recognise and understand how this unknown slavery creeps in and how we ourselves are responsible for it.

First and foremost, there is only one kind of ownership that is possible in this world (and such is the rule of nature): the ownership of one's own self. We cannot be the masters of anything except our own selves. As soon as a person strives to possess what is other than himself, he becomes a slave. When a Mahavira or a Buddha gives up his throne and kingdom, we marvel at their great renunciation but we are mistaken. Buddha and Mahavira renounced their own slavery in doing so, for it became clear to them that all possessorships are forms of slavery. The greater the ownership, greater is the subservience.

Therefore an interesting fact comes to our notice: there is not a single case in the annals of our history where a beggar gives up his begging in order to become a renunciate. Do you know of a single case when a beggar has given up his begging bowl and moved into a forest? What is the reason that a beggar cannot give up his begging bowl whereas kings have relinquished their thrones?

There have been many instances of kings giving up their kingdoms and becoming mendicants, but no beggar has had the courage to give up begging. What is the reason? Actually the beggar's servitude is so negligible that he is not aware of the fact that he is a slave. The king's subservience to his possessions reaches such a suicidal point that he cannot help but be conscious of it. The kingdom becomes like a big prison to him, whereas a beggar's bowl gives no indication of a prison. The beggar can move with it freely wherever he likes. The prison as yet is so small that it can dangle from his hand. The king is not free to move about with his kingdom. He has to live within it. The illusion of ownership becomes clear to the king and hence he can renounce it. The beggar's sense of ownership being infinitesimal, the illusion persists.

Therefore as long as a person is aware of his ownership, know that he is yet a poor man. His possessions as yet are few. The day you realise your slavery to your possessions, know that you are rich in the right sense of the word. This is the only criterion to judge a rich man or a poor man. Says Lao Tzu: "If you desire to be the owner, take care that your possessions need no protection, for then you are no more than a guardian."

Lao Tzu also says: "When your task is duly fulfilled make haste to withdraw into obscurity and thus give no chance for your arrogance to crystallize." Let no one know that you were the doer. When Lao Tzu's fame spread far and wide and people trekked hundreds of miles to come and meet him, Lao Tzu quietly slipped away one day and was no longer heard of. He withdrew into obscurity. He, disappeared from view completely. It was never known when Lao Tzu died or how he died! All that is known is that one fine day he disappeared. This same advice he gives to others: when your labour is crowned with success, step silently into oblivion.

But this is very difficult because this is the moment we toiled for. We step back into obscurity at times but that is in our moments of defeat and failure. Then we wish to hide, to run away. In our sorrow and despair, we even go to the extent of committing suicide. This goes to show how deeply we wish to withdraw into obscurity; to fade away, so that we leave no trace behind. When, however, a person withdraws into oblivion in the hour of his success, a great transformation takes place in his life.

To run away from life, to drown oneself in oblivion in one's hour of despair and failure, is a very natural reaction. The mind always prompts us to run away, to hide when beset with failure, so that others may not know. Failure torments the ego, whereas success nourishes it. When a man is successful, he walks with his chest out. He goes out of his way to meet even those whom he does not know because now he is very eager that all the world should know of his success. This was the very moment he longed for. But here is this man Lao Tzu who says, "Fade back into obscurity when your work is successful."

If the ego becomes established in the moment of success, it paves the way to hell. If you withdraw yourself from the public gaze in your moment of achievement, you find yourself on the doorstep of heaven. When the doer's fame spreads at the successful completion of his mission, his stepping into obscurity opens the gate of heaven.

Here, hell means the ego and heaven means the annihilation of the ego. There is no other heaven or hell. The stronger the 'I', the greater the hell; the rarer the 'I' the more I am in heaven. My being in heaven depends on how much of the 'I' is in me. The knowledge that "I am" is the cause of all my woes and the feeling that 'I am not', is my bliss, my joy.

Understand this a little. Whenever you experience pain or suffer anguish, have you tried to find out where and what this pain is? What is the fundamental cause of the pain? Is someone else responsible for it or is it your way of life, your constant endeavour to feed your ego that is the cause? Or, when you have experienced joy, in that moment of bliss, look within and you will find the 'I' completely missing in you.

In the hour of pain, the ego crystallizes even more. The shadow of the ego is the pain itself. But we endeavour to save the ego and enter heaven too! The 'I' must be saved and heaven must also be attained. But if the 'I' is saved, you cannot achieve bliss because the 'I' is the pain, the misery itself.

Therefore it is necessary to break our present patterns of life at certain places and also to become alert and awakened in a different sense. Lao Tzu says: "Step back into oblivion in your hour of success."

We should also recognise the alternative implication of this statement: Do not hide in obscurity in the hour of defeat. Leave not the streets of your town in the hour of defeat, but step back into obscurity when rewarded with success so much so that no one sees you. He who steps back in the hour of his glory his ego disappears at once. And he who stands doggedly in the face of defeat? His ego also vanishes.

As opposed to this, there are two ways which help to strengthen the ego: To hide in the hour of defeat and to reveal yourself to all the world in the hour of your success. It is because of the ego that we hide ourselves in defeat and it is because of the ego that we wish to display ourselves in the hour of success.

When a person begins to understand fully the character of the ego and the means through which it develops, he can play with it. At present, the ego plays with us; but when a man is prepared to play with his ego he is filled with strength and is freed from the ego.

Gurdjieff was in New York where his theories were being widely acclaimed. One of his disciples has recorded, "We could never understand Gurdjieff. Whenever his mission almost reached completion he somehow turned it into a failure. He never missed a single opportunity to do so. And oh, the trouble he took, the way he toiled to fulfil his aims!"

Gurdjieff established many ashrams. There was one on the outskirts of Paris. For years he toiled to develop this ashram. He got hundreds of people to join it. Then one fine day when all was set, he closed up the place! Those who had worked zealously for him were shocked at this. They asked him why, when after so much trouble, the goal was almost reached and they were hopeful that now the ashram would get going, did he abandon the project. Gurdjieff replied, "I worked so hard only to abandon the project."

In New York also, he got going a very big institution but abandoned it as soon as it was established. Many of his followers were convinced he was insane. When the goal was far away, he worked ceaselessly and with a vengeance; but in the hour of success, he turned his back on it. He was mad! His close associates left him one by one.

But Lao Tzu calls such a man a wise man. Lao Tzu says: "When success is attained, step quietly into obscurity." If this statement is understood from within, the inner transformation will come.

You can try this experiment for yourself in small things in life. If you pick up an umbrella dropped by a man on the street, you wait expectantly for his thanks. If he does not thank you, you are terribly disappointed. We cannot even let go of a small thank-you. But Lao Tzu says: "When your world reaches the point of fulfillment, when your life's purpose has been served and the goal appears before your eyes, turn your back and disappear." This necessitates a well-integrated atman (soul).

When a person turns his back on the goal, the goal begins to follow him. When a person steps back into oblivion in the hour of his success, no trace of failure remains in his life. Such a man can never be a failure. In fact, he has discovered the alchemy of success. He has learnt the art whereby he is no longer a human being but God himself. He has mastered man's weakness for the ego and this enables him to meet his failures face to face and treat his success as if it were nothing.

Lao Tzu disappeared. One of his disciples followed him a long way out of the village. Lao Tzu persuaded him to go back, because now he was going to enter into oblivion. He told him, "Go back and you shall attain great heights of success. Thousands will come to ask about me. "You have to answer them." This appealed to the reasoning of the disciple. How man indulges in rationalisation!

"It is only to do your work that I am going back," he told Lao Tzu. "People will come and you shall not be there to answer their questions. I cannot explain as you do, but I shall try my best."

His mind clung to the desire of fame and respect, it was now clear to him that there was no point in following Lao Tzu. No one knew him in the villages beyond and besides, he was about to die in the wilderness. But the sum total of his life's effort lay behind him. For his whole life he spread his fragrance and not when people were drawn by the fragrance, he was running away! Barely a night the disciple spent with him. The next morning he returned to the village.

The last person to see Lao Tzu was the guard at the check-post. Thereafter, no one knows what happened to him. Chinese tradition believes that he is still alive. For how can such a man die? Death occurs only to the ego. How can such a man, who never accumulated any ego, die? When the king came to fall at his feet, he left his hut and ran away. Such a man can never die!

Two unusual stories exist about Lao Tzu: One is that he was sixty-two years old when he was born... an old man! Those who loved him asserted that such people are always born old.

Most of us remain juvenile till the hour of death. We find eighty year old men playing with toys. The toys are different, but the play is the same.

We see a child sucking his bottle and we see an old man sucking his pipe. Psychologists say that both are doing the same, if an old man were to suck milk from a bottle he would look odd; so he finds other means of satisfying himself. He sucks at a pipe or a cigarette. When the warm smoke goes within, he gets the same satisfaction as when the mother's warm milk travelled down his throat. This delights and satisfies him. There is no difference between a child and an old man. And if there is, it is only the difference in stupidity. The child at least, drinks milk to sustain himself. The old man achieves nothing but a false satisfaction. A general observation about old men is that their innate childishness is intact. Only forms and methods have changed. Childishness persists.

Little things cause us irritation. Little things strengthen the ego, increasing our greed, our fears and desires. Everything remains the same as we grow older; there is no difference. So according to the Lao-Tzu point of view, we all die as children.

And here is Lao Tzu who is supposed to have been born old. He was sixty-two when he was born -- such is the legend. There are many such legends in the treasure-chest of the Orient which are very meaningful. The fact is, a Lao Tzu cannot be born unless he is mature.

Another story about him is that, no one knows when he died because he never died. Such a one never dies. The mortal thing that dies within us is the ego. We do not die; it is the ego created by us that dies. The pain of death is the pain of the dying ego. All that we have gathered together at the insistence of our ego, we see being snatched away from us at the time of death. All that we constructed breaks; all that we attained is lost.

One thing in all this is certain -- we have not created ourselves. Another thing that is certain is that we are not snatched away even by death.

Do you know who you were before you were born? No, because nothing is remembered except the ego, and the ego takes three to five years to develop. Therefore, the psychologists say that we cannot remember our lives before the age of three to five years. Why is this so? After all, we were present from birth to the age of three. It is because it takes three years for the ego to develop.

This brings us to an interesting fact -- children never hesitate to steal or tell lies. This does not mean they are thieves or liars. The actual fact is, the ego is still absent so the child cannot differentiate between 'mine' and 'thine'. What we look upon as theft is pure socialism to a child. The 'I' that creates differences between two people, is not developed as yet. What we look upon as theft is because of the ego. For a child, everything in this world is his; whatever he likes belongs to him. As yet, his likes and dislikes are all that matter to him. The all-deciding ego is yet unformed.

Similarly, a child sees no difference between truth and untruth, for he cannot differentiate between dream and reality. We often see a child waking up from sleep crying because of a doll that was broken in his dreams. The ego is essential to differentiate between the dreams of the night and the reality of the day.

When a person like Lao Tzu sheds his ego and views the world, he too finds no difference between dream and reality. This is the reason that Shankara can say, "The world is an illusion." It only means this; that in a manner of speaking, the world is also, a dream. Once the dream was as real as the world -- before the advent of the ego. Then came the ego and separated dream from reality. This discrimination was created by the ego. Then for Lao Tzu this ego, this 'I' dissolved and the world again began to look like a dream.

At the moment of death, this self-created 'I' crumbles and breaks. In every aspect its hold gives way. This is the agony, the pain, of death. Would that we remembered at that hour that when the ego is not, then too I am. Then we would enter death as joyfully as we entered birth. Then we would enter the realm of the great sleep of death as willingly and as happily as we enter the realm of sleep each night.

This happening however, cannot take place by chance at the time of death. He who has accumulated success all his life and shunned failures; who has never missed a single opportunity, even if it be false, to

nurture his ego, has only crystallised his ego. That is why flattery sounds so sweet. The flatterer knows that what he says is not true and the one flattered also knows it is not true, yet when praise is showered, we do not have the strength to repudiate it. If someone says to you that you are the best looking person he has ever seen -- and you know that such a thought has never crossed your mind when you stand before the mirror each day, you still feel like believing him when he praises you. You accept the praise offered you without a question.

And you never refuse the scandal about others no matter how improbable. One's own glorification, however absurd, is always acceptable; we never feel the flattery is going beyond limits. Everything appears within the bounds of reason both as far as praise of oneself is concerned or slander about another. One who takes pleasure in scandalising others, who has delighted in his own praise, who stands proudly facing the world in his hour of triumph and hides himself in times of failure, he who has always sought respect and honour and fled from ridicule and revilement -- such a man cannot let go of his ego all of a sudden at the time of death.

But one who has done the opposite of this -- who has doubted the scandal about others and refused to believe it, who has doubted the authenticity of the praise lavished on him and refused to believe it; who has stood his ground in the face of failure and drawn back in the hour of success; if such a characteristic persists throughout his life, freedom is possible at the hour of death. The doors of hell are perpetually closed for such a person because he has lost the very key that opens it. The gates of heaven are forever open to him. Heaven means that the doors of happiness remain wide open for him. Then wherever he is, however he is, he cannot be anything but happy. There is no way to take away his happiness. His eyes always catch the good and the beautiful in everything and he derives pleasure from it. He remains closed to the painful and ugly aspect of things. Such a person sees diamonds in Pebbles and flowers in thorns. He sees light in darkness. For him, death is the ultimate din of life.

Therefore, I say, life is not mathematics but all insoluble mystery. It is not arithmetic where two and two is always four. A riddle never conforms to calculations. Many times the result turns out to be other than the calculated outcome; even contrary. All the same, riddles have their own rules that are very subtle -- and it is about these riddles that Lao Tzu speak If we wish to understand the workings of a riddle, we will have to first understand its subtle mathematics. Understand it in this way. When a hunter shoots an arrow at a bird that is flying in the air, he has to make use of some subtle calculations. If he aims straight at the bird when it is at a certain place and shoots. he is bound to miss. He has to aim the arrow at where the bird will be when the arrow reaches the height at which the bird is flying. If he aims straight at the bird. the bird will have long passed the target when the arrow reaches. So he has to aim at the point where the bird is not, but where the bird will be in due time. The art of archery is to shoot the arrow where the bird is not, because you are aiming at life that is moving, flowing. This is the secret of life also. For a dead bird no calculations are required but for a living bird. you have to calculate.

Dead mathematics move on a straight line. The mathematics of life cannot move linearly. Lao Tzu says, "If you wish for success, avoid it. If you desire failure, cling to success." Lao Tzu says, "If you wish to become extinct, if you wish to die, cling to life with all your might. If you wish to live. Let go of life, let go of your hold on it."

If you wish to be happy, do not seek happiness. He who seeks happiness, loses it. He who seeks unhappiness, loses it. He who sets out to attain happiness gets unhappiness instead: and he who seeks unhappiness, never finds it. If we begin to see things in this perspective, our every movement, our mode of thinking, our vision, our philosophy will be entirely different.

When a person attains this perception, I call him a sannyasin. Ordinarily those whom we call sannyasins also think in terms of worldly mathematics. They too, set out to seek God. Remember, he who sets out to seek God finds him difficult to attain. Calculations hold good only in the quest for material gains, not in the quest for God. God is not such a thing that you can take a staff and set out to attain Him. You will find that ultimately you are left with the staff only. God is not an object to be sought; God is an experience. When you are not, when the seeker is lost, He appears.

He who sets out to seek finds himself in difficulty, because the seeker is always present in the search. Therefore the ego of a sannyasin becomes very dense, very dangerous. He is seeking God. If you question him, he will look down on you with scorn. What are you? A mere nothing! You run after mundane things that are not worth a penny. Here is he: in search of eternal wealth! You are a sinner in his eyes; he is the embodiment of virtue. It is only natural that he should be filled with pride. He finds it difficult to sit with you, he requires a throne. This is very natural: it is the working of ordinary mathematics. I was reading the life of a Japanese fakir, Tatasusu. Whenever a person came and praised him, he would listen very attentively. Then when he finished he would say, "You have come to a wrong person I am afraid, for I have none of the qualities you recounted. I am sorry; you have made a mistake. I am not the person you are talking about." He said this with such assurance that the stranger could believe him and ask his pardon.

If any one came to condemn, revile him, Tatasusu would give him just as patient a hearing and agree wholeheartedly with what he said. It was only after his death that it came to be known how many false criticisms he readily accepted. Not only did he agree with them whole-heartedly but he took care to see that the one who was complaining returned fully satisfied that he was right.

If a man came to him and said, "I have heard that you are an ill-tempered person," Tatasusu would pick up a stick and his eyes would turn red with anger. His disciples would be shocked to see their master, whom they knew so well, becoming angry but the newcomer would be satisfied that his doubts were confirmed. He seeks no further proof. Tatasusu would say, "You are right. My anger knows no bounds."

His disciples would ask, "We have never seen you so angry!" Tatasusu would reply, "You never gave me a chance to show you my anger. Had you done so I would have given you a taste of it. This poor man walked miles to tell me I was a wrathful man. Was it not right that I should at least show him my anger? Now he is satisfied. He will not have to trouble himself again."

Lao Tzu speaks of such a man. Only such people can be called sannyasins. A new dimension opens in the life of such men. We shall talk about this new dimension in the sutras that follow.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #2

Chapter title: The oneness of the body and the soul, the eternal state of Tao, and the sadhana of the vital breath

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WHEN THE INTELLIGENT SOUL AND THE ANIMAL SOUL ARE HELD TOGETHER IN ONE EMBRACE, THEY CAN BE KEPT FROM SEPARATING.

WHEN ONE GIVES UNDIVIDED ATTENTION TO THE (VITAL) BREATH AND BRINGS IT TO THE UTMOST DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY, HE CAN BECOME LIKE A (TENDER) BABE.

WHEN HE HAS CLEANSED AWAY THE MOST MYSTERIOUS SIGHTS (OF HIS IMAGINATION), HE CAN BECOME WITHOUT FLAW.

We are told about the one indivisible truth. Yet those who talk of the indivisible truth also divide the soul and the body into two; they also believe the body and the soul to be separate. If there is a difference between the body and the soul, then the world and God are bound to be apart. The slightest assumption of a difference gives place to duality, so a very contradictory situation takes place: the believer of indivisible oneness, also believes in the duality of things.

In this sutra, Lao Tzu is laying the foundation stone of advaita (the indivisible). Lao Tzu says: "God and the universe cannot be one unless there is oneness between the body and the soul." Unless there is an experience of oneness between the body and the soul, there can be no unison between matter and consciousness.

The so-called religious person will find this hard to accept. If a person believes himself to be divided within, he cannot accept existence to be one. Only one who is integrated within himself can know existence to be one, indivisible whole. The world is the expanded body; consciousness is the enormous

universal spirit. If my consciousness is apart from my body, God's consciousness also is bound to be aloof and apart from the world. Lao Tzu says: "If the body and soul can be kept in union, then alone is the Indivisible possible" -- then alone can the integrated whole blossom.

How does this discrimination between the body and the soul take place? If we know this, we shall understand their union also.

When a child is born, it is not conscious of any differentiation between the body and the soul. The body and the soul develop as one existence. But the necessities of life -- culture, society, security -- begin to teach us to discriminate between the body and the soul. When a child feels hunger, he is taught that it is not necessary that he must eat whenever he is hungry; it is necessary to control hunger. This is an inevitable arrangement of life. The child needs to be taught self-control. He has to learn that it is not incumbent on him to satisfy his bodily needs as and when they arise. It is not essential that he must sleep when he is sleepy or quench his thirst as soon as it arises.

As soon as a child learns self-restraint, he begins to feel himself to be apart from his body. The body feels hungry and he restrains his hunger; the body feels sleepy and he forbids it to sleep. Then he believes himself to be apart and different from that which he controls.

As the child develops the power to control, the union of the body and soul develops a crack. As the control increases, the split becomes bigger and bigger. The bigger the gulf, the more difficult it becomes for him to feel one with existence, because one who finds it difficult to be one with his own self finds it impossible to be one with the larger body of the universe.

This deep-rooted duality arises out of the necessities of life. It is useful, but is not the reality. It is not essential that all that is useful in life is the truth. Many times, untruth turns out to be more useful. This untruth is very useful. So it has to be cultivated. But if our minds are forever in control and we find it difficult to extricate ourselves from these useful untruths, they will prove suicidal.

It is necessary to develop restraint and forbearance. Necessities of the body arise and the power to control them needs to be developed. By and by the one in whom the needs arise becomes differentiated from the one who controls the needs. The moment intellect and desire appear distinct from each other things split into two within us. Then, for our whole life, we are tormented by the conflict between these two parts within us. Our whole life becomes an inner struggle. Desires forever assert themselves and the intellect forever asserts its own requirements. Then slowly and slowly, everything within us divides into two.

Psychologists say that we begin to look upon the part of our body below the navel as the lesser part of us not only because it is situated in a lower position but also because we think of it as inferior. We establish an identity with the upper half of the body and sever all connections with the lower half. We feel as if the lower part of the body does not belong to us and that only the upper half is us, the lower part gradually being identified with desire. Eventually, intellect gets centered in the head. This is why we recognise ourselves only by our faces.

The rest of the body we hide. Not from rain or heat or snow, but because we do not want to identify ourselves with any other part of ourselves except the head, where the intellect is located. It is an interesting fact that if you are asked to identify your body minus the head, you yourself will fail to recognise it. Our recognition is connected with our intellect only. The rest of the body we have cast aside as being a victim of our desires. This has produced far-reaching effects about which we shall talk later.

In this first sutra Lao Tzu says: "IF THE INTELLECTUAL SOUL AND THE ANIMAL SOUL ARE HELD TOGETHER IN ONE EMBRACE. THEY CAN BE SAVED FROM SEPARATION." If my intelligence and my senses are interlocked, no duality, no turmoil from contradictions, can form within me. But if these two are not amalgamated, if the intellect and the senses are divided and I destroy all bridges between them, the 'I' cannot help the disintegration that will occur within myself. This is the state of schizophrenia the psychologist speaks of, a state which exists in each one of us to some extent. When a person becomes too disintegrated within himself, he goes mad. We manage somehow to keep ourselves below the danger level. The scales balance precariously between sanity and insanity. We are embroiled in a deep struggle within ourselves. There is a constant conflict, an opposition, an enmity within. We are at war with everything within ourselves.

A new movement has just been started in the West, especially in America. This movement is an attempt to increase the sensitivity of people. It is found that man has almost lost his sensitivity. We touch, but our touch is dead; we see, but our look is blind; we hear, but it is just a sound that passes through the ears. Nothing reaches the heart. We talk of love, we make love, but our love is lifeless. The heart that loves seems devoid of passion. Our love is artificial. We do everything, but all our actions are void, inert, mechanical, devoid of all sensitivity. Sensitivity has to be brought back.

Psychologists say that if we fail to restore man's sensitivity, it will be difficult to save him from extinction by the end of this century. As yet, only a few people are becoming insane, but soon large numbers will begin to lose their sanity. Sensitivity has got to be restored. But how?

If you have any memories of childhood, you will remember that a flower in bloom held an inexplicable fascination for you once. Its beauty evoked a deep response within you. Flowers bloom even now but their beauty has lost all meaning for you. They might as well not be there at all. The sun rises now as it always did, but it no longer fills you with exuberance. The moon comes out in the sky every night too, but it rarely touches you. What has happened? Lao Tzu says, "The embrace is broken."

The intellect and the senses stand at different levels. Sensitivity arises in the senses, The intellect experiences it. If these two are separated, sensitivity is lost. Then the senses become inert and dull, and the intellect is left uninformed. Then the poetry, the music, the essence of life, is all dried up.

Children appear to be living in heaven here, on this very earth where we live. This is because their animal soul and their intellectual soul are still one. When a child eats, it is not only the body that eats; his very soul derives pleasure out of the act of eating. When he dances, his very soul dances with the body; when he runs, his soul runs with him. He is, as yet, united, integrated within himself. No crack has yet developed within him. He is still an indivisible whole.

We cannot experience the bliss of a child or the love of a child. It should actually be the other way around: our greater ability, backed by our experiences of a lifetime, should qualify us. But this is not so because the process of experience is disrupted within us. When I touch your hand, it is only a hand touching a hand. If my hand is inert, the intellect remains unaffected.

One of the three gurus of Mahatma Gandhi was a person by the name of Handiaro. It is said of him that when anyone touched his hand, they got the feeling of touching a dead man's hand. His friends have recorded that if anyone were to touch Handiaro's hand with his eyes closed, it was difficult to tell whether they were touching a piece of wood or a live hand.

His hands were devoid of all sensitivity.

Perhaps this is an exaggeration, but in our case it is very true. If the hand is alive, if it is very sensitive, then every hair on the hand, every pore on the skin, is filled with a current of electricity. Then only can the intellect take in the experience, the bliss, of the touch.

If the hand is lifeless, no message reaches the intellect, because the intellect has no direct means of its own. The senses are the gates of intelligence and the body is the medium of the soul. The body is the extension of the soul in the world of matter. If we become enemies of our bodies, we sever all our connections with the world. Our connection too breaks in existence in the same proportion as our connection to the body.

We live, but there is always a distance between us and existence. Go where we may, this distance always remains. When we love, this distance remains, when we are friendly or kind, the distance remains; whatever we do, this distance remains and is very difficult to cross. Lao Tzu says: "Duality forms within us because of this disparity between the senses and intelligence." This disparity, however, is also useful. Distance should be formed at one time and broken at another time. That is why Jesus has said: "Only those who have become like children can enter the kingdom of God."

To become like children once more is to be so sensitive that each experience reaches to the core. Children possess an indivisibility (advaita) but it is born out of ignorance. The wise regain this advaita but this time it is born out of wisdom. There is an innocence about children, but it is an ignorant innocence. This same innocence has to be re-attained by the sage. But then it is an innocence that results from wisdom and full awakening. An awakened state of innocence has to be established. The advaita of the child does not last because it is not his attainment. His surroundings and situations bring about a conflict within him and break his innocence, his indivisibility. It is, however, not necessary for man to die with this duality within him. Advaita can be re-established during his lifetime. When this happens, the advaita thus established is richer and sounder than the advaita of childhood. The experiences of a lifetime add greater dignity to it.

What should be done so that we can embrace advaita with ourselves? How can we be one within? In Lao Tzu's method of sadhana there are very easy methods to develop this unison within ourselves. Let us talk of one method and then we shall take up the sadhana in greater detail.

Lao Tzu believed that whatever we do -- whether we sit or stand, eat or sleep -- we should be absolutely immersed in our acting, be completely one with it. If you are walking on the road, become the walking itself. There should not be any difference between you and the act. "I am the walking!" Not even the method of witnessing that we talk about can lead to advaita. At a certain point, even the witness has to be dropped.

Krishnamurti talks of awareness, but even this does not lead to advaita; it has to be discarded later. Lao Tzu says, "Neither awareness nor witnessing but oneness, complete absorption. Become the act itself." When you walk, become the walking itself; the walker should not remain. Similarly, when you eat, become the very act of eating itself; when you look, become the looking itself. Whatever you do, do it with such wholehearted totality, that you are completely one with the act. There should be no difference between the act as the doer.

When the distance between the act and the doer begins to shrink, it is possible to create bridges once again between the animal and the intellect, between the senses and discretion, between the body and the soul. They can then be bound in one embrace. This embrace is referred to in tantra as the inner intercourse, where the consciousness within becomes one with the desire.

Tantra refers to intelligence as the male element and to the nature of the body as the female element. When the male and the female within become one, bound in a single embrace, the highest peak of samadhi is attained. It is this embrace that Lao Tzu speaks of.

The 'I' within me should be totally absent in whatever I do. The act may be as insignificant as possible, but, I should be thoroughly immersed in it; I should be completely one with it. I should be so perfectly absorbed in the act that the 'I' is no more. The 'I' within me is the cause of all duality. Being completely one and integrated is becoming unbiased, free. It is only then that the embrace is possible. But then this process has to be spread all over one's life. This is difficult because there are certain inherent distances between you and the body and until these distances are broken, it is difficult to practise the sadhana of complete absorption.

Let us understand these differences. They have become so mechanical, but unless we break these mechanical arrangements it is useless to practise the sadhana of absorption. It is possible that the very thought that you should be one with what you do may create fresh dualities within you. This very thought will keep you from becoming one with your actions. However hard you may try -- say, to be absorbed in the act of eating -- your very effort will keep you out of it.

Certain mechanical errors have taken place within us. These have to be understood and eradicated. If you observe a child sleeping in his cot, one thing which should be noted by you, but which does not strike us normally, is that it is the child's abdomen that goes up and down as he breathes and not his chest which is absolutely relaxed. In our case, we breathe through the chest. Lao Tzu says -- and now even science agrees with him -- that as the animal consciousness and mental consciousness of man begin to separate, the seat of the breath is changed from the navel to the chest. The greater the distance between mind and body, the higher the seat of the breath goes. When the child begins to

breathe from the chest, we know that his animal consciousness and his mental consciousness have broken apart.

When an adult sleeps, he too breathes through his stomach and his chest is relaxed because in sleep this distance between the mind and the body cannot be maintained. In the state of unconsciousness, the distance is broken and the natural process begins. There is a Japanese word (no other language has its equivalent) for the initial source of breath. That word is "tanden". Right breathing is connected with tanden, which is located two inches below the navel. The further a man is away from existence, the further his breath moves away from tanden.

The higher your centre of breathing is, the more tense you are; the lower the point of your breath, the more you are relaxed. If your breathing is from tanden, there will be no tensions in your life. This is the very reason why children are free from tension. Observe your breath in a moment of relaxation. You will find it coming from tanden. When you are filled with tension and anxiety, observe your breath. It will become short, and it will come from the chest. Short breath is an indication that you are far removed from your original nature.

There is a reason why we breathe from the chest. A very wrong concept has pervaded in the world. According to this, the chest should be well developed and large, and the abdomen should be flat, almost against the back. This mad tendency has created a terrible disturbance within the human body. In order to inflate the chest, the breath has to fill the chest and not be allowed to go down further. This brings about the dangerous state of segregation of the animal level and the mental level. You will be surprised to see paintings of Buddha or Lao Tzu in Japanese or Chinese art. They are shown with big stomachs. Unlike our depictions of them where their chests are full and stomachs small.

Tao recognises three centres: one is the tanden (the navel centre), the second is the centre of the heart and the third is the centre of the head (the centre of intelligence). The tanden is the highest and most profound centre of Existence). Next comes the heart and the last and least profound is the centre of the head. Intellectuals, therefore, are the farthest removed from existence. An emotional person is nearer to existence than a rationalist. A devotee is much nearer to existence than the so-called intellectual. He who takes the intellect to be everything lives only on the surface of existence. His calculations are correct, his logic clear, but he never goes deep down because there it is dangerous; there all logic is lost and all calculations fade.

The rationalist lives on the surface, where everything is clear-cut and straight. As soon as we descend to the heart, this clear-cut world of logic and reason is lost. Therefore, the intellectual is afraid to talk of the heart; for with it comes illogic and disorder. But it is here that desire and love may arise, and devotion also. Anything can happen here, for which no explanation can be given.

The more rationalistic a person is, the higher is his centre of breathing. By observing the point of breath of a person, we can find out his type. The more emotional a person, the deeper his breath will go. "But," says Lao Tzu, "the heart is not the ultimate depth. It is necessary to go down even further -- to the tanden."

The breath should arise from tanden. Then a person is united with the existence, just as infants are. When a person, through concentration, carries his breath to the ultimate depth, he becomes as tender as a child. This happens only when he attains a tensionless simplicity and innocence. Observe yourself sometimes as you sit quietly by yourself on a chair. Let yourself loose, -- there should be no tension -- and you will feel the breath rising from your navel. But we do not let ourselves relax even when we rest. Is the idea of having an expanded chest so ingrained in us, or is there some other reason?

There are many deep-seated reasons. The most important of these will come to your mind if you give it a thought. When does a child become conscious of his body? According to Freud (who has done extensive and useful research in this direction) a child becomes conscious of his body when he touches his genitals for the first time. When he touches his nose or his ear or his eye his mother takes delight in his action; but as soon as he touches his genitals, he is stopped, -- forbidden to do so. It is then that the child realises that there is a part of his body which is not to be touched, which is dangerous, which is sinful. The child comes to feel this from the look in his mother's eyes; and she in her turn had come to know from her parents. The sense of sin is thus traditional. But this sin does not exist.

But now a distinction begins within the child. Through the gestures of his parents, he begins to feel that there is a part of his body which does not belong to him. This is why, till our dying day, we fail to consider this part of the body as our own. It cannot be; the distance remains. Then, with the separation of the genitals from the rest of the body, the lower part of the body becomes off-limits. The body above the genitals is accepted and below the genitals is not accepted.

No sooner does this differentiation take place than the seat of the breath rises up from the navel to the chest. There is a reason for this. If the breath reaches the tanden, it affects the genitals. So, as soon as we feel that the genitals are not a part of us, the tanden is suppressed. Then we are always afraid, lest the breath reaches the Tanden.

Do you know that an erection takes place about twelve to eighteen times in every man when he sleeps at night? This is a regular happening. Freud was under the impression that this happened because of the unsatisfied desires which were triggered off in dreams. Dreams of copulation and the satisfaction of the sexual urge cause the organ to stiffen, Freud believed. But further deeper research has proven Lao Tzu to be correct. Lao Tzu says that this happens because in sleep, the breath beats against the tanden and the genitals are affected. It is not necessarily because of sexual dreams. We breathe fully in sleep and this full breath knocks against the tanden.

The sex-energy centre and the tanden lie side by side, and it is the impact of the breath that activates the sex-centre. Therefore, you cannot breathe from the chest during the sex act. You have to breathe from the stomach. Quick breathing makes the breath knock against the sex-centre and keeps it activated. If the breath is controlled at this stage, ejaculation can be put off. Tantra has methods of controlling the breath so that copulation can take place without ejaculation. The act can thus be prolonged for hours but then care must be taken that the breath does not reach the tanden.

The child grows up with the idea that the sex organs are taboo, that they are contemptible and sinful; and with this feeling, the breath shifts from the tanden to the chest. This is because our impact on the

tanden produces a sensation on the sex organs, and this sensation is very gratifying. This pleasure-giving sensation attracts the child and makes him desirous and restless. But his parents' attitude and the attitude of the society is not favourable towards this. So a distance is created and eventually every joyful experience carries a type of guilt within us.

Whenever we are happy, you must have noted we feel a slight feeling of guilt within. Some people take great pleasure in being unhappy, because then the sense of guilt is not there. This feeling of guilt rises from the very first sense of guilt that the child experiences in his first movement of pleasure. Then we live, divided within ourselves.

Impotency can result if the breath does not reach the tanden. Many research workers who follow the Lao-Tzu theory believe that impotency is the result of the breath not reaching the tanden. Hence, a very interesting thing happens: Wrestlers and body-builders become impotent. The reason is obvious. They breathe so entirely from the chest, in order to expand it, and they draw their stomachs in so much, that all possibilities of the breath reaching the tanden are destroyed. Thus, though a wrestler looks very virile, he is not so. The connection between the breath and his manliness gets severed.

The breath can rise from the tanden only if you accept your sexual desires. In fact, advaita cannot be born within you unless you accept your desires in their totality, just like a little child. And let me tell you, as soon as a person accepts all his desires completely, he is freed from them. Desire thrives on contradictions. It writhes in non-fulfillment, it torments you, but it is never satisfied. The desire becomes a painful hell but the person is never freed from it. We find ourselves going further and further away from what we desire. The more we suppress ourselves, the greater the distance is between us and the desired goal.

Lao Tzu says: "Entwine yourself in an embrace. Accept your animal senses in their totality." You become the master of your senses the moment you accept them. The duality is destroyed and the essence is realised. The intellect that accepts its desires completely goes beyond them, transcends them. This transcendence is possible only in a non-struggling, non-dual state.

To bring the vital breath to its most adaptable level is the first experiment. Those who wish to practise the Tao-sadhana have, at the very outset, to stop breathing from the chest and begin breathing from the navel. This means that when the breath goes in, the abdomen should rise, and when the breath goes out, the abdomen should fall and the chest should remain still.

Perhaps men could be persuaded to do abdominal breathing because all men do not have the craze to be athletes or he-men: but it is very difficult to make women agree to breathe through their abdomens. Women are obsessed with yet another craze; that of developing big, firm and shapely breasts. This craze is so strong that no women would agree to follow Lao Tzu theory. The fact is such breasts are biologically unsuited to perform their natural function of nursing a baby because the fear is there that the child may get suffocated. Psychologists say that many men are unnerved by large, round breasts. The basic reason is the remembrance of the suffocation the infant feels which leaves a deep mark on the tender mind.

Psychologists may give a hundred other reasons why women are eager to possess large, firm breasts, but the profound and widespread effect has been that no woman is prepared to breathe from the navel. If we cannot breathe from the navel, we can never be as innocent and artless as children. It is only breathing from the navel that can bring about child-like flexibility and fluidity.

So, first and foremost, see that your breath arises from the navel. When you sit or stand or walk, in all your activities, keep an eye on the breath and see that it starts from the navel. Tao-sadhana consists of three parts, of which this is the first: the breath should rise from the navel. Practise for three weeks and you will be surprised to find that your anger has subsided, your jealousies are lost, your tensions are gone and you can sleep like a child. Your personality becomes balanced. Breath is not an ordinary thing. All arrangements of life are connected with it; so as you breathe, the arrangements within you change.

Your breath cannot be rhythmic when you are angry, and you cannot be angry if your breath is rhythmic. It is necessary that the breath becomes erratic in the moment of anger, because only then does the mind get excited and only then can the glands secrete poison into the system.

So the very first sutra is: Bring the breath slowly, slowly, to the navel and use the chest less and less in breathing, and finally, stop breathing from the chest.

The second part of the breath-sadhana is: Focus your mind on the outgoing breath and do not pay attention to the incoming breath at all. Try and empty your breath as much as possible but make no extra effort to breathe in. As much as the breath goes in by itself is enough. This has wonderful results. We all are very eager to breathe in, but have no interest in the out-going breath. If you watch yourself, you will find that your emphasis is on the incoming breath and not the outgoing one.

If you investigate further, you will find that throughout life we have a tendency to take and never to give. He who makes a sustained effort to breathe out fully, and does not interfere with the natural course of the incoming breath, develops the profound quality of giving charity and his desire to receive will disappear by and by. By observing a person's breath, you can see whether he takes more pleasure in giving or taking. You cannot escape from breathing.

A miser takes no pleasure in letting his breath go; he only takes pleasure in taking it in. Psychologists say that it is not money alone that the miser cannot let go of in life but everything else also. He lives in a sort of state of constipation throughout his life. Ninety-nine per cent of the cause of constipation is the miserliness of the mind. A miser desires to keep everything to himself so he cannot even let his bowels empty. He even tries to stop his outgoing breath. He is eager to take and very much afraid to give. But the law of life is -- that the More you give, the more you will attain. If you are niggardly in letting out your breath, you will attain nothing. How can you? You will only succeed in collecting foul air within, carbon dioxide. There are about six thousand air-sacs in our lungs. We make use of about fifteen hundred to two thousand of them only. Two thousand air-sacs are always filled with carbon dioxide. We never empty these out. We thus collect filth within us and live merely on the surface.

The Tao-sadhana believes that the breath should be thrown out as much as possible and we should ignore the incoming breath because it happens by itself. The greater the quantity of breath thrown out, the greater the quantity of fresh air that will go in.

This emphasis on throwing out is in order to increase the possibilities of giving in your life. All the anger, the greed, the jealousy within us, is because of the fact that we want to take but we do not want to give. All the complications and involvements in our lives come from this fact that we are greedy to take and have no wish to give. But one who cannot give receives nothing, and one who gives, receives back a thousand-fold. Another thing: if we give iron, we receive gold in return. Exhale carbon dioxide and fill yourself with the life-giving oxygen. This is a scripture for our whole life.

Lao Tzu's second sutra is: Always throw the breath out, forget about taking it in. You only have to empty yourself and leave an empty space. It will get filled by itself. If your emphasis is not on breathing in at all, the mind becomes absolutely calm and relaxed. For in taking in the breath there is tension, there is violence; whereas in letting the breath out, there is only a sense of lightening your burden. Filling is a burden. Emptying is to become burdenless, because it reduces the load. So the second sutra is: to place all your effort in exhaling the breath and do not worry about taking the breath in.

Now, what is the third sutra? The first is to make the navel the seat of the breath. The second is to concentrate on breathing out. The third is: To be one with the process of respiration and not to think of it as happening apart from you. When the breath goes out, feel 'I am going out'; when the breath comes in, feel 'I am coming in'. Be one with the life-breath.

We feel that the breath has gone out of us and the breath has come within us. Lao Tzu says the opposite. He says, "I go out with the breath; I come in with the breath. It is I who am in and I who am out. With the breath, I enter the body; and with the breath I go out and merge in the vast body of the universe." This constant japa should be practised when we sit or stand or walk or sleep, that I go in and out of my body with every breath. Then only is advaita experienced. If these three steps are carried out with utmost care and if a person thus raises his life-breath by one-pointed concentration to the highest point of flexibility he becomes as tender as a child. The greater this tenderness, the greater life is. The lesser this tenderness the more dead the person is. To become hard is to stand at the gate of death and to remain tender is to stand at the gate of life So tender, like a newly formed bud! It looks weak, but that in itself is its strength. An old man may look strong, but he is not stronger than a child. Death is forever drawing near and the harder he gets the closer he is to death. The child looks very fragile but in his fragility lies his power. Existence has yet to grow in him and spread.

This flexibility is not possible without this experiment in breathing. But if this is brought about with the breath, it can easily be brought about in all facets of life. Your breath influences your personality in every dimension; it is a complete mirror of you. What you do with your breath is an indication of what you do with yourself; it indicates what kind of person you are. When anyone approached Lao Tzu for sadhana, he would tell the person to stay with him a while so that he could observe his breathing. If the seeker happened to be an intellectual who had come to imbibe Brahma-jnana (the ultimate knowledge), he would be perplexed. For seven days, Lao Tzu would observe the new comer's every movement and

see the state of his respiration. Only when he understood the state of his respiration completely, would he give him any instructions. The whole sadhana can be completely determined by this breath method.

You must have heard the Japanese word 'HARAKIRI'. It is generally understood to mean suicide. But in the Japanese language, it means much more. Hara means the centre -- the supreme centre from which life is born. One who stabs himself in this centre is supposed to have committed harakiri. But not everyone can commit harakiri because in order to do this, the hara first has to be recognised. We spoke before about the tanden. If you begin to breathe from the navel, by and by you will come to feel a place, two inches below the navel. That is the centre. When it becomes clear to you that this centre burns like the flame of a lamp within you, then it is called the hara. For such a person, whose hara centre burns like a flame, there is no death. Harakiri means to separate this centre from the body. Then the flame of hara merges with the eternal flame.

This hara centre is not within the intellect, nor is in the heart. It is near the navel. This is why an infant in the womb is not joined with the mother by the heart or the head but by the navel. It is a miracle that the child neither breathes in the mother's womb nor does its heart beat and yet it is kept alive by the umbilical cord that joins it to the placenta. This clearly shows that neither the heartbeat nor the breath is essential for life, but it is impossible to be alive without the navel. Therefore the first thing we do when a child is born is to cut the umbilical cord. Until this is done, the child does not begin to breathe. Now the infant is on his own on the threshold of life.

We can understand it this way, Just as a thread from the navel connects us to the mother, another thread from the same place connects us to God, to existence. The connecting point of this thread which joins us to existence, is called the hara. Tao says: "He who attains this centre becomes tender like a flower, like the stars in heaven, like little babes. His eyes are as liquid and innocent as those of animals."

If this liquidity and innocence is to be attained, then, Lao Tzu says in his third sutra; "WHEN HE HAS CLEANSSED AWAY THE MOST MYSTERIOUS SIGHTS (OF HIS IMAGINATION), HE CAN BECOME WITHOUT FLAW." The breath should become fluid and it should be based at the hara centre. One should then cleanse away the entire web of imagination.

We do not know how many kinds of webs of the imagination we have woven. Not only in the name of samsara but also in the name of religion, we have woven webs of illusion. We have created countless Gods, countless heavens and hells by our imagination. We have known nothing, realised nothing; we have only let our imagination run wild. Our imagination is a library where we have collected all kinds of illusions from many births, and amongst these we live. All these cobwebs are in the mind only. If a person tries to rid himself from the entanglements of his intellect, he will fail. It is necessary to go right down to the centre of existence and establish oneself there. As soon as a person reaches the tanden, he becomes so strong and powerful that it becomes easy to throw away the cob-webs of imagination.

Some people try to achieve this by their intellect. One logic can be defeated by another but then the second logic grips you. The same is true with the imagination. The difficulty here is that it is the very intellect that has to be destroyed or else nothing is changed. But we do otherwise. We find people changing from one religion to another; going from one guru to another, changing their shastras, their

doctrines. Some under the illusion that they have left all doctrines, have even, in the process, created new ones of their own -- which are bound to be poorer than the ones they have left.

This has happened with Krishnamurti. He exhorts his followers to break all webs of imagination. This sounds very good to the ears, it is appealing, but then the follower places his self in the centre of imagination and begins weaving new webs. Unless you step out of the centre of imagination you will keep on weaving cobwebs.

The power of the imagination is so great that it can fill you with negative illusions also. Krishnamurti says, "There is no guru." The listener accepts that there is no guru and promptly begins to look upon Krishnamurti as his guru. This happens in his deep unconscious self, of which he is not even aware. A friend had come to me some time ago. He told me, "I believe in no guru because I heard Krishnamurti." I told him that if he has arrived at this solution by listening to Krishnamurti, then the guru is already established. I also told him that this concept was not his and that he was accepting the words of others just as he had been doing before. "I do not take Krishnamurti as my guru," he retorted.

"Then why do you listen to him?" I asked.

"I go to listen in order to understand." "That is what I am saying", I said. The guru is one to whom we go in order to understand, and that is the meaning of guru: One to whom we go in order to understand. If man listens only to his intellect, he will have to use his intellect only to cleanse his imagination. This is only natural. The real thing is not to cleanse the intellect of all its imaginations, because it will promptly produce fresh illusions. The real thing is to stand apart from the intellect.

How is the jump to be taken so that we can step out of our imaginations? There are two methods of stepping out of the mind. One method is to leave all thoughts and become emotional, like Meera. She does not think; she is drowned in her feelings, her emotions. She dances, she sings. But feelings also do not take you very far. It takes you deeper than intelligence and hence it is better, but Lao Tzu says, "The heart is nearer to the mind." I take you where there are no thoughts, no feelings; no mind, no heart; no knowledge, no devotion. I take you to where the intellect becomes flawless, where only pure existence remains. And for this, all cobwebs of the imagination have to be swept away.

But how is this to be done? If you empty your intellect for this purpose, you will be making a mistake. It may sweep out the old cobwebs but will promptly weave new ones. Remember, the new webs are more dangerous than the old. When the new are created we easily let go the old ones; but the new webs we tend to conserve because they are still fresh. New gurus become more dangerous than the old, and so also new shastras because in the new there is the lure of novelty. Also, if a person develops the notion that he is strong enough to destroy all the webs of the imagination, his ego is strengthened. So it is important to avoid this entanglement.

It is interesting to note that if you begin to breathe from the navel you lose your ego. There is no way to uphold the ego at the centre of the navel because the ego is a tension and there is no tension if the breath is at the navel. Then one day we find that all is quiet within.

Lao Tzu used to test his disciples from time to time. He would ask them questions. They brought the right answers but Lao Tzu would tear the paper up and throw it away. He would put his hand on their stomach and declare: "The question was asked in vain. The answer is wrong!"

One sadhaka told him: "But this is what you taught!"

Lao Tzu replied: "Yes, that is what I taught you but the one who answered, his breath does not rise from the navel. This answer can only come from within if the breath is established in the navel. You have merely reproduced what you heard from me. You have heard with your intellect and answered with your intellect. There is no experience within you."

When Chuang-Tse, who was his most prominent disciple approached Lao Tzu for the first time, Lao Tzu gave him the same instructions as he gave to others. When the time of examination approached, Chuang-Tse came and quietly took his seat with others. "Today I shall ask you some questions. But you have brought no pen or paper with you?" Lao Tzu asked him. Chuang-Tse replied: "If I myself am not the answer, what good would my written answers do?" He quietly stripped himself and lay before Lao Tzu: "Examine my breath," he told Lao Tzu.

Remember, if your breath does not genuinely come from the navel and you are merely making an attempt to breathe from the abdomen the moment you become unconscious of your breath, the breath will slip back to the chest. The genuinely navel based breath comes only when you become as artless and as innocent as a child. Then, let anyone examine you; it makes no difference. When the physician holds your hand to examine your pulse, it is bound to increase because you are now conscious and worried. So the doctor always allows a certain margin when he examines a patient.

Chuang-Tse lay down before Lao Tzu like a little child and his stomach was rising and falling rhythmically. Lao Tzu looked at him and said, "You have passed the test. I have no more to ask, because that which has the power to answer is now within you."

The consciousness has to be shifted and brought towards the navel. All our impressions, our education and our society work in the direction of taking our consciousness towards the intellect. This has its own uses as I told you before but one day we shall have to retrace our steps away from this world where it is useful.

To lose the original centre is very dangerous from any point of view and it is comparatively so easy to do. So, regard this sutra of Lao Tzu as a sadhana sutra. Keep an eye on your breath and try to transform it. A change in your breath brings a change within you. A Revolutionary change in the breath brings a revolution in your own personality. As your breath deepens, your character also becomes profound; all superficialities in your nature fall off.

And the day your breath reaches the centre of tanden, you shall merge with the whole world at the point of advaita. One who reaches his own centre reaches the centre of the universe. When a person merges with his own centre, he becomes one with the centre of the vast cosmos. It is then that the supreme embrace of the advaita takes place.

As your breath becomes deeper and deeper and penetrates within, the curtain lifts and many unusual mysteries reveal themselves, and new doors to truth begin to open. What lies hidden within man extends and spreads out into the vast world. He who delves deep within himself rises high in the supreme Brahma. Christian saints have said, "As above, so below." Indian saints have said: "What is in the body is in the universe." Plotinus has said, "Man is the measure of all things." Man is a miniature of the vast universe. Whatever is in the universe exists in him. Therefore, when he reaches his own centre, he attains the universal centre. Says Lao Tzu: "When a man fulfils these three requirements of the prana sadhana, he attains the universe as well as advaita."

Please note: Lao Tzu's breath sadhana is different from the Indian pranayama, because the latter is based on the intellect. It is an organised endeavour, the breath is controlled by the intellect. Lao Tzu's pranayama is absolutely natural. It is not mind-oriented.

Rather, all the arrangements that have developed between the breath and the intelligence are to be severed. We have to discover the natural movement of breath within the body, the movement that is with us from birth. So there is a fundamental difference between the Indian pranayama and Lao Tzu's prana sadhana. And Lao Tzu's sadhana is more profound. The Indian pranayama follows man-made calculations: close one nostril, then another, hold the breath for so long in suspension, then so much exhalation. This is all mind-oriented. It has its uses and advantages, but they are only useful for the body. A person attains glowing health through pranayama and also gains strength.

Lao Tzu's sadhana is totally different. Through it, man attains his true nature -- that which was before his mind and intellect came into being and that which will remain after the mind and intellect are extinct. The Indian pranayama is dangerous without the help of a guru because it entails a lot of discipline. Lao Tzu's sadhana can proceed without the help of guru. In his sadhana, there is little to learn and more to forget. We have to drop all the false practices we have learned. Then that which is natural will appear by itself. No new order is to be created. In fact, all rules and regulations of the past are to be abandoned so that nature is given full scope to act as it wills.

But as I told you before, if you do not accept your body and by that I mean, unless and until you accept your organs of reproduction you cannot feel one with the body. If you have a feeling of censure and scorn towards a part of yourself, how will the embrace come about? When we create walls within our own selves, the question of meeting others is absolutely out. He who is afraid to meet his own self within can never claim to have the courage to meet God.

Accept all that is within. Accept it as a gift of God. Shun all censure and scorn. Nothing is sin, nothing is crime. What is within is part of God. As this all-round acceptance comes within you, all obstructions between your body and your mind are removed. The body and the intelligence then merge and flow in a simple stream. Then the body is experienced as part of our very own self that has extended outwards into the world and the atman is that dimension of our body that has gone within. The body is the manifested atman and the atman is the unmanifested body. The body is the visible atman and the atman is the invisible body. Thus they are the two ends of the same thing.

When this experience dawns on a person, all the world becomes one. Then he sees no difference between a stone and God. Those who carved images of God out of stone, were wise people. The message they wished to convey was that as long as you cannot see God in a piece of stone, know that you have known nothing. But when we cannot see God in a living body how can we see God in a dead piece of rock? Those who bow before stone images do so, perhaps, because there are no desires, no sense organs in a stone. It is a dead piece of matter. Therefore, perhaps, they see a little of God in them. But if they were to meet a live God they would raise a hundred doubts about him. "You eat also? You feel hungry like an ordinary man? You shiver in the cold and need a fan in summer?" they would exclaim. The God within the man would be completely lost -- He is not there, He cannot be! They return to their homes, fully convinced that this man is a fraud and their trip was in vain. But those who carved images in stones had an altogether different reason. Their reasoning was that if you begin to see God even in a piece of rock, then there can be nowhere that you cannot see Him. A all-embracing acceptance of life is the first characteristic of a religious person. Through this acceptance, serenity ensues childlike innocence. It is this innocent eye that sees the Lord in everything and the whole world becomes divine.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #3

Chapter title: An aimless life, an inviting attitude and a pliable understanding

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IN LOVING THE PEOPLE AND RULING THE STATE, CANNOT HE PROCEED WITHOUT ANY (PURPOSE) OF ACTION?

IN OPENING AND SHUTTING HIS GATES OF HEAVEN, CANNOT HE DO SO LIKE A FEMALE BIRD?

WHILE HIS INTELLIGENCE REACHES IN EVERY DIRECTION, CANNOT HE (APPEAR TO) BE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE?

A thoughtful person always asks: "What is the aim of life? Why should we live and what for?" Not only in this age but for ages past, this question has been posed by intelligent people. All religions and philosophies have been born in and around this question. What is the aim? What is the purpose? What is the goal and what does it all end as? Those who do not ask these questions are considered to be ignorant and non-intelligent by the wise. To them, they seem to be leading an aimless, purposeless life. Viewed in this context, Lao Tzu's statement is shocking. Lao Tzu says, "He who lives with a purpose not only does not achieve his ends but also loses his life. He never achieves his goal and destroys his life in the bargain. He alone lives who knows the art of leading an ambitionless life. He alone can live life in its fullness whose aim does not go beyond the present moment."

We shall have to try and understand this step by step because it is very difficult for the mind to grasp. The mind cannot exist for a moment without an aim. We can exist without any vision of the future but for the mind it is impossible. If there is no goal in view, the mind crumbles and breaks. Therefore, the mind will have great difficulty in understanding this sutra. Actually, the mind is opposed to life. This has to be understood from many angles. Firstly, all attempts to comprehend life are meaningless. When a question still remains as it was, no matter what solution we find for it, then all our effort is in vain. For instance; people ask: "Who created the earth?" This is a meaningless question in the sense that even if we reply that 'A' made the earth, the question still remains as it was, because then the question arises, "Who created 'A'?" No matter how many answers we find to this, the question remains the same in the end. This happens because we have taken it for granted that nothing can exist that is not created. This is an error, and this error remains with us forever. If someone answers, "God made the earth," then the question arises, "Who made God?" You cannot say that no one created God, because then your initial question would be wrong. In that case, the world can also exist, uncreated. So this question leads to infinite regression.

This same error is committed with regard to the purpose of life. When we ask, "What is the purpose of life?" then we start with the assumption that nothing can be without a purpose. This is an implication we have accepted within ourselves. But we are in the wrong because whatever aim we imply again poses the same question. For example, a religious man will say, "The purpose of life is to attain God." But then it can be asked, "What is the aim in attaining God? What will we achieve? And having achieved that what next?" The question stands unanswered. Another man may say that the purpose of life is to attain beatitude but then, what is the aim of beatitude? So the question is meaningless. It is meaningless because no answer destroys the question. Please note: NO ANSWER.

You might think: there must be some answer to these questions. But no matter what answer you bring for them it will be useless. The same question can again be asked in spite of the x, y, z, you have brought forward as the solution. It is not necessary for me to know what the answer to this question is because whatever the answer, the question in itself is meaningless. No purposeful answer can be found.

The question remains despite any effort to explain. Those who are deemed wise and thoughtful in this world, however, go about exhorting people not to lead a useless life. There should be a purpose to life:

live to serve, live for the sake of truth, live for God. They warn us not to make the mistake of living for the sake of living only. Such a man is not prepared to believe that life is its own goal, that life is sufficient unto itself and there is no need to seek goals outside of it. To him the path of life must reach a destination. His intellect cannot grasp the fact that the journey itself can be the destination, so he creates destinations for himself. But no destination can be a destination for we can again ask: "What is the purpose of this destination? What happens next?"

Life with a purpose pleases both the mind and the ego. The ego cannot fill itself without a goal. Therefore, the bigger the purpose, the greater the ego. If you live for your family alone, your ego is not as great as it would be if you lived for your country. This too is not as great as it would be if you lived for the whole of humanity. You can inflate your ego even further if you set out to live for the whole universe. The higher the goal, the greater the ego; the lesser the goal, the smaller the ego. By a higher goal I mean the bigger the circumference a man creates around people. A higher goal also means a non-competitive goal. If you are seeking wealth, there will be a lot of competition for many others seek gold. If you seek service, there will be very little competition for very few seek to serve. If you seek respect for yourself, you will face stiff competition because each man seeks respect and honour for himself. But if you seek honour for your country, your religion, your caste, the competition will be less. You may face competition from other countries, but never within your own.

You create your ego very easily. So the greater the goal, the easier it is for the ego to establish itself. The ego always speaks the language of aim and purpose. This is why we teach every child the language of the ego. Children are motiveless; there is no purpose to their action. If a child is playing and we ask him why he plays, our question will appear strange to him. He will not understand the whys and wherefores of the adults. For him the play is enough. When we play, part of our attention is always towards the reason behind the play. To a child his play is sufficient unto itself, so much so, that he aims at nothing outside the play. The joy in play is in the playing itself. The child does not expect to get something out of his sport. The very act of playing is all the pleasure he derives. The means and the methods are not apart; they are one and the same.

But such a child is not fit to encounter the struggles of life. So we remove him from his world of play and introduce him to ambition and achievement. We shall have to educate him so that he can secure a job in the future, he can amass wealth. We shall have to direct his life on these lines: where the goal is always in the future and there is work, work and work only.

The goal is always in the future and the effort always in the present. The child will learn mathematics, but he will not say that he is learning it for the joy of it. He knows he is undergoing the stress and boredom of learning so that he may derive benefit from it later on. He passes examinations and then he is ready to face life's struggles. Each child has to be drawn out of his aimless life and made to enter a life of aims and ambitions. All our methods of education tend towards this. This is necessary, it must be acknowledged; it is a necessity of life. If the child is not drawn into this, he cannot become a part of the society he lives in. Perhaps it will be difficult for him to survive the various things he has to face in life. He will fail in the struggle for survival of the fittest, which is an inevitable law of life.

Jesus has said to his disciples, "Why do you worry about your daily bread? Look at the flowers, look at the birds. They do not have the means nor do they worry; and yet, they are fed. Look at the lilies in the field! Even King Solomon in his majestic robes cannot come anywhere near them for beauty and majesty. They neither weave threads for clothes, nor grow cotton; and though they are naked, they are unmatched in their beauty." Jesus says exactly what Lao Tzu said before him; and he is right.

But, alas, we are helpless! Man cannot be left alone like the lilies in the field. Neither can he gather grain like the birds. Man has severed his relationship with the animal world. He has taken over his own responsibility and therefore he has to enter the world of struggle. Although it is true that life has no goal, we have to teach each person the aims of life. This is an untruth which is necessary in order to live -- a necessary evil.

But it is possible to get out of this necessary evil. When a person transcends this evil, he finds his life enriched in a very profound way. To become a child once again is to enrich life and fill it with exuberance. Then the whole rat-race of life becomes a mere drama.

Deep within us, we know that life has no aim; each moment of life is an end to itself. Where we are, what we are, -- that is the very fulfillment and perfection of life. We should not live for the morrow, for then we miss living today; and the moment that is lost never returns. Besides, he who gets into the habit of missing the present, misses his future also; because when the tomorrow becomes today, it loses its charm. Remember, whenever the morrow comes, it comes only in the form of today. If we have become habituated to sacrificing our today for tomorrow, our whole life will become sacrificed in this manner. Ultimately we will find that nothing except death comes to hand.

We all lose our lives in this manner. What we call today was tomorrow yesterday, but yesterday we missed for the sake of tomorrow. Then today we miss for the sake of tomorrow and so we go on, wasting all our moments. Then one day we find there is nothing in our hands except the ashes of our hopes. Ambition takes us nowhere and we lose life in the bargain. Not more than a single moment is ever given to us. Nobody is given two moments at a time. This moment is an infinitesimal part of time, which is never static but is a constantly running process that fades in the void. It hardly comes to hand and it is lost. "If we dedicate this passing moment to any purpose," says Lao Tzu, "we deprive ourselves of life." That purpose may be anything. Whether it is the lowly pursuit of wealth or the high aims of religion, it makes no difference. Whether you aspire to reach a high status here or sit on the throne of moksha there, it is all the same. The desire of tomorrow is a poison in itself, because it destroys the life of the body.

Can't this moment be lived for itself? Why can we not take it to be complete in itself? This does not mean that if you are to catch a train tomorrow you should catch it today! It also does not mean that you cannot look up the railway timetable today if you are leaving tomorrow. It also does not mean that if your factory project is to be completed in a year's time you should not make arrangements for it today. Questions such as these arise in the mind of people: "I have to decide today that I must get up early tomorrow to catch the train!"

Let us try to understand this a little then it will become clear. When you are making a decision, that process belongs to the present moment because it is in this moment that you are making the decision. So take as much pleasure and interest in it as is possible. To make a decision is a pleasure in itself. So you enjoy the pleasure of your decision that tomorrow morning you will get up at 5.00 a.m. This is your decision for the moment, so let it be complete, here and now. Then, tomorrow morning at 5.00, enjoy the pleasure of getting up. Don't let the present moment be spent in worrying about the fact that tomorrow you have to be up at 5.00. And then tomorrow, when you get up at 5.00 you will be worried about whether you will reach the train in time. Then when you catch the train you will be worried about further anxieties. Thus, every moment slips by and we are engrossed in future anxieties. Then we can never be one with existence.

To live in the present does not mean you cannot plan for the future. Rather, it means that life is not just planning for the future. To live is life. And it is only possible to live here and now in this moment, and not in any other moment.

On one side we see the aimless life of a simpleton, who is thrown here and there by the vicissitudes of life. Steeped in lethargy and dulled by apathy, he goes wherever life pushes him. He has not taken life in his own hands; and he is like a dead leaf. This kind of life is also an aimless life. On the other side, we see the man who is always on the run to attain a goal. Such people we look upon as wise and intellectual. His is a life of ambition, in which each moment is sacrificed for the moment to come. This man is forever investing today's moments for tomorrow, and tomorrow's for the day after. He spends a life-time in vain pursuits till death claims him ultimately. Perhaps the simple idiot is better off than him, because it is possible that his vacant mind may have caught a glimpse or two of life.

Lao Tzu talks of a third type of man. He talks of a life devoid of ambition and competition. This is a different type of man altogether. He is neither lazy nor obsessed. He neither runs away from life nor is he a lifeless corpse, unmoved by the current of life. Neither is he like the second type who is madly rushing around. He is a different type altogether, a third type. When this man runs, it is not to achieve something. Each step he takes is a source of joy for him.

This third type of man never suffers defeat or failures, and hence is never vulnerable to sorrow. He never suffers from frustration because he has never built his hopes on anything. He lives each moment in its fullness, in its very essence. He never regrets that his life was spent in vain and he did not reach his goal, because he never set a goal for himself in life. This man will declare that he has lived each moment of his life, that he has extracted the essence of life fully. Such a man embraces death also, very very gladly, because whatever came before him he accepted and lived in it; whatever he obtained he enjoyed to the full, not leaving an iota of experience behind that would need to be fulfilled later.

Such a man may even run faster than those who are ambitious. You must be aware of the fact that when a man is encumbered with the burden of his destination, his feet drag in the same manner as if he had load on his head. Then walking is a tiring job. Has it ever occurred to you? -- The road you cross in the early morning when you go out for your walk is the same that you walk on your way to your work. The skies above are the same, and your own two feet carry you in both cases. But in the morning you find

your step is light and springy; your breath too is different. With the same feet you walk the same way to your office but everything undergoes a change for the worse. In the morning when you walked, you had nowhere to reach. The act of walking was enough in itself. The joy of walking that you experienced in the morning is completely missing in the afternoon as you walk to the office. It is possible that you may come across another man who has come out for a walk in the afternoon. His state would be exactly what yours was in the morning. But a man can convert his leisure walk also into a religious duty. He must get up at five in the morning and go for a walk. Then he will miss the joy, the bliss of walking; because then he will walk as if he is going to his office or his shop. He will return from his walk with the feeling of a task completed.

Where there is a goal in view, each act becomes a burden. Where there is no ambition, a state of lightness and freedom arises. The lesser the burden, the greater the possibility of bliss. The more burdened a person, the heavier life seems to be. It is something to be lived through somehow. We change everything into a task and not a play. If you understand Lao Tzu well, you will find he looks upon life as nothing but a play. We, on the other hand, turn even our play into a task. The concentration on our face and the look in our eyes when we play betrays the fact 'that it is a task' for us and not a play.

Those who play cards do not enjoy the game unless there is some money at stake. When money is involved, the play becomes a task, it has a goal. Even a rich person enjoys cards only if there is money involved, be it a single rupee. This one rupee makes no difference to him, but it sets up a goal. Now the game becomes interesting and exciting. The game in itself is not enough. One rupee brings about such a change! Money has penetrated so deep within us that it needs be included in our sports also. Everything must become a business in order for man to enjoy.

To work for an aim means that each work carried out is for something other than work itself. The pleasure is in attaining the end, the work is a necessity. If we can attain the end without effort, we will promptly stop working. Since nothing is achieved without working for it, we have to work. So we turn our sports into a vocation.

Love also is turned into an assignment. If a woman looks after her child, she considers it a service she is doing for him. A husband working for his wife considers it an obligation to her. People come to me. They say: "We have to fulfil our duties as householders." If you are doing your duty, then it is not a household you are looking after but a shop! A house should mean a haven of bliss for you. If the husband earns money because he has to support a wife, or if a mother brings up her child for the simple reason that he has been born to her and so she has to rear him, then these are just irksome duties that are forced to perform. When we attribute a purpose to all that we do, all acts become a burden. Nothing is a play for us. We are never so enamoured of anything that, for a moment, we forget the anxiety of what is beyond. Not for a moment are we there where we actually are. Forever the mind rambles elsewhere.

Lao Tzu says: "IN LOVING PEOPLE AND RULING THE STATE, CANNOT HE PROCEED WITHOUT ANY PURPOSE OF ACTION"?

According to Lao Tzu, even a king can turn the gigantic task of ruling a kingdom into a play. But we find that even a beggar who is penniless is incapable of looking upon life as a play. We are afraid that if we

do not have vision and ambition we shall lag behind and become useless, because then, what is left to be done? We have always worked for a purpose so it seems strange and impossible to work without an aim. If, however, we have ever done anything without an eye on the result, we keep remembering it again and again.

You see a man drowning in a river and you at once jump into the river and bring him ashore. Not a thought passes your mind whether you should save him because it is your duty. Whether he is a Hindu or a Muslim, whether he is known to you or unknown -- no such thought crosses your mind. You see a man drowning and you jump in the river to save him. Then it is possible that you will get a glimpse of the bliss of the act itself.

But whenever such an opportunity comes our way, we destroy it immediately. As soon as the man is saved the mind starts working. "Will this man be grateful? Will the news come in the papers? Have people witnessed my performance?" If only we could drown ourselves even for a moment into an act for the sake of the act without any reward I Then the act becomes meditation.

But, we even meditate for a purpose. People come to me and ask, "Will meditation help us to become successful in life? Meditation, and success in the mundane world? They say, "Our financial condition is bad. By meditating shall we attain the 'grace of God?'" Meditation also becomes an investment, a part of their business. It is impossible for us to conceive that meditation has no connection whatsoever with anything purposive. It is wrong even to say that meditation leads to bliss, because one who meditates to achieve bliss cannot meditate at all.

However, one who meditates for the sake of meditation invariably attains bliss.

One who plunges into the act for the sake of the act and completes each act fully at that very moment when it is required, one who engrosses himself so completely that the sense of being, the doer is lost such a man's entire life is meditation. Lao Tzu says that even a king, if he so wishes, can organise the working of his kingdom and demonstrate his love towards his subjects and yet act as if in a play -- without a purpose.

The statement of Lao Tzu, here, is in the form of a question: "IN LOVING PEOPLE AND RULING THE STATE, CANNOT HE PROCEED WITHOUT ANY (PURPOSE OF) ACTION? IN THE OPENING AND SHUTTING HIS GATES OF HEAVEN, CAN'T HE DO SO AS A FEMALE BIRD? WHILE HIS INTELLIGENCE REACHES IN EVERY DIRECTION, CANNOT HE (APPEAR TO) BE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE?"

Why does Lao Tzu raise those questions? What he means to convey he wants to put forth clearly, but in the form of questions. Knowing human beings as they are, he is very doubtful whether we can ever act without an aim. But we can. What results are there if we act so? What happens? We have to understand three things in this context.

Firstly, life is an accomplishment in itself. There is no achievement outside of life. No matter how difficult we find it to accept this fact, never give into the thought -- "Why should I live"? Always ask yourself instead, "How shall I live?" No sooner is the aim removed than the question changes. As long as

there is ambition we ask, "Why should we live?" but as soon as we understand that our very life is the goal, we shall begin to ask, "How should we live?" The whys and wherefores lead to science, to metaphysics. The 'how' leads to yoga. There are many people who are ready to answer our whys and wherefores. They may tell you of a beatitude that is beyond life. But then, everything worth attaining is beyond life. There is nothing worthy of any effort in this life; everything is obtained after one dies. He for whom what is after death is more meaningful, more important, turns his life into a living grave, because then, there is nothing worth achieving in this life.

Because of this theory, spread by the so-called religions, a dark negation of life has spread all over the earth. These religions proclaim: "Life is useless! Far away, beyond death is the goal which has to be attained." Those habitual questioners, may abide in heaven for a day or two but they will soon begin to question; "What shall we gain by staying in heaven? Peace and tranquillity are all right but what next?" This questioning is a chronic disease, and it is so deep-rooted as to be almost permanent with man. Wherever he is, man will ask this question.

It is said that whenever Mark Twain was asked a question he always replied with another question. If a person asked, "What is your name?" he would reply "What is the reason you are asking my name?" Once he went to meet the American President who said to him: "I have heard haven't I that you raise a question to any question that is asked of you?" Mark Twain replied, "Is it so? Do I still do this?" It was a chronic state. Poor man, he did not know what he was doing. Perhaps he came to know later that it was again a question he asked.

This tendency to ask questions, is a state of illness. The fact is, it is evidence of our diseased mind. When life is filled with happiness, we never question why? Have you ever noticed what raises a question within us? People come and ask me, "My child was born blind, why?" They never question why so many other children are not born blind. In the same way, a man asks why he should fall ill. No one asks why he is in good health. We never ask why there is happiness in the world, but when someone is in pain he invariably asks why there is pain and suffering in the world. For the last 5000 years, ever since man's history has been recorded among infinite questions asked, not a single question has been asked why there should be happiness in the world.

Even Buddha questioned, "Why is there unhappiness in the world?" Every man asks the same question. Whenever a man asks what the goal of life is, what is the purpose of life, he is actually asking why life is. This means he has filled his whole life with unhappiness or else he would never have asked the question. Living, alone, would then have been enough. But we have filled our lives with sorrow so the question arises. Lao Tzu asks: "Cannot even a king live without ambition?" because the king possesses everything that a man desires. Lao Tzu talks about kings because if a beggar is asked to live without a purpose he will say, "I do not even have a roof over my head! How can I live without an aim?" But even a king cannot be without ambition. Why? The reason is that the possession of things have no connection with ambition. To live ambitiously is a disease of the mind. Even if everything is attained, the mind still questions: "Why, wherefore?" It keeps on questioning.

Therefore, a very interesting thing happens: a poor man is not half as unhappy as a rich person. If you find a rich man who is not unhappy know that he is still poor. The very sign of a rich man is that he is so unhappy that he finds no way to get out of his unhappiness. A rich man attains everything that he thought would give him pleasure, and when once attained finds that happiness is still far away. He finds himself surrounded by his acquisitions -- there is nothing more left to be attained -- and yet, what he was to derive from them is totally absent. This gives rise to pain and sorrow. A poor man lives in hardships but never in sorrow. To live in difficulty means to live with few possessions. Absence causes hardships. There is no food, the stomach is empty -- this causes hardship, suffering. When the stomach is full but there is no feeling of fullness, it causes unhappiness. When a man lays himself on the softest of beds and yet there is no sign of sleep, he feels unhappy. Hardship is caused by the absence and unhappiness by the presence of the same thing. Hardship is a part of poverty; unhappiness, a part of riches. So when there is unhappiness, know that that man is rich.

What is unhappiness? As long as we are running, struggling with a goal in view, life seems to be filled with interest. There is a certain flavour in the poor man's life: the goal is far away and has yet to be attained. It might come to hand tomorrow or in the future or in the next life. Psychologists say that the concept of the next world is the comfort of the poor. It is true to some extent. How will he work? On what will he pin his hopes? If not the next world, then socialism or communism -- he needs some utopia in the future. A poor man rushes to attain his goal but when all achievements are fulfilled and all aims attained, he realises for the first time that all his efforts were in vain. He finds he has accomplished all that he desired and yet his hands are empty.

So today, if we find the philosophers of the rich countries talking about meaninglessness, it is meaningful. Whether it is Sartre or Camus or Heidegger or anyone else -- they all say the same thing, namely: life is meaningless. This meaninglessness has been created by man himself in his effort to lead an ambitious life. Now all his achievements are reaching completion and he finds he has not understood the significance of life. This troubles and perplexes him. Whenever a person says he is filled with despair, know that it is because of his hopes. He who does not build any hope for the future is never frustrated.

You can never disappoint me because I do not pin my hopes on you. However you deal with me, I shall not be disappointed; for I have not committed the initial error of handing over that power to you. The slightest expectation from you and you can disappoint me. If I meet you on the road and I expect you to at least greet me -- you can dash my hopes and I shall be filled with despair! Then you become the master. Your indifference will make a wound in my heart for I had great expectations of you and you do not even care to greet me?

All our hopes turn into despair. If life is made meaningful for a purpose we will fall into the pit of meaninglessness one day. Lao Tzu says: "Make no aims. Live life without aims". No poisonous fruit will then mar your life. Then you shall be filled with a fresh and new happiness every moment. Lao Tzu is very much against ambition. Leave all ambition; ask nothing of life. Then, whatever the future brings consider it a boon. Ask not, because no sooner do you ask than the trouble starts.

We always make demands and turn our whole life into a turmoil. We make demands from all our relationships Even in love we demand. If someone loves me today, I look eagerly the next day for the same affection. Then my life becomes a source of pain and anguish. If I receive honour, I expect it every day; if I am shown mercy, I want it every day. Then my demand pulls me down into gloom and melancholy. But even this does not stop my demands.

This is interesting. If I expect you to greet me and you do not, I never think that I should not expect your attention. On the contrary, I begin looking for others who will greet me. Then it seems that you were not the right sort of person; another person might turn out to be better -- so my old habit continues. If I fail in love in one place, I seek my ego in another place. If my ambition fails in one direction, I seek another direction. I never pause to think whether it is possible to live without ambition. Lao Tzu asks, "Is it possible to live without ambition? It is possible but it is difficult, because our whole education prepares us for a life of ambition. Also the society we live in, our very culture prepares us for the same thing. Whatever ambition the father has failed to fulfil, he plants on his son. The mother similarly sows the seeds of those desires of hers which were left unfulfilled, into her daughter's mind. Psychologists say that every son elaborates once more upon the hopes and despairs of his father. Till his dying day, the father wishes to see his son complete that which he could not.

Our hopes never end. We wish them to be eternal. Therefore, the old shastras say that he who does not have a son has lived in vain. This is absurd. Our life is our own but it becomes useless if we do not have a son! Why? Because if you have no son, what will happen to your unfulfilled desires? On whose shoulders will you set out on your journey to eternity? So a son is very necessary. If you do not have a son of your own, you can adopt one. There must be someone to carry on the load of your unsatiated desires even when you are not there. Is this not intriguing? Even when you no longer exist you want your desires to exist.

Lao Tzu says "Live but do not let your desires live." But we are such that we would rather not be than have our desires cease to be. We tell our sons, as we lie on our death-beds, "Son, uphold the traditions of our family and complete the tasks that I could not." Wonder of wonders! Not only do you leave the world empty but you also make your sons useless. Every father passes on his diseases to his son. Each generation has made meticulous arrangements to deposit their illnesses with the next generation. So we find each new generation, more ill more diseased than the previous generation.

"What brought the Kaliyuga about?" people ask. It is this very tradition carried on from father to son that has brought the kaliyuga. It is a collection of all the maladies of the satyuga. Dasharatha must have planted the responsibility on Rama to carry out his unfulfilled desires Rama, in turn, must have passed on the burden to Luv and Kusha and so it went on. With each generation, the load increased, and man finds himself crushed underneath it. But the unsatisfied desires still scintillate giving the father the hope that perhaps it may be fulfilled some day. Some part of my blood may feel the satisfaction of enjoying it.

Lao Tzu says: "Is it not possible that you can live without ambition? You just live." The so-called mahatmas would say: "Animals live in that way!" In a sense they are right, because the animals live in the present. They know of no future, they have no time-consciousness therefore they don't store for the

morrow or remember the past, or have much sense for the future. Their time-circle is very small, and they live within it. So in a way, the mahatmas are right: that an ambitionless man would live like an animal. But then, unlike animals, this man is not oblivious of the future. In fact he has greater knowledge of the future and hence he lives in the present moment. He knows that tomorrow can bring nothing but sorrow and so it cannot fool him. So in a way, he becomes artless and innocent like the animals. You will see the mellowness of a cow's eyes in his. And also, in a way, he becomes like God.

But this is difficult to bring about. I was recently reading a booklet by one Muni Vidyananda. He speaks from an average mind. He says, "Time is precious. Do not lose a single moment. Earn something, acquire something!" If a shopkeeper talks in this manner, it is understandable. All business firms declare,

Time is money." But here comes a Muni who speaks the same language! He says, "Time is money. Do not lose it. Utilise it to attain moksha; utilise it to seek the atman. Time never returns, so do something, acquire something. If you do not, you will have lost it."

What Lao Tzu says is a profound religious truth. His is not the shopkeepers' language. In fact, when sadhus impress the businessman, the reason is only this; that they both speak the same language. The trader fully agrees with the Muni: time is wealth. Now the only thing that remains is how to define wealth -- whether it is taken to be the worldly wealth or the wealth of virtue. But the fact remains that time is wealth and it should be directed towards earning it should be dedicated to some purpose. Then only can you be wealthy. Whether you are worldly rich or the spiritually wealthy, you can only be rich if you turn your time into wealth.

Lao Tzu says, however, "Do not change time into wealth. Time is life. Live it. Be immersed in it, and do not think of attaining something through it." Be so rapt, so engrossed with the present moment, that you are completely one with it, that there is no distance between you and the moment. Time is not wealth. Time is life. Nothing can ever be earned from time, because time is its own goal. He who tries to make capital out of time, dies a beggar. He who lives each moment of his life becomes a king; because to him the treasures are open. The very essence of life becomes so clear as to be almost transparent. Each moment that passes sharpens the sword of his life, more and more. The wine of his life becomes more potent and profound, and his dance of life will become more lithe and graceful. But this happens only in the here and now.

So this is the first thing. Now in the second part of the sutra, Lao Tzu says: "IN THE OPENING AND SHUTTING OF HIS GATES OF HEAVEN, CANNOT HE DO SO LIKE A FEMALE BIRD?" This we shall have to understand a little. There is a male mind that works in a particular manner and there is a female mind that works in an entirely different manner. Lao Tzu is in favour of the female mind.

The male mind works in an aggressive manner. When I say 'the male mind', I am not referring to men alone. It is only a symbol of aggression. One method of going about things is to be aggressive. If you desire something, go all out for it. This, according to Lao Tzu, is the characteristic of a male mind. There is another type of mind also, which believes not in aggression but in patient awaiting, together with invitation. A woman can never be aggressive by herself. If she wishes to be, she has to take the help of a

male. She can bring about aggression, but cannot be aggressive herself. A man is capable of aggression by himself. He needs nobody's help.

There are some men who do not enjoy making love if they are not aggressive, because they derive full pleasure of aggression, in rape and violence. Therefore a man is never satisfied with a woman who is easily available. The more unattainable a woman, the greater is the excitement to win her, the more attractive and desirable she seems. The very preparations to attain her give endless pleasure to his aggressive mind.

A woman's mind is non-aggressive. She is receptive. She accepts. Her acceptance is her disposition, her natural attitude towards the world, towards life.

According to Lao Tzu, we can have two types of relationships with existence: one is of aggression (enmity) and the other of acceptance, of friendliness. So he says, "Become like a female-bird, like the female mind." Do not push open the door of heaven.

Swami Ram Tirth used to say that doors are of two types: On one is written 'Push', and on another is written 'Pull'. The door of the female mind bears the inscription -- 'Pull'. The female mind draws. It never reaches out, it only calls, invites.

Will you carry your habit of pushing even up to the doors of heaven? Will you enter the gates of heaven like a Hitler or a Napoleon? Will you try to invade and conquer God? When a man sets out to seek God, his attitude is aggressive. "Where is He? I shall not rest till I find Him." He does not set out dancing and singing like Meera.

When I say a man, I mean a male mind. Not all men have a male mind. A man can also dance and sing his way to God like a Chaitanya or a Kabir. A woman can have a male mind also. The male and female minds are just symbols.

A female mind, even when it sets out to seek, is receptive. If such a mind does not attain, it never complains. It never rebukes: "Where are you? Where do you hide?" A female mind always says: "There is definitely something wrong somewhere within me. Perhaps my invitation is lacking, perhaps there is a fault in my awaiting and so I have missed you! You are here around somewhere, I know. It is my door that is jammed and will not open unto you." Understand this clearly: The method of seeking God of the sage (the intellectual) is the method of the male mind. The method of seeking God of the saint (the devotee) is the method of the female mind. This is why, when the devotee says; "There is no man in the world except Krishna," it means, that all other men are mere seekers and hence they should have the female mind. This does not mean that the rest of the world is feminine. Some ignorant and stupid people do take it to mean this however. There is an organisation in Bengal: the Order of the Sakis. The members of this order believe themselves to be the sweethearts of Krishna. Even a male member of this order holds an idol of Krishna to his heart when he sleeps at night. Now no matter how much this man believes himself to be Krishna's sweetheart, his method of approach is that of a typical male mind in fact, a male mind always wants to do something. He cannot let go of himself because he feels restless if he does not do something.

Lao Tzu says: "Let go!" He exhorts us to relax and let things happen as they may. Do not be eager to have things happen. Do not be hasty, do not be insistent on a particular type of result. Cultivate the ability to accept whatever happens. Keep your doors wide open and be happy with whatever you are. Do not incur enmity with existence. Have an attitude of friendship. Whatever happens is the right thing to happen. Have this type of an inner feeling of amiability, of friendliness, an attitude of being close to existence, and accept whatever it does as being the best that could happen.

To live in such an attitude with such a frame of mind, is to live according to the female mind.

The third sutra is: "WHEN HIS INTELLIGENCE REACHES IN EVERY DIRECTION, CANNOT HE (APPEAR TO) BE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE?"

When wisdom is complete, is it necessary to keep the arrogance of wisdom? When the name of wisdom shines with full lustre, do you have to proclaim that you are a sage? Actually, as long as a person asserts his wisdom, know that his knowledge is not complete. How can wisdom claim to be wise? The truth is, as soon as a person's knowledge is complete, he also comes to know that it is impossible to know. He becomes aware of the fact that however much one knows, there is still much more to be known. He becomes aware of the fact that his knowledge is a mere handful of water from the infinite ocean of knowledge, which he can never grasp within his hand. Actually, he alone knows whose fist is unclenched and who has lost all sense of grasping. He dissolves in the ocean of knowledge, just like salt would dissolve in water. There is no knower left behind. So, he who sets out on the path of knowledge should be prepared for complete annihilation. Where there is a goal in view, this cannot be; because there the ego is strong. But where the goal is absent, there is no reason for the ego to remain. If I have no anxiety for the 'morrow, the 'I' in me invariably dies. If I make no demands on the coming moment, if I have no plans for the future, then only can I be happy. As soon as I give up all insistence, my ego has no place to stand. The 'I' is the link between my persistent aims and plans. The greater our demand of the future, the greater is the ego.

Lao Tzu asks: "Can we not, after attaining full knowledge, live as if we know nothing?" It often happened that when Lao Tzu was questioned, he would become silent sometimes for hours. So much so that the questioner forgot the question. Then after a long time, Lao Tzu would ask, "What was your question?"

The man would reply, "Now I too forgot what I asked. Why did you not answer me then?"

Lao Tzu would say, "I did not know the answer. Had I had some answer ready, I would have given it to you. I waited silently for the answer to come. I thought perhaps it would come. Therefore I ask again what was your question?"

Throughout this long life, Lao Tzu wrote nothing. This small book is his first and last. His disciples pleaded with him time and again but Lao Tzu would say, "What do I know that I should write? And if I leave my ignorance behind me, it will be dangerous." But the more he refused, the more people pressed him to write. Then one night he ran away from his hut, but was caught as he tried to cross the border check-post. The officer in charge refused to grant him permission to leave without paying his taxes, which he demanded in the form of his writings. He ordered him to stay there for three days and write

down all that he knew. Lao Tzu was in a dilemma. He who had remained silent all his life, who had never declared his knowledge, was now constrained to write! He needed to cross the border and leave forever to be one with the solitude of the mountains. But this man would not let him go.

So for three nights Lao Tzu sat up and wrote this book -- if you can call it a book. The very first thing he said was: "That which can be known cannot be expressed and that which is written is not the truth."

So Lao Tzu asks: "Can it not be that one who knows may be established in the feeling of not knowing?" It is not a question of 'can it not be?' IT IS SO! But so that this may not become a dogmatic assertion, Lao Tzu puts it in the form of a hesitant question. He says that when a person's understanding is open in all directions, when he is in a position to know all there is to know, when all doors of knowledge and life's mystery, are open unto him, when the light of knowledge falls on him from all directions, can he not seem to be like a person without knowledge?

Lao Tzu puts this in interrogative form to convey his hesitancy. This hesitancy is the characteristic of an illumined person. The ignorant man speaks with confidence. Whenever Mahavira was questioned, he never answered without 'perhaps'. He would say, "Perhaps it is so." Or he would say, "Perhaps it is not so," or "Perhaps both. Perhaps both are so." Or he would say an illumined sage's answer is never mathematical. He never insists that two and two make four, because the mystery of life is so vast, life is an unsolvable riddle. He who gives clearcut answers should know well that there is much left to be known yet. To give a clearcut answer leaves much to be developed. This undeveloped part is also alive and if neglected, will not fail to take revenge.

Therefore Lao Tzu does not assert anything authoritatively. He could have easily said that the wise should behave like the ignorant. That, too, could have conveyed his meaning; but then, his statement would not have borne the mark of his wisdom. It would then have been like the statement of an ordinary ignorant person.

It is said that once a famous Sophist debater came to visit Socrates. Socrates is the only Western philosopher who was almost of the calibre of Lao Tzu. He always asked questions but gave no answer himself. One reason why he was poisoned was this habit of not answering. It caused such frustration among his enemies. Socrates always said that he did not know. He claimed to be ignorant and, hence, he said he had the right to question and since he had no wisdom, how could he answer? We find ourselves in difficulty with such a person, because questions can be asked endlessly. And if the other offers no reply, on what will you base your other questions? The whole town was troubled by the behaviour of Socrates. They were afraid to encounter him on the streets for fear he might put some question to them. Then crowds would gather and there would be lots of difficulties, because each person knows he knows nothing about all the things he pretends to know. Because no one questions, you go about happily with your illusion of knowledge. If, however, someone does question, you find yourself in trouble.

But the fact is, no one questions because each of us has to save our so-called knowledge for ourselves. We are perpetually engaged in a mutual conspiracy, For instance, if someone asks you, "Does God exist?" You find yourself in a difficult situation. But you can also turn around and ask, "What is your

opinion?" Now this other man also has some belief of his own which he wants to conserve, then, the difficulty starts. So we do not prod at each other's ignorance. We are wise in our ignorance, and the other is proficient in his. Thus, we protect each other's ignorances and consider it bad manners to raise such questions.

Socrates was not a civil person. Before administering poison to him the city magistrate told Socrates, that if he stopped his activity of telling the truth he would set him free. Socrates replied that that was his business, he could not do otherwise. How could he stop telling the truth, because whatever he said was invariably the truth. There was no point in living if he could not speak the truth. Such a life would be a bondage.

This Sophist I mentioned came to Socrates and pronounced one of his logical concepts. He told Socrates, "There is nothing absolute in this world; nothing is independent. Nothing is perfect in this world neither man nor his doctrines nor his truths." Socrates asked him, "Is your statement completely and fully true?" The Sophist, who by now had jumped into the heat of argument, not realising that he would be caught in his own words, said, "This is wholly true."

Socrates said, "Then I have nothing more to say. The matter is at an end, I leave you to think about it for yourself."

Whenever we assert the completeness of anything, we forget the fact that life is very mysterious. It is not that two and two make four and that is the end of it. Something always remains behind, and that something becomes the end for us. Had this man told Socrates that some truths in this world are perfect and some are not instead of saying that no truth is perfect in this world Socrates would not have dismissed him so quickly. In one and the same breath he declared that no truth is perfect and that what he says is wholly true, he defeated his own statement. Whenever we make such traditional assertions, we completely forget their opposite. This opposite then takes its revenge.

Therefore Lao Tzu does not say that one who claims to be wise, is an ignorant person. Such a statement would be akin to an assertion of wisdom. Therefore Lao Tzu says: "It is not possible that he to whom knowledge has opened all its doors, should behave like an ignorant person? This hesitant question Lao Tzu asks. The mild and flexible wisdom, the liquid consciousness are the characteristic indications of Lao Tzu's own perfection. These are the three sutras; a life free from ambition, an attitude of complete acceptance and invitation, and a preparation to become completely knowledgeable.

He who has the courage for this, attains the ultimate aim of life and reaches the highest perfection here and now. Such a one does not wait for the 'morrow. Such a one attains beatitude -- not after life, but here and now. Paramatman does not send him to some higher world as we believe. Rather he is surrounded and permeated by God on all sides. Such a one has nothing more to attain because the treasures of life are forever open unto him.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #4

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THE TAO PRODUCES ALL THINGS AND NOURISHES THEM;

IT PRODUCES THEM AND DOES NOT CLAIM THEM AS ITS OWN.

IT DOES ALL, AND YET DOES NOT BOAST OF IT.

IT PRESIDES OVER ALL, AND YET DOES NOT CONTROL THEM.

THIS IS WHAT IS CALLED THE MYSTERIOUS QUALITY OF THE TAO.

All that is subtle in existence is invisible. Things are visible according to their grossness. That which is visible is superficial; that which is invisible is profound and deep. Therefore, those who set out to seek God make a fundamental error. The very word "Ishwara" for God is irrelevant and absurd. That which can be seen is not Ishwara; that which is seen, by dint of the very fact that it can be seen, is not God. What the eyes see is matter, what the hands feel is matter, and that which the mind knows -- that too is matter.

Actually, whatever we know develops a boundary, a form, a structure. That which forever remains beyond all our knowing, that which we can never touch or never see no matter how much we want to -- and yet, whose existence we cannot deny -- that is God (Paramatman).

There are three things. One is the visible world that consists of all that we see and that registers on our senses. To be visible means to be evident before our eyes. That only we consider to be true and authentic. That which we cannot see, can touch, it is only natural that our mind should deny its existence. This is the second category.

If there were only these two categories of existence, then God would have no place in the world the atman could not be and religion would be of no use. Then love also would not be possible and all prayers would be false. But there is a third category. We have talked of the first two: the first is the visible world that we can see, touch and feel with our senses; and the second is the invisible world which we cannot experience with our senses -- we cannot see it, nor touch it, nor understand it. Now there is a third classification of existence which we also cannot see, nor touch nor understand, and yet whose existence we cannot deny. This third category is God himself. Lao Tzu refers to it as Tao. Tao means religion Tao means the law, Tao means the supreme rule, the ultimate reality. This third Lao Tzu refers to as Tao. Whether we say Ishwara or atman or truth it makes no difference because all names are given by man.

Buddha has referred to this category as nirvana, the void. Those who lack understanding interpret his statement to mean that Buddha denied the existence of God. If that is what Buddha meant, there would have been no need for him to refer to it as shunya (void). Buddha has not denied the existence of God, but he refers to Him as the void.

Why did Buddha choose this word to describe the ultimate reality? Because both aspects of existence are contained in the void. The void is, and also is not. It exists as if it did not exist. Its presence is not present. It does not exist in a gross form, and therefore those who try to grasp it in a gross way never attain it. Those who endeavour to know it in the same manner as they know other objects can never know it. We have to change our very method of knowing.

Let us try to understand this. I say that there is love for you in my heart. But you cannot understand my love by dissecting my heart. If you try, you will come to the conclusion that I told a lie because nowhere will you find love within me. Love is not matter that can be examined in a laboratory. What the scientist will find will be things that love may have no knowledge of. He will come across the various organs of the body, the flesh, the bones and even the heart, but nowhere can he point and say, "Here is love." Then the scientist is bound to declare that there is nothing like love. Then only two things are possible: either this man is purposely lying or he is under an illusion.

But if the scientist is asked, "Granted that this man was under some illusion, have you been able to locate this illusion within him?" he has no answer to this. He cannot find the illusion anywhere on his table. Or, if the man was telling a lie, the lie should be hidden some where within him.

Actually, the scientist should say that the man who said he was in love is not there at all, because he cannot be found anywhere within the body. What comes within our grasp of understanding is unable to speak. But this the scientist will not say because he himself can speak.

So we shall have to say that love exists, but not as an object. It has a different dimension of existence. Love exists, but not like matter. And remember, the more invisible the love, the deeper it is. The more it is expressed, the more base it becomes. When someone declares his love, he debases it, because even this much brings love within the grasp of senses. If nothing else. the ears hear the declaration.

Therefore, a person like Buddha would never say to anyone that he loves him. To say it is to destroy the love. If love is there, there is no need to express it even this much. If love is, it will be experienced. If it cannot be experienced without expression, there is no way to experience it.

Have you ever experienced a love that was never spoken, that was never expressed; where the lover never touched your hand or took you in his embrace, where the lover made no effort to reveal his love? And yet, you felt as if you have been refreshed by the waters of the Ganges, or that suddenly flowers seem to have showered on you and some distant music from unknown quarters begins to play within you. No fingers touch the strings of the veena, and yet its mellow music enthralls your very being. No one is near, and yet someone seems to have gone deep within, to the very core of your being. If you have experienced such a love, it will be easy for you to understand what Lao Tzu says, for God's nature is like love.

Unfortunately we do not know love. And one who does not know love can never know God, because love is the way of the supreme power.

The first sutra of Lao Tzu is: God gives birth to everything and nourishes it also. And yet, He claims no ownership over it. Man's consciousness has lifted its hands to heavens infinite times, man has bowed low in reverence and worshipped Him, his soul has cried out to Him, proclaimed faith in Him, even experienced His presence, but there has never ever been any response to his utterances. Man has called himself the son of God. Man hails God as his creator, his preserver, but God never confirms. He never says, "I am your creator, your preserver." Unproclaimed, silent is His Being.

Understand this a little. He who makes a claim, by his very action forfeits his rights. If a father has to tell his son that he is his father, if a lover has to make it known to his beloved that he is the lover, if a guru has to announce to his disciples that he is the guru, the genuineness is destroyed. The day the guru demands respect from his disciple, he should know that his gurudom is either lost or non-existent. It needs to be proclaimed. He who is revered with instinctive spontaneity is a guru. He who has to make known his gurudom, knows well, within himself, that he is not a guru.

When I was in the university, a question was asked during a conference : "Why doesn't the student of today respect his teacher?" I replied, "Where is the teacher?" Guru means, one who is invariably respected, who cannot but be respected. He does not demand respect; rather, respect flows towards him as the waters of the river flow to the sea. If the sea questions why the rivers do not flow into it, we shall have to inform the sea that it is under an illusion and that it is no more than a pond or a lake. The very meaning of the ocean is that rivers flow into it; that rivers have no other option but to flow towards it. The river exists only to flow into the sea. If it does not flow into the sea it cannot be a river. The ocean does not have to attract the attention of the rivers towards itself. Its being is enough.

Respect and reverence flow towards the guru: love flows towards love. But if a claim is being sought, it proves the claimant is absent.

This may seem paradoxical, but it is so. Whenever you claim that you love, search within. You will not find even a trace of love, because love is claim enough unto itself. Its very being is enough to prove it. All

other claims are impotent declarations of what is not within. God does not claim, for God is the claimant.

There was an atheist in the West by the name of Diderot. In one of his meetings, he held up his watch and said, "If God is, let him give me a small proof of His existence. Let Him stop my watch ticking right now. You say God is the creator and the destroyer of this world. Let him stop this man-made watch and prove His presence. Then I promise to worship Him forever." All the theists that were present in the crowd looked up to the skies and began to pray, "O Lord, by your grace, the lame can climb mountains, the blind begin to see, the dead come to life! What can you not do? And this is a trifling matter. Stop this watch and prove yourself to the infidels!" But the watch did not stop.

Diderot won, not because his atheism was right but because the theism of the theists was incorrect. They were coaxing God to enter into competition with Diderot. They were urging Him not to lose this opportunity to prove himself. If, however? Diderot was really wise, or if the theists were really wise, they would have understood.

My feeling is that if God also had entered into the competition that day, He would have become inauthentic forever and ever. Had the watch stopped, to prove His authenticity, God would have debased himself. Actually, claims always arise from the low, the inferior. If God could not be indifferent to one single Diderot, He would have lost all claim to Godhood.

Diderot went home exulting in his victory. All his life he remained perfectly convinced of his understanding because if God could not give even such a slight indication of His existence? how could He exist?

We need proofs to demonstrate the existence of anything. Actually, that which is, needs and gives no proof. We seek proof only when we doubt the authenticity of a thing. Those who have been the greatest believers in God, have never troubled to prove His existence. Those who have given proofs of His existence were not theists. Those who made the existence of God a syllogism for their arguments and lengthy, logical calculations cannot have been theists. Those who try to persuade themselves with proofs of His existence are also atheists. If any proof turns out to be wrong, their God becomes false immediately.

If God depends on proofs for His existence, then remember? the proof is greater than God. Tertullian has said, "I believe in you because you have never given any proofs." This man must have been a perfect theist. He says, "I believe in you because you seem impossible. Whatever way I think, I find no evidence of your being. Therefore, I firmly believe that you are. If your existence depended on my testimony, then I would be greater than you, because then it would be in my hands to give evidence to prove or disprove you. My intelligence would then become the deciding factor on which your existence depended."

Lao Tzu says, "He is the creator, the preserver, but he is not the acclaimer." He has never proclaimed His ownership. He is so sure and confident of His ownership that He needs no declarations. Because we are not sure of ownership, we need to proclaim it time and again, even to our own selves. Have you ever noticed that you hardly ever talk of a thing you are sure of?

Vivekananda went to Ramakrishna. He shook him by the arm and declared, "I want to know whether God is." He had asked this question to others before. Many tried to give him proofs of God's existence, some with logic, some through the shastras, but Vivekananda was not satisfied because if your God is hidden behind logic, you can be proved wrong. Logic is a double-edged weapon.

To Vivekananda's question, Ramakrishna replied, "Do not waste time in asking useless questions. Tell me if you want to know, to see, to meet Him." For the first time Vivekananda was facing a man who was so sure of himself that he never offered to prove or to teach. He simply said, "If you want to meet Him, say so".

Vivekananda commented later on that he had asked this question to others and caused them embarrassment; but in the case of Ramakrishna it was his turn to be disconcerted; because he realised that he himself had not yet decided the issue. It was mere curiosity that he was out to satisfy. One thing, Vivekananda says, was clear from this: that this man's knowledge depended on nothing outside himself. He knew; his knowledge was pure. There were no reasons why -- he knew. And he was so sure and confirmed in this knowledge that he said, "If you want to know, say so."

This question that baffles almost all of mankind was so easy for Ramakrishna -- as easy as if someone had asked him about the sun and all he had to do was to take him by the hand and take him out of doors! It is worthless to argue whether the sun is or is not. Step out of the house and there the sun is! Ramakrishna's speech was so artless, so spontaneous, that it carried the mark of deep and profound knowledge. Where there is complete assurance, there is no claim. If God is not assured within himself; who else can be? Therefore, God has not proclaimed His existence. People say that the Bible is the book of God, that the Koran and the Vedas are books of God, but I say unto you, there is no book of God. All these books belong to men who have had a glimpse of God. God can only write a book if He feels inferior within himself. He would only proclaim himself if He himself was doubtful of His existence. There is no book by God because God has given no statements. Whom would He want to convince of His existence? He is. His ownership is natural because there is no competitor. Ownership has to be declared only when there is the fear of other aspirants.

A husband tells his wife: "I am your master." Why? because all around there is rivalry, and any time the ownership can be snatched away. Anyone can be the owner. You proclaim your ownership of a house because if you do not do so in time, others can snatch it away from you. But if God proclaims, to whom should He proclaim?

Therefore, Lao Tzu says, He does not declare His ownership. Tao, Paramatman or religion make no declarations because His claim is confirmed and natural. He is. He does everything and yet does not boast of being the doer.

Whenever we do anything, we are motivated by compulsion. This gives rise to the ego. You sleep all night, breathe for twenty-four hours, but you do not boast about it. You do not proclaim from rooftops that you breathed so many times! Mind you, your number of breaths runs into thousands each day. You can boast that you have slept twenty years out of a life of sixty years, but we do not do this for these acts are so natural to us that we do not proclaim to be the doer.

But man always boasts. He boasts if he has even one rupee in his pocket. When he has thousands of rupees, he proclaims his riches for sure. Yet he would pay thousands of rupees for one breath. But he never boasts about it. If a dying man were told that he would be given so many breaths if he agreed to give away his wealth, he would most willingly part with it. But it is strange that all his life he proclaimed his paltry wealth and never his precious breath! Breath was natural to him and hence did not need to be proclaimed. Wealth was not his nature. He had to toil in order to attain it, and hence the claim.

Where there is effort, there is ego. Where there is no effort there is no ego. If God had to make an effort to make the world, as we do to gain wealth, then ego would bound to be there. But if it is an effortless act on His part -- like our breathing -- then there is no question of the ego and, hence, of proclamation.

So those who know never like to say that God made the world. They prefer to say, "God became the world." They do not allow even this much distinction: that God made the trees. They say God creates Himself and becomes the trees. The clouds that glide in the skies are not driven by the power of God. Rather it is God himself who glides in the clouds. God does not create man; rather, He himself is born as man.

Understand this a little. An artist paints a picture. No sooner is it made than it becomes separate from the artist. But God is not separate from His creation, because there is no way for Him to stand apart. He is connected with His creation like a dancer with his dance. When a dancer dances, he and his dance are not two separate things; they are one. If he stops, the dance stops. We cannot ask him to go away and leave his dance behind. Therefore, we have depicted God as a dancer in our images of Him: Nataraja. And the reason is only this: that the dance and the dancer are one. God can be understood best as a dancer.

God and the universe are one. Whatever happens within the universe happens within the order of His disposition. It is, therefore, that Lao Tzu says, "IT (TAO) DOES EVERYTHING AND YET DOES NOT BOAST OF IT."

Only one whose acts are stamped with force and violence bouts. Do you know of any act of yours that you have performed without the feeling of pride? Know then that that virtuous deed.

This may sound difficult because our good deeds also give rise to conceit. The truth is that if there is no conceit, we do not care for virtuous deeds. If I ask you to contribute towards the construction of a temple, you will at once ask where I intend to place a plaque with your name. If I say, "This temple shall bear no plaques," know for certain that this temple will never be constructed. We do not care for the temple; we care only for the tablet that bears our name. The plaque is significant; the temple secondary. The inscription looks nice only on a temple -- and therefore, the building. If no acclaim is forthcoming, we are not prepared to donate.

The shastras say, "Give charity and you will be acclaimed in this world for your virtuous deed and reap the reward of it in the next world." Spend one coin in charity and you gain thousands in heaven." To get a single coin out of a person, you have to promise him millions in return.

But the meaning of a good deed is something very different. A virtuous deed is a deed which does not give rise to arrogance. That act which gives rise to arrogance and conceit is a sin. Therefore, it can be safely said that God has never committed a sin because there is no sign of conceit in any of His actions. To date, He has not once proclaimed that 'I am'. Therefore, all that He does is virtuous.

Your actions also can be virtuous, if there is none go consolidating behind them. If an act is performed and nothing is added to your ego, then the act becomes a virtuous deed. That which adds to your ego is a sinful act.

So the question is not between a virtuous deed and a sinful deed. The question is of the doer himself. The question should be: how is a deed to be performed? The act must be done, but the sense of being the doer should not be strengthened. Then, it is a virtue.

Even if the act is not performed and the ego is strengthened by it, it becomes a sin. Action is not necessary. A man may not steal; he only thinks about stealing. A man may not kill; he only thinks about murder. Or, a man may not be fighting in the elections but only thinking about it. Such people climb the steps of ego in their thoughts, which are a substitute for action. It is not everyone who can perform. Action has its own problems, its own difficulties, but everyone has the capacity to dream. All men cannot be kings but they can rule over the kingdoms of their dreams. But an act in your dream also helps to push the ego up a few steps. Even if you are sitting in a chair and dreaming that you have won the elections, this is enough to lift the ego sky-high. The ego is like the mercury in a thermometer. The slightest pleasure you take in your actions and it rises immediately -- even when the act itself is not performed.

But the opposite can also happen. You do a good deed and there is no pride behind your action. Then, the mercury falls.

"IT (TAO) DOES ALL, AND YET DOES NOT BOAST OF IT. IT PRESIDES OVER EVERYTHING AND YET CONTROLS NOTHING." This sutra is very subtle. Tao is the all-in-all of everything, yet does not control anything.

A common question that has been asked throughout the ages is that if God is, and if everything happens according to His will, then why does he allow a thief to steal, or a murderer to kill, or a cheat to deceive? And when the weak is tormented by the strong, why does He merely look on? The question is consistent and deserves recognition. Intelligent people have questioned this time and again. Actually, the biggest doubt in the minds of intelligent people about the existence of God is caused by this question.

Bertrand Russell asks, "If God exists, how can He allow a child to be born blind or crippled or with cancer? If God is, how does this happen? And you say He is the doer of everything!" The hell that we witness today in life makes us doubt whether God really is. If there is a God, doesn't He deserve to be called Satan, seeing life is as it is? The question is very consistent with the facts: if God is, why is there evil in the world?

A Muslim friend came to visit me. This was his question too. He said, "The biggest question I feel is that if God is, then why is the world so evil?" He is right, because there can be no relationship between God and evil. How can there be?

I told him, "Let us remove all evil from the world for a moment. Can you visualize what the world will be like then?" The moment you remove evil, the good also disappears from the scene. Good cannot exist on its own. It is because of evil that good exists. Remove darkness and light disappears together with it. Light exists because of darkness. Remove the cold, and the heat is automatically lost. Heat and cold are different variations of the same thing. If we try to remove death, life too will be lost. If there is no death, how can life be? Or, if there is no life, how can death be?

The universe exists with the help of polar opposites. The world's existence is brought about by the music between opposites. If the opposite is removed, both are removed. Remove the male, and the female is lost. Remove old age, and youth is lost. The young person always wishes to prolong his youth because he does not know that youth and old age are so closely combined that if one is removed, the other is lost. We all wish ugliness to be removed from the world; but if ugliness is lost, beauty will also disappear. If you wish for a world without ugliness, be prepared to face a world where nothing is beautiful.

I told my friend, "If you wish for a world where evil is banned, good will flee from such a place immediately. Then this world will be a big prison house; because where there is no freedom to do evil, there can be no freedom at all.

In fact, the word "freedom" contains the freedom to do evil also. If a man is told that he is free only to be good, what meaning does such a freedom convey? This freedom has no meaning. Rather, it implies bondage. It would be proper to say; you are condemned to be good -- not free to be good. When we tell a person he is free to be good, the freedom to be evil enters along with the freedom to be good. God is the totality and yet he does not control anything. This means that God creates, but He creates freedom.

A man is free to be good and free to be bad -- as bad as he wishes -- when God is the Lord of everything. This is because true freedom exists only if there is freedom to do what one wishes, be it good or bad. When no such freedom exists, man is not man but a machine which does whatever it is made to do because it is insentient.

Man is sentient; he possesses consciousness. Consciousness is not possible without freedom. Lao Tzu says; He is the creator, but not the controller. He has not created a prison for us, where He stands guard at the gate.

People like Bertrand Russell say that it is this very reason that creates a doubt about His existence. But I say, it is for this very reason that God is. Where freedom is not, God cannot be. Freedom is the very proof of the existence of God. He is, because we are so completely free. He is! You may compare the existence of God to the example of the ocean and the fish that live in it. The fish are not aware of the ocean but their very existence is because of the ocean. Suicide; our lives become a veritable hell. Then

we turn around and say, "Slavery was better, because then we were happy." Freedom always finds us moving downward.

We seek slavery in all kinds of ways. And the ways we seek it are really astounding! Erich Fromm has written a unique book, *Escape from Freedom*. Fromm says that each man wishes to escape freedom. Wherever he finds freedom, he quickly seeks out slavery and hides himself behind it. This slavery cannot be detected easily because our habit of serfdom is so old that we cannot discriminate slavery from freedom.

If a person sets out to seek truth, he does not directly go out in search of it but begins to turn the pages of the shastras. Little does he know that this is slavery. He wishes to borrow even truth; -- he wants someone to give it to him.

If a person wants to know truth, he does not set out by himself to discover it; he goes and falls at the feet of a guru saying, "You are my everything. Give me the knowledge of truth. How can I, a sinner, do anything?" He little knows that all his sins are his own doing. A lot of toil and effort is required to become a sinner. He admits his ability to commit sins by saying he is a sinner. At the same time he says, "How can a sinner do anything to gain knowledge of the truth?" Actually, he is begging to be saved from his freedom. He is requesting this guru to become his jailer so that if tomorrow, he finds himself in hell, he can put the responsibility on the Guru. And if he attains heaven, he can always claim the credit for having chosen this guru. Thus, man clings to the shastras, and to gurus.

People like Hitler, Mao and Stalin are not born accidentally. They are born only when a whole country desires to be enslaved. Each person eagerly wishes for a man who can stand up and say, "I know what is right, Follow me!" -- so that they can follow him. They want to be told clearly what to do and what not to do. This is why we pursue politicians and sadhus and mahatmas. And these whom we ask, -- they too have asked others. They have no direct knowledge of their own; they too do not know what is right and what is wrong. The fact is, when there are people to inquire, teachers become available.

We are eager to place our burden on others. Freedom seems too heavy for our shoulders. It should actually be the other way around: freedom should give us wings to fly in the sky.

Freedom seems very cumbersome, because we do not know what to do with it. There was a Zen fakir by the name of Nanin. One day he stayed late at his guru's ashram. He asked his guru to give him a lamp since it was too dark and he had far to go. The guru gave him a lamp but as soon as he began to go down the steps, the guru blew out the flame and extinguished it. Nanin was surprised. "What kind of a joke is this?" he asked.

The guru replied, "It never pays to find your path with another's light. Your own darkness is much better than someone else's light. Go, seek in your own darkness, so that the lamp within you may become lightened. The more you seek, the more you shall be cleansed. You will fall, you will dash against things, your limbs may break, but you will discover your soul in the bargain. Therefore, I have extinguished the lamp."

Nanin has written in his memoirs that he was never able to forget this man who had snatched the lamp from his hands and snuffed it out. He was the one who pushed him into darkness and made provisions for the lamp within to burn. "Today," he says, "when I see the flame burning within, my head bows down in reverence and gratefulness to this man who caused it to be lit."

This is freedom. It is very easy for God to place a light in your hands, but you can only live like worms with the help of such light. You will never fall, never go astray. There will be no hell; you will go straight to heaven. But the heaven that is obtained with the help of another is worse than hell, because such a heaven is a bondage. The good fortune that is not entirely one's own, that has not been sought and attained and experienced by one's own effort is worse than misfortune. Therefore Lao Tzu says: "Tao creates everything but controls nothing. It gives no instructions. It has given us the strength and the means to walk but it does not say, "Walk like this." The power to walk belongs to Tao; the space, the path, the darkness, the light, the very person who walks is Tao; and yet, Tao does not command: "go to the right, go to the left."

Tao gives us life, but it makes freedom the very basis of life. This freedom can become the agony of life or the benevolence of life; the choice is entirely ours. This freedom can cause that which lies hidden within to be revealed. This freedom can also be utilised to create our own darkness, our own nether world where we can rot and decay and be destroyed. One thing is certain however: that there is perfect freedom in the world. This perfect freedom is the unclaimed declaration of the existence of God. This is His silent declaration of "I am".

But we are totally unaware of this freedom. We are afraid, because freedom means responsibility. It means that I am the only person responsible for all my actions. If I find myself in hell, I have no one to blame but myself.

This responsibility perplexes and confuses us, so we try to shove it on to each other. The husband puts the responsibility on the wife, the wife on the husband, and thus both absolve themselves, taking the other to be accountable. They are not at all conscious of the game they play.

Eric Berne has written a book *The Games the People Play*. In this book he describes almost all the games that human beings play with each other. This act of throwing responsibility on each other is also a game. The funny part is that the one on whom we place the responsibility, places the same responsibility on us. He who cannot be responsible for himself how can he be expected to shoulder the responsibility of others?

Unfortunately, neither he nor you are aware of the fact that you have placed your responsibility on each other. And so, we blame each other throughout life, without knowing that we both are beggars who are holding our begging bowls before each other. Each begs of the other, and neither can give!

Freedom is frightening, so we try to look for some kind of slavery. Our so-called God [not the Tao that Lao Tzu speaks of] is also a bondage. We place the onus on Him. We say, "We are in your hands. Take care of us!" Therefore, when a man is happy, he never thinks of God; but when he is unhappy, he always thinks of God. He does not want to bear the responsibility for his own unhappiness. He is only prepared

to be responsible for his good fortune. He likes to feel and believe it was entirely because of him. But when bad days befall him, he looks up to heaven and cries, "How can I suffer so when you are there? Of what use is your being if I suffer so? Either banish my woes and give me proof of your existence or I shall not believe in you."

A man came to me and said, "I have complete faith in God. I prayed to Him that if my son did not get a job within fifteen days I would never have faith in Him. And, within fifteen days, my son got a job!"

I told him, "God has struck a bad bargain with you. Do not ever test Him again in this way or else you will be disappointed."

He was adamant in his belief. He said, "I am now convinced that He is!"

I said to him, "This very conviction will land you and your God in trouble one day. Your son getting a job is a mere coincidence. Do not pride yourself that God took pains to get your son a job. This way, you prove yourself and your son to be more significant than God. Even his job is more important than God; God has proven himself to be your servant. Do not ask Him for such things again. Such coincidences are never repeated."

After two months, the gentleman returned. He said, "What kind of words have you uttered? Everything is confused now. Four times I tried to attain God's favour, and four times He has failed me. God has turned His back on me!"

I told him, "God has not turned his back on you. Neither does He turn His face towards you. He has no face and no back, nor is your prayer, your insistence, your appeal, of any consequence. What is precious and meaningful is your own self."

Your value, your meaningfulness, depends upon the extent to which you make creative use of your freedom. Your value depends upon the right use you make of your freedom. The very meaning of Sadhana is this: The creative use of your freedom.

Sadhana means the creative use of your freedom. The worldly man is one who uses his freedom destructively. He is leading to his own destruction. He makes his freedom the obstruction to his own elan vital and is instrumental in creating his own gallows.

We do not remember God in happiness, but we remember Him in our unhappiness because then we want to shove off the responsibility from our shoulders. Russell has written, "I will only believe that God really is when there is no sorrow on earth." Russell is right as far as theism goes. Our theism will fade if there is no sorrow on earth. Think a while: Will anyone remember God if there is no sorrow on earth? Will the temple bells ring? Will candles burn in churches then? Will the call of the muezzin fill the morning air? These prayers, these calls, this worship, these oblations of fire -- through all these, our sorrow cries. And the absurdity of it all is that neither temples nor mosques can eradicate our sorrows, because it is we who create them and we alone can destroy them. Sorrow is the misuse we make of our freedom. But it is this freedom that we want to save ourselves from.

Really, would the thought of God ever have entered our mind if there was no sorrow on earth? How could it arise? God is like medicine for an illness. If there is no illness, who but a madman would think of taking medicine? God is like a medicine to us. We use Him to cure our ills. When there is sorrow, we think the medicine of His name; when there is happiness, we throw the bottle of this medicine in the dustbin.

We think of Him in sorrow only, because we want to place the responsibility for our ills on His shoulders. But you cannot place any responsibility on God's shoulders because God does not bind you. You are free, independent. No one is there in this world who is a greater advocate of freedom than God.

The freedom He confers on His creation is so profound that we see so much dissimilarity around us.

The socialist and the communist, who always criticize God always put forth this argument: that if there is a God, then why all this inequality? Their argument appears to be correct on the face of it because they do not take the trouble to think. Remember, however, that freedom and equality are opposite conditions. If you desire equality, you cannot have freedom; if you desire freedom you cannot have equality. All people can be made equal, but then all will have to be slaves. Equality can only exist in prison. Even in a prison, if there is some laxity, inequality creeps in. Utmost strictness is required to maintain equality.

Complete equality is possible only in complete subservience. Therefore, if communism succeeds, the whole world will be one big prison. If communism does not succeed completely, it cannot be communism.

Freedom means that each person has the freedom to be what he wishes to be. Then, inequality is bound to be there. Then inequality is inevitable. If equality is to be maintained, each man will have to be forcibly made to conform to the accepted level of equality.

Another interesting development that follows such equality is that the level of consciousness falls according to the degree of equality in a society. The greater the equality, the lower will be the plane of consciousness. Supposing there is a class of thirty pupils. The boy who is the thirteenth in the class cannot be made to attain the first grade; but in order to maintain equality, the first boy can be forcibly constrained to go down to the level of the thirteenth. Actual equality can only be maintained at the level because the lowest can never be pulled up to the highest point, whereas the highest can be obstructed and made to go down. Likewise, it is not easy to bring all the patients in a hospital back to good health, but it is very easy to make healthy people sick. To pull back is always easier; to rise up is always difficult. Therefore, the greater the equality, the lower will be the plane of intelligence; and the greater the freedom, the greater the possibility of intelligence touching the peaks of consciousness.

Remember, freedom means that he who wants to reach the peak will reach, and he who does not want to reach will not reach. He is free to remain where he was if he so wishes, and he is free to undertake the long journey -- again, if he so wishes. So to people like Marx who deny the presence of God on the grounds of inequality, I say that this is one of the many proofs of the existence of God: that there is so much inequality and disparity in the world because of the complete freedom He has granted us.

People invariably invoice equality and freedom in one breath. Not only this, in France they went a step further and shouted the slogan: "Justice, Freedom, Equality!" This is complete insanity, but we are not aware of it because we are so enchanted by the trickery of words. We never try to investigate deeply, but are simply carried away by the magic of words. If there is equality, there cannot be freedom; and if there is freedom, equality is impossible. And if you want justice, you shall have to choose between the two.

Then also, if you opt for freedom, your justice will be entirely different; and if you opt for equality, your justice will be entirely different. If you choose equality, then an attempt to be different will be termed a crime. If you choose freedom, this very attempt would be deemed a just and rightful act. If you choose equality, it will be lawful to keep each man limited; and if you choose freedom it will be considered lawful to encourage a person to be different. It will be unjust and unlawful to hinder or obstruct a person from becoming unusual and different.

All this is very difficult to deal with. Freedom and equality are very important problems.

So, Marx denied God. He had very little to do with God. Rather, he had no use for Him. But one thing was clear to him: If God exists, freedom cannot be destroyed. Then inequality is bound to remain. So if inequality is to be destroyed, we shall have to destroy the very philosophy of the existence of God. Thus it is not without reason that Communism is atheistic. A person cannot be a communist and still believe in God. He has to be an atheist, because the very meaning of God is freedom -- no control.

What Lao Tzu said dates back 2500 years before Marx. Independence and freedom can only be in absence of control. Only where there is freedom is there the possibility of development. But then, the responsibility rests with us. If we wish to avoid it, we will have to find some means of bondage and slavery. If we do not make God or guru our master, we shall make the state our master. It makes no difference. Let he who wills, throw the reins round our necks. We are ready to follow. We are incapable of walking ourselves; we need someone to prod us, to goad us on. Then we are assured and feel confident. We feel there is no need for anxiety; we cannot go wrong. But remember, this is the biggest mistake. Whatever we do after surrendering our freedom is an error, a sin, a crime.

Lao Tzu says, "THIS IS THE MOST MYSTERIOUS QUALITY OF TAO." That is so. It is, and yet it is not the cause of anyone's bondage. Think this over: If God comes and stands before you here and now you shall no longer be free. Why? Because His very presence will create inferiority in you. You will be thrown into confusion; all your misdeeds will stare you in the face.

The priests explain to people, "He has a thousand eyes. He sees you from everywhere." This is only a trick to deter people from stealing. God has no eyes. By this I do not mean He is blind. He needs no eyes to see us. But the priest must admonish, "His eyes are always on you, wherever you are!" This is just to create the fear of God with you. If a person really believes this, it will be impossible for him to commit a sin! How can he dream of committing a sin when a thousand eyes, like searchlights, are always focussed on him!

But he who is thus saved from sin is merely succumbing to fear. The sin is committed twice over. The theft is committed and the fear-complex haunts the person.

I have read about a Catholic nun who used to bathe with her clothes on. When other nuns asked her why she did this, she said, "Don't you know that God is everywhere? He is even in the bathroom!" But this poor woman was not told that one who can see through the bathroom can also see through her clothes. If God is everywhere, we can not remove our clothes anywhere, for wherever we do so, He is bound to be looking.

These are nothing but ways of arousing fear. Man does not become good this way; he only becomes fearful. A fearful man is never a good man. Only a fearless man can be a good man. Priests of all religions, however, have made man conscious of His presence everywhere -- although God is totally non-present. This too is a part of His total freedom. If He were present, we could not even exist, let alone be free. His presence in itself would have snatched away our freedom, because then, how could we commit violence? All this then becomes impossible. So His very absence is an inevitable part of His freedom. He is as if he is not. The class-room is full, but the teacher is missing. Then, each child does what he feels like doing. Each one is free to do what he likes. It is His profound and mysterious, distinctive quality that He is and yet is absent. He is, but He is not present. He is everywhere, -- not an inch of space is without Him, not a pore of the body, not a simple beat of the heart, not a particle of matter is without Him -- and yet, He is not present. His non-presence is so complete that people question His existence.

This is His mysterious quality: that He is everywhere and yet is so unobtrusive that we doubt His existence. We can turn round and ask, "Does He exist? And if so, where?" We are not convinced unless we can see Him, because if He was, we could surely see Him.

Even one who says he has seen Him is completely helpless when asked to show Him. He is dismissed as mad, of unsound mind. There are thousands who swear that there is no God because He cannot be seen, so when some one comes along who claims he has seen Him, he is singled out from the crowd, and stands like a lone figure against the crowd who revile him. Buddha, Christ, Mahavira, Mohammed, stood alone against the whole world. In fact, there have not been more solitary figures than them in the history of this world. They lived surrounded by crowds and yet they were alone.

Mahavira was always surrounded by a crowd, but he was alone within himself because not a single person understood or believed what he said. Lao Tzu also found himself surrounded by thousands of people, yet he was alone. Those who heard him doubted his words because they could not see what he saw. Yet these were lovable persons. Their personality was magnetic.

We doubt the words of these people and yet we cannot help but follow them. Their elan vital is filled with a mysterious magnet that draws us towards them. Their eyes are hypnotic. Once they catch you, they do not leave you. We do not have the courage to accept what they say, and time and again we wish to run away from them. We try to criticize them, we try to escape from them, and yet there is something in them that invariably draws us towards them. But these are solitary people because they talk of Him whom they find present but who is absolutely non-present for us.

Ramakrishna told Vivekananda. "I have come to know that you have not eaten for days. Why don't you go inside the temple and tell Mother about it, you foolish fellow? Go and ask Her for what you want."

Vivekananda was an intellectual who took nothing for granted and when Ramakrishna talked like this he wondered, "Where's the mother? Who is this mother?" But Ramakrishna spoke with such faith and conviction that he did not dare to raise these questions that arose in his mind.

His father had died, leaving a debt to be cleared. He found it impossible to clear it. There was not enough food for two in the house, so everyday he pretended he was invited out so that his mother would eat. He would return home in the evening and talk about how much he had enjoyed the meal so that his mother would be assured that he had eaten. Under such conditions, Ramakrishna's words seemed to be the words of a madman. Which mother was he talking about? He could not believe.

Ramakrishna had just become the priest of the temple when the trustees filed a suit against him. On the eighth day, he was called before the committee and charged with tasting the food before it was offered in worship. To this, Ramakrishna replied, "When my mother used to feed me, she always tasted the food first. How can I offer my Divine Mother what has not been tasted and tested? How can I be sure it is fit to be put before Her?"

The trustees were filled with despair. What mother was he talking about? The temple was theirs, the idol was one they had erected. Surely this man was mad! He was a worker employed by them for eighteen rupees a month, they had spent lakhs on constructing this temple, and this man had the temerity to say he would rather leave the job than offer untasted food to his mother! He insisted on smelling the flowers first before offering them to Her, because how could flowers be offered to the mother that bore no fragrance? The members of the Board looked at each other. What was this man saying? It was unbelievable. And yet when they looked into his eyes, they felt that they would have to believe what he said. Perhaps he could see what they could not!

This man is alone. And the cause for his solitude is this mysterious qualification of God: that He is, but He is as if He is not. So only those who discover the art of seeing Him in His absence -- they alone can see Him. Those who develop the art of seeing without the eyes, they alone can see Him. Those who embrace Him without the use of hands, they alone can embrace Him. But unfortunately, neither the theist nor the atheist believes in this mysterious qualification of God. Understand this a little. The atheist says, "Leave all this nonsense! What is not, is not. Where is the need for all these deliberations? Go straight to the point. If He is not, He is not; if He is, He is." An atheist's logic is straight and simple. He believes in mathematics and straight forward calculations. He says, "Why go into all this 'as if He is not' and such stuff? Why not say directly: He is not. Why go into a long fruitless debate? If He is, He should prove His presence. Let Him come before us and we shall accept His existence."

The theist's trouble is the same. He also is not yet able to grasp the 'as if'. He too cannot understand that God is as if He is not. Then he begins to invent the devices we all know. One invention of his is an image, a symbol, to make it possible for us to understand this mysterious qualification. He carves an image. Then he forgets God and drops all talk of him. He concentrates on this image now; he bows at its

feet. The image is at least a concrete thing he can catch hold of. Then he makes an image of Buddha, Rama or Krishna and prays to it:

"I am not concerned with the formless Brahma that may or may not be. You are enough for me."

But this is also an atheistic attitude. He cannot defeat the atheism's argument so he says, "There may be no Paramatman but Rama is, Krishna is." Then he weaves stories of miracles around and about Rama and Krishna to answer the atheist's questions: "When a thorn pricks Rama, his foot bleeds. If you slay Mahavira, he dies. Then, they are just ordinary human beings." So the theist has to invent stories of miracles in counter-argument. He has to say: "Slay Mahavira. The sword will break but Mahavira will remain unaffected. Kill Jesus. You may think he is dead, but he rises again the next day. He is resurrected; he cannot die." All this is an outcome of our ignorance, because we do not understand the mysterious characteristic of God.

A friend came yesterday. He is an intelligent person and has great regard for me. He told me, "Why do you not perform some miracle like Sai Baba? Thousands will flock to you." What use are these thousands of people? What shall I do with them? They come not because of Sai Baba but because of the miracles. If even one came for the sake of Sai Baba it would be more fruitful.

One who comes for miracles is not a theist. A theist is one who says, "Everything in this world is a miracle. There is nothing that is not a miracle A seed turns into a tree; clouds move in the sky; the sun comes out, there are stars; there are birds and animals; there is man -- everything is a miracle!" He who sees no miracle in all this is impressed by the ash that comes out of the hands of a miracle-man. That the sun comes out is no miracle to this blind man, but a little ash drops from this man's hand and he is impressed!

The intelligence that believes in this ash is not the intelligence that can go God-ward. Lakhs of people are bound to gather, but this crowd will be the crowd that gathers to watch a magic show. It has nothing to do with religion.

The stories woven around Mahavira, Christ or Rama are downright false but the devotee, out of sheer frustration invents them. Otherwise his God does not look distinctive from the rest of mankind. So he says, "When Mohammed walked, even on the sunniest day a cloud moved along with him. The devotee has to say all this because his logic is the same as the atheist's; he has the same intelligence.

One who sets out to look for miracles does not have the heart of a devotee. Is there anything in this world that is not a miracle? Show me a single thing that is not a miracle! This whole world is a miracle!

Is it not a miracle that you are? There is no reason why you should be. The world would have no complaint if you were not. But you are -- a complete living entity. It never occurs to us that there is no reason why we should exist. The world would have got on just as well without us. Yet we are! We do not know who creates us; we do not know who destroys us, who brings us into existence, who takes us out of it. We do not know. Is this not a great miracle that is taking place every moment of our existence?

And here are we flocking to see a man who takes a little ash out of his hands! Lack of intelligence makes such things appear like miracles. If man is intelligent, the whole world appears to be a miracle.

Otherwise, we have to invent devices to prove that Rama is God, Krishna is God. I do not say they are not. What I mean to say is that everything on this earth is God. Everything here is divine. There is nothing on this earth which is not God. Therefore, there is no need to prove that Rama is God, that Krishna is God. When every thing is God, Rama is bound to be God also. On this earth, existence itself is God. But we do not accept a simple, ordinary man to be God, so we devise ways and means to accept him as God. We place these before us as an ideal and forget all about the distinctive speciality of God. We have torn the mystery of God apart from our consciousness. We have raised our own gods, our Tirthankaras, our avataras, and we go around and around these, because these are what our intellect can grasp, whereas Lao Tzu's mysterious quality of the Tao is beyond our understanding. Remember however, that until such time as the mysterious quality of the Tao comes within your understanding you have not entered the gates of religion. The day you gather courage and attain the ability to understand this you shall have your first glimpse of the temple of God, not before that. All other things are home-made stuff. All the avataras and Tirthankaras are your own creations. If you want to enter into God, you have to remember this mysterious quality of the Tao always.

He is present as if He is not. He is absent, and yet He is present. If this is constantly remembered, if it pervades every breath you take, the revelations of religion will begin in your Life, and the screen of religion will begin to rise, to reveal the glory that is existence.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #5

Chapter title: Non-existence and emptiness is the support of everything

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THE THIRTY SPOKES UNITE THE ONE NAME; BUT IT IS ON THE AXLE THAT THE USE OF THE WHEEL DEPENDS.

CLAY IS FASHIONED INTO VESSELS; BUT IT IS ON THEIR EMPTY HOLLOWNESS THAT THEIR USE DEPENDS.

THE DOORS AND WINDOWS ARE CUT OUT FROM THE WALLS TO FORM AN APARTMENT; BUT IT IS ON THE EMPTY SPACE WITHIN, THAT ITS USE DEPENDS.

THEREFORE, WHAT HAS A (POSITIVE) EXISTENCE SERVES FOR PROFITABLE ADAPTATION, AND WHAT HAS NOT, SERVES FOR (ACTUAL) USEFULNESS.

He who views life superficially and takes its outer most level to be everything fails to see the usefulness of the void. Those who confine themselves to reason alone, and do not go into the depths of thought, cannot comprehend the fact that what is non-present is the support of existence. Those who think in terms of mathematics -- to them, life appears positive. But the positivity of life cannot exist for a moment in the absence of its negative aspect. This they cannot see. Let us try and understand this by way of examples.

One of the basic sutras of Lao Tzu is that life is based on the rule of opposites. Life does not oppose its contradictions. Rather, it works in collaboration with its counter-forces. Ordinarily it appears that if your enemy dies you will be a happier man, but you do not know that with the death of your enemy something within you, which existed entirely on account of the enemy, also dies. Therefore it happens many times that you lose much more by the death of an enemy than by the death of a friend. The opposition of the enemy awakens the challenge within you, and the mutual hostility gives rise to and nourishes those qualities within you which would have otherwise remained dormant.

That is why Lao Tzu has said: "Any friend will do, but choose your enemies wisely." Friends do not influence our lives as much as enemies do because a friend can be disregarded but we cannot afford to neglect an enemy. We can forget a friend but an enemy is never forgotten. It never dawns on us, however, that an enemy can so influence our life. Mahatma Gandhi would never have become a mahatma had it not been for the British. It was the opposition of the British Rule that brought him into being.

Great men are born when a country is in great trouble. It is the calamity that causes great men to be born, not vice versa. The hour of calamity, the hour of tension, produces great men. Hitler has written, "No leader is born without a great conflict." Therefore the greater the leader, the greater should be the battle. You cannot name a single leader who was born in times of peace. So he who desires to be a great leader has to make arrangements for a great conflict.

Life works on the law of the opposites -- where the contradiction is visible and the collaboration on which it actually works is not. Let us examine this from different aspects in order to understand it better. If we were to remove Ravana from the epic of RAMAYANA, nothing would remain of the epic except Rama; and with him alone, it would not be possible to construct the narrative. Rama could have existed

on this earth without Ravana, but then the Rama of the epic would have been lost completely. It is the very challenge of opposition to Ravana that brings out the resilience and temperance of Rama's character and reveals the brilliance of his personality.

Ravana made a great contribution towards the exaltation of Rama. It would not have been possible for either Rama or Ravana to be born without each other. They grOW with each other's support. This is the truth, but those who view things superficially see them to be enemies, opposed to each other. The profound reality of life is, however, that they are partners. It is not necessary that they themselves should be aware of this, but on a very subtle plane these seeming opposites are partners, co-sharers, collaborators and friends. Not only is life not formed without the opposites but it does not develop without the opposite. The opposite is inevitable.

Freud has discovered a priceless truth. He says: "We also hate those whom we love." This was a startling discovery even for Freud himself. It was a terrible blow for all mankind especially for lovers. Lovers cannot believe they are capable of hatred towards those whom they love. The fact is, however, that all lovers know this within themselves, though they may not admit it. Therefore, Freud was resisted for a long time. Ultimately he could not be proven wrong. Gradually, the truth was accepted.

Those whom we love we also despise, for love cannot stand without hatred. If you love somebody and you analyse it honestly, you will find yourself loving and hating alternately. You hate in the morning, love in the afternoon, hate in the evening and again love at night. Your love is periodical. The one you quarrelled with in the morning and decided it was impossible to live with, you again reconcile with and swear you would be lost without.

The ancient prophets of love have declared that love is complete and perfect only when there is no strife between the lover and the beloved. Freud however says that the greater the love, the greater the strife between the lovers. If there is no strife between two lovers, according to Freud -- they are not in love; they are just fooling themselves. If you do not fight with your wife (or husband), it means your relationship has vanished long ago, so much so that there is no need for strife any more. Freud is not talking about the spiritual love. He is talking about that which passes for love in our society, what we generally know as love.

In this so-called love that we know, strife is an inevitable part. But lovers (and married couples) want there to be no strife, no conflict, in their relationship. Then, love would be bliss. But they are not aware of the facts of life. The day strife ends, love will end also. In fact, conflict cannot be ended by the sort of love we indulge in. Conflict exists because of expectations -- great expectations. The greater the love, the more the expectation. The greater the expectation, the greater the frustration. And when there is frustration, there is conflict. If there are no expectations if there is no demand on the lover, if there are no hopes pinned on the other, all conflicts will stop immediately. Then we accept life as it is.

But Freud says, "Great lovers cannot live in peace." Another unique personality of the West, De Sade, has said, "Love is an illness". He calls love an illness because we invite love, and hatred is there instead. Love and hatred are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, hatred will go on side by side with love.

Hatred cannot stand on its own. If you think you have hatred towards someone, you are mistaken because of the simple fact that hatred cannot exist alone. You can hate only that person for whom you still have some measure of love. If you try and analyse your feelings about someone you really hate, you will find some strings of love that unknowingly tie you to him. If all ties of love are broken, all means of hatred have also vanished.

Hence, we are tied to both our friends and our foes. For the friend there is love outside and hate within; for the foe there is hate without and love within. Our ties with both are however the same.

This may be difficult to understand, because we have great expectations for love. Let us try to understand this from different angles.

A man toils all day long. Now, according to our reasoning, a man who has toiled throughout the day should find it impossible to relax all night. He who is used to working all day should pass his nights also in work. The fact is however that he who toils throughout the day sleeps profoundly at night.

The man who does not exert himself throughout the day should find no difficulty in relaxing at night because his experience of relaxing throughout the day should be good practice for sleeping at night. But a person who relaxes in the day finds it difficult to sleep at night. Actually, he who toils all day long accumulates the opposite aspect (relaxation). He who relaxes, accumulates the opposite of relaxation. So he who relaxes in the day toils at night by changing sides time and again. He cannot sleep.

We cannot escape the opposite. The opposite is always standing by. If you wish to sleep at night, you shall have to exert yourself in the day. The greater the exertion, the deeper the sleep. So a very interesting thing happens: Those who work very hard, and have no time for relaxation, attain the height of relaxation. And those who have all the means to relax -- to them, relaxation is a vexing problem. Do what they may, they cannot relax.

Unfortunately, we live by our superficial standards. We say: we must relax in the day in order to know how to relax at night. This is straight and simple logic. But it has nothing to do with life. This is just the same as saying we should not have any conflict with those whom we love. But life exists in opposites -- just like electricity exists because of its negative and positive poles. If we take away one, the other gets lost simultaneously and there cannot be any electricity.

But it is very difficult to accept the opposite. He who accepts the opposite is a Sannyasin according to me. Lao Tzu calls such a person, wise.

To accept the opposite means that if, today, you have come and paid respect to me, I should accept the fact that at some level within you, disrespect is also gathering towards me. This fact cannot be escaped. If I accept your respect, I should also be prepared to receive disrespect from your hands at a later date. If I accept your obeisance with full knowledge of this fact, your reverence will give me no pleasure. Similarly, your disrespect will not make me unhappy either. Deep within your reverence, I shall spy the seed of irreverence; and deep within your irreverence, I shall see the spark of reverence.

If a man hurls a shoe at me, why should he take so much trouble if he is not concerned with me? Surely there is some connection between him and me somewhere. The shoe he throws at me is much more expressive than the garland that another person puts round my neck. This man's leaning towards me is great. His restlessness is acute. He is bound to do something or other for me. If I become aware of the trouble he is taking for me, the sting of his disrespect will not hurt me. And if I become aware of the other side of the coin when I am honoured and respected, the illusion of reverence will vanish. Then respect and disrespect appear to be two sides of the same coin. He to whom this becomes clear, transcends both sides.

Life is bound by opposites from all directions. When we see one side of life, we forget the other. It is this error that is the greatest misfortune of mankind. When we are looking at one aspect of life, we become completely oblivious of the other.

When we look at a flower, we never glance at the thorn; when we look at the thorn, we forget the flower. And the flower and the thorn grow on the same tree, the same branch. They are fed by the same channel, they are alive because of the same roots. The same gardener waters them and the same sun sends its rays towards them. They come from the same existence. Deep within, they are one. But when we look at the flower, we forget the very existence of the thorn; and the more we forget the thorn, the sharper it pricks. Then, when the thorn pricks, the flower vanishes from our vision and we are only aware of the pain of the thorn. We even forget that it was because of the flower that we had to suffer the prick of the thorn. We enjoyed the aroma of the flower and the prick was the result.

Our vision is always partial. Partial vision is ignorance. Partial vision is not wrong, but it is not complete. It sees only one half of reality. The other half seems so contradictory that we cannot relate the one to the other.

On the face of it, it is difficult to relate the opposites. You can never imagine that a person who clings to your neck, today and vows that you are aU that means anything to him in the world and life would be meaningless without you, would thrust a knife into you. Logic needs consistency. But here, there is no consistency. How can this very person kill you? But the reality of life is that he can. This is the very depth of life. He who has no relationship with you does not bother to kill you. He is not interested in you. Can you make someone an enemy without first making him your friend? Also, one who becomes your sworn enemy could not have just been a slight acquaintance. The proportion is equal: the greater the friendship, the greater the enmity. Machiavelli, in his book *THE PRINCE*, has written, "The greater the intimacy, the more cautious you should be of your friend." This is cunning advice, but it has some truth in it. The thicker the friendship, the more vigilant we should be because the danger is greater. Machiavelli says, "If you do not want your enemies to know the facts, take care that your friends do not know them." He has also said, "Do not treat your enemy in a way that you may regret some day when he becomes your friend, because an enemy can become a friend any day."

Life changes every moment. Nothing is stable. Life swings from one extreme to the other. The opposites are united in the profound depths of existence; but on its surface they are far apart. He who sees only the surface of life cannot understand Lao Tzu because he talks of the ultimate polarity of existence.

Lao Tzu says: "THE THIRTY SPOKES OF THE WHEEL COMBINE AT THE CENTRE, BUT THE USEFULNESS OF THE WHEEL DEPENDS ON THE EMPTY SPACE OF THE HUB IN THE CENTRE." Look at the wheel of a cart and you will find that it is the hub on which the whole movement of the cart depends. In the empty centre there is a pin, and the amazing thing is that the whole moves but the pin is stationary. It is motionless. The more fixed the hub, the easier is the motion of the wheel. This is the law of opposites. The empty space where the pin is fixed is the centre of all movement. This is its secret. The wheel cannot move without this vacant centre. This means that where we see things saturated, solid, there is an emptiness deep within their depths also. Let us understand this a little.

If you were to meet Buddha on the road-side with his begging bowl, he would appear absolutely empty - bereft of everything. He has no wealth, no status, no palaces, no glory. Had you met him a little earlier, he had all these. But when he had all these, Buddha felt that, in spite of these, he was empty within. There was nothing in the world outside that was not his for the asking -- the wheel was completely full -- but the hub was empty. And he felt: of what use was this outside fullness if he felt so poor and empty within? So he renounced everything. One day, he came out of his palace and became a beggar on the road.

Now, when you see him as the Buddha, the beggar, the outside is empty but the inside is full. The whole concept of renunciation is based on this fact. This secret was understood long ago: that if you are engrossed with accumulating outside wealth, you will remain empty within. With all that you have acquired on the outside, there is an inevitable emptiness within. If you wish to be full within, you should be prepared to be empty without, because both cannot happen at the same time. If you wish to be full within and full without, that cannot be because life works on the law of the opposites. You have to understand the polarity.

If you wish to be filled with God within, you should give up the idea of filling yourself with material wealth. You have to let go of all clinging to outside things. Then only will the filling start within but then, outside, emptiness will spread.

A king came to Buddha and asked, "You find everything that a man could desire. Why did you leave your palace and run away? Sometimes in the heat of stress, one tends to make a rash decision. But do not worry, your father is a good friend of mine, he will listen to me and take you back. And if, for some reason, you do not feel you should stay under anybody's obligation, I have a daughter. You can marry her and be the master of all I possess, for I have no son."

The king never looked once at Buddha while he gave his long proposal. He would have seen Buddha laughing. When he finally looked up and asked, "What do you have to say?" Buddha smiled and said, "You think I have no possessions. I think you have none. You are right and so am I. Only, our ways of thinking are different. You have everything outside of you and I have nothing around me. It is only natural that you should pity me and try to help me return to my riches. But I see myself filled within whereas I see there is nothing within you". Buddha told him further, "I have known both kinds of riches. What you offer is nothing as compared to what I left behind. And I say unto you, King, I now possess

everything. Before, I had nothing. You have only one experience, of riches which you consider everything. Listen to me. Now know the other. Take this begging bowl and enter sannyas."

There is an antithesis, a contrariness everywhere. So Lao Tzu says: "The wheel of the cart moves. The spokes are filled, but the centre is empty. And on this emptiness depends the movement of the cart."

We cannot see this emptiness. Emptiness means that which cannot be seen. The visible is always dependent on the invisible. This polarity remains everywhere: the visible depends on the invisible, the word is born out of silence, life exists because of death. But the other side is forever invisible.

Again, to explain his point further, Lao Tzu gives another example. He says: "A pot is formed out of clay, but its use lies in its emptiness. " We form a pot out of clay, but actually speaking, where is the pot -- in the clay or in the emptiness of the pot? When you buy a pot, do you buy it for the sake of the pot or for the empty space within it? Water can be put only into the emptiness not into the walls of the pot. The more empty space there is within, the more useful is the pot. The usefulness of the surrounding clay walls depends on the empty space it contains within its boundaries, that is all. The actual pot is the space within, but what is visible to the eyes is the earthen pot and not the emptiness.

You do not go to the market to buy emptiness; you go to buy a pot. The price you pay is the price of the clay of the vessel. The bigger the vessel the greater the price. It depends on the amount of clay that goes into making the pot and not the emptiness within. But the usefulness of the vessel depends upon the empty space it contains within itself. No matter how fine or ornamental the clay-work, if the vessel is not empty it becomes useless; it defeats the purpose for which it was bought. Emptiness has its uses.

Lao Tzu then goes on to talk about the houses we build. What is a house? We are sitting here. We would say that we are sitting in a house, but if we asked Lao Tzu, he would say we are sitting in emptiness. The house consists of the walls on the four sides. No one sits within these walls; they only serve the purpose of dividing the outside space from the space within. Their use lies in providing a boundary that is all. This has its uses, it is necessary, but that is all. Nobody sits within the walls; we all sit in the empty space that the walls surround.

So what do we actually make use of in a house? Its emptiness. The more empty a house, the more useful it is. We cut doors and windows in walls and make balconies, courtyards and rooms, but their usefulness depends upon the emptiness within. Lao Tzu says, "Usefulness is not where it appears to be. The usefulness of a thing depends on the opposite factor."

Do you realise that when you build a house, you are building an emptiness? No. You design the walls and the doors; you have no concept of the emptiness within the walls. If you observe properly, you will find that you are shaping the emptiness within the house with the help of the walls and windows. You are unknowingly giving shape to the void. The form is visible to the naked eye, whereas it is the emptiness contained within that is of real use to us and is more precious.

Therefore, we find that at times a hut is more spacious than a palace. Everything depends on the empty space within. I have often noticed that if a poor man is requested to accommodate a guest, he readily obliges; but if a rich man is asked to put up a guest, he pleads lack of space. Now it is evident that there is more space in a rich man's bungalow than in a poor man's hut, but the bungalow is so filled with things that there is no space left.

I was once the guest of a millionaire. He took me to his sitting room, but I found that there was no place to sit anywhere. It was almost like a museum. There was furniture of all sorts and places, and of different periods, which my host had gathered together. I said, "The furniture is all right, but where does one sit?"

He was taken aback by my remark. "That never occurred to me" he exclaimed. "It was a sitting room once upon a time, but I bought things indiscriminately and filled up the place. Now, as you say, there is no place to move!"

This happens easily with things on the outside, but it happens with the same ease within us also. When you are fascinated by a person, you begin to love his body. You never give thought to the empty space within him, which we call the atman. It is as if a man goes to buy a pot and is so enchanted by the art of the potter who has designed it that he forgets to note whether there is enough space within to hold water.

A man falls in love in exactly the same way. He gives no thought to the inside of the person -- whether there is enough empty space within, for him to enter into. He is attracted by the form, the looks of the person. Later he regrets and curses himself for his error of judgment. The error is only this: that man is not significant because of the body alone. The body is necessary, but it is the amount of empty space, the void within him, that decides his excellence. This very space is the atman (the self).

When we ask how much atman is within a person, what is meant is how much can be put into him, how much emptiness is within him. If trivial abuse becomes difficult for him to contain within himself this means there is very little ATMAN (space) within.

If someone throws a stone and there is no place within where it could be contained, it returns back, doubly charged. If we throw a stone into an empty space, it cannot rebound; but if it hits a wall, it is bound to rebound. If a man lives in reactions, it shows that there is no empty space within. No sooner do we throw a stone than it is thrown back. Nothing can be contained by such a person, because there is no empty space within him.

The true flower of love, however, blooms in this very space within. I am not talking about Freudian love. I am talking of the love, which we are not even conscious of. I talk of that love in which there is neither hate nor love; that love where flowers and thorns are both absent; where only the underlying current, the intrinsic essence of love flows.

But where do we take the trouble of seeing and witnessing this emptiness within? We don't. Many times when someone went to Lao Tzu and paid his respects, Lao Tzu would not return his salutation for an

hour or more. Often the man would be greeted by Lao Tzu long after he had forgotten that Lao Tzu had not returned his greetings. Perhaps this man had already debated within himself whether it was worthwhile coming to a person who did not even have the courtesy to accept his greetings.

One day, a friend questioned him about his strange behaviour with newcomers. "A person comes to you, he greets you, and you take an hour to reciprocate. What sort of courtesy is this?" he asked him.

Lao Tzu replied, "I must wait at least till the person's salutations reach me. I must take it within my heart; it must rest there awhile. What is the hurry? I feel it would be very discourteous and the limit of impatience to return his greeting as soon as it is offered. Then it would be like a task that is finished with, and is no more."

This sounds queer on the face of it. An hour is a long period, and the person concerned has already forgotten the incident. But his salutations remained in Lao Tzu's heart all that while; it echoed within his heart for one full hour! It was not a mechanical happening, like you press a button and the fan works. It was a live response not a mechanical reaction which takes place immediately. You press a button: the light comes on; you press it again; the light goes off. The light cannot stay on once you press the button because it is mechanical.

A man abuses you and the flame of anger ignites immediately within you. It is a mechanical response. A man praises you and you feel elated. This is as mechanical as pressing a button. Someone is pressing a button, and you automatically feel happy or miserable. How much you go through within a span of twenty-four hours! Everyone you come across presses a button, and you immediately have to react accordingly.

Someone abuses you, and you are beside yourself with rage. Someone smiles at you, and life seems filled with flowers. Someone does not look at you, and you feel miserable; your life is filled with darkness. You have to keep changing your color, like a chameleon. There is no atman within you, no empty space. Therefore, things rebound from the surface. Space within means patience; it means a state of equilibrium. It means that anything that goes within me will have to take some time to travel within me before it reaches me. So Lao Tzu says, "It takes time for the visitors' greetings to reach my inner being and echo within me; and, also, for the reply to form within, which I can then offer."

When we fall in love, we have no knowledge of the space within the person. Nor do we bother to find out. We buy only the pot without examining its capacity to hold water.

Rabindranath Tagore has written a song about a bodhi-bhikshu: A bodhi-bhikshu passes through a village, and the village prostitute is standing on her terrace. The word "prostitute" is derogatory, so ancient people, who were wise, called her the daughter-in-law of the whole town. Nowadays, things are just the opposite. Psychologists say that wives and prostitutes are the same. The former has a life-long contact; the latter believes in short-term contracts.

This prostitute who is standing on the terrace, happens to see this sannyasin youth passing. Sannyas fills a person with a particular beauty that is never obtained or known by a house-holder. The reason is that

with sannyas, a freedom is born, an independence bereft of all bondage. This freedom gives rise to a unique beauty. Sannyas allows an empty space to form within a person; it is the advent of the atman within. He no longer lives by reactions. He begins to live in his own way now. No one can force his way of life; he chooses his own path. He designs and fashions his own path. He is, in a way, the owner and master of his life. So a unique beauty and integrity is born within him -- a different dignity and majesty.

The prostitute looked at him and fell in love with him. She came down from her terrace and approached the bhikshu, entreating him to be her guest for the night. The youth looked at her and said, "You have many to love you. You are young; you are beautiful. Your nights will not be lonely if I go away. But someday, when all your lovers discard you, and someday, when there is no one to hear your cry of woe, then I shall come."

It was a terrible blow to her pride. No one had ever refused her. She returned to her house filled with grief and shame. Twenty years later, on a moonless night, someone lay groaning on the roadside. A passing bhikshu stopped by. He passed his hand over her face and asked what ailed her. She said she was thirsty; she wanted water. He went to the village nearby and brought a lamp, and some water. In the light of the lamp, he saw the face of the woman who had invited him to be with her twenty years before. She was now a leper thrown out by the village-folk. Today, when there was no one to give her a mouthful of water, her guest returned.

He said, "Open your eyes and look at me. Twenty years ago you invited me to be with you. Your invitation has reached within me now. I have come here now because your time has come."

She opened her eyes and said, "It would have been better if you had not come now. What is the use of coming now? You should have come then, when I was young, when I was beautiful and desirable."

The bhikshu replied, "But now you are more experienced, more wise. You have seen life, you have seen and experienced its pains and frustrations. Today your body is nothing but you have a little atman within you. Then you had your body alone, and no atman."

There is something within which is contrary to the body, and yet united and blended with it. If we keep in mind this example of what is opposite to the body, we shall be able to understand Lao Tzu's sutras. The example of the pot is just for illustration. Deep within, it pertains to man.

About existence he says: "THEREFORE, THAT HAS A (POSITIVE) EXISTENCE SERVES FOR PROFITABLE ADAPTATION, AND WHAT HAS NOT, HAS (ACTUAL) USEFULNESS." When things are present, they have their advantages; but their non-presence can have a profound usefulness also.

For instance, youth has its uses; but when youth is gone, that too has its uses. The abatement of youth is a profound development in itself. This we rarely recognise, because most of us become old in body only. Our consciousness never matures. Our understanding remains at the level of childhood.

There is a very interesting fact: when an old man dreams, he always dreams of himself as a youth and never as an old man. This fact has been discovered by analysing thousands of dreams. This means only

one thing: he still considers himself young. The body does not cooperate, the body is old and weak but the mind within refuses to become old. The mind within reveals itself in dreams.

If a man considers only youth to be a useful part of life and sees no usefulness thereafter, he will not be aware of the value of negation. Once he understands the value of negation, old age will appear more beautiful than youth. There is thrill and excitement in the beauty of youth, but there is no depth. There is swiftness. there is speed, but there is no depth. The beauty of youth is shallow, superficial. When youth is lost, and when someone understands the usefulness of this loss, his old age gains a beauty that youth can never rival.

And this is right, because old age comes after youth. Old age is a further development of life, so it has a dignity, a depth -- an infinite depth. This is the outcome and result of the evolvement of youth into age. It is a natural result of the absence of youth.

Life is a mystery but he who catches hold of the mystery of life alone and knows nothing of the mystery of death does not understand the full mystery. There is nothing in existence to equal death. Death is the absence, the non-existence.

Lao Tzu says that positive existence has its uses, but negative existence is in class by itself -- it is the supreme usefulness. It has a different meaning altogether. But we see meaning only in life. We see no meaning in death. Death, to us, is an end -- where life finishes for us. We do not see in it a beginning, a new opening. It is not an entry into new vistas, but a sudden closing of old doors.

We have no knowledge of death. This is because we are tied to the positive. The positive troubles us, and we have no knowledge of the negative. If we understand this negative aspect, we shall understand non-existence.

We keep count of our waking hours and strive to make-do with as little sleep as possible. In the West, the scientists are trying to find ways and means whereby we can do away with sleep. If we do not sleep, we get an added period of twenty years to one active life. If a man lives for sixty years, twenty years are lost in sleep. Now, instead of extending life by twenty years, would it not be better to retrieve these twenty years of sleep and live them? Then one would be able to live the full sixty years of his life. So scientists are working towards a life without sleep. They do not know that they will be forcing the positive to its utter extreme.

He who forgets to sleep -- his waking hours will be filled with dejection and become meaningless. Have you noted that when you prepare to sleep at night, the light in your eyes is almost abated? When you get up in the morning, they are fresh and sparkling again. The night is not passed in vain. Night is a means of regaining strength through non-existence. Sleep means to be immersed in the negative, the void, so that the void rejuvenates us again.

This is why physicians say that it is impossible for a man to recuperate from an illness if he does not get the required amount of sleep. If a man loses all possibility of regaining strength from within, no amount of medicine can cure his illness. Physicians now admit that at most we can only help a man to get well.

Actually, it is the patient himself who is basically responsible to cure himself. But this is only possible when he gives up all the positive aspect of life and loses himself in the darkness of the night completely.

As soon as we lose ourselves in the void, we reach the deeper levels of life, which are the support and the original roots of life. From there, we imbibe the fresh energy of life. This very energy gleams in our eyes in the morning and becomes the happy songs of the birds. It is the same energy that causes the flowers to open in the morning. Every thing sleeps at night, the trees, the birds, the animals and also man.

But of late, most men find it difficult to sleep. By and by, it seems that all mankind will be unable to sleep. That will be the end of sanity for man. We can never hope to be well and healthy again if we ignore and discard the negative aspect of life.

Lao Tzu says: "Sleep is first; waking is secondary." The negative, the relaxation is first; the labour afterwards. The greater the relaxation, the greater will be the energy to work. This negative aspect, this non-existence, will have to be understood thoroughly. We can understand it in various ways.

As I said, sleep is non-existence and waking is positive. Sleep is negative. We are active in our waking period and inactive (silent) in our sleep. A man who dreams all night feels he has not slept at all, because dreaming is the middle state between waking and sleeping. The mind oscillates between the two and remains active. That is why at times people find themselves so tired when they get up in the morning. They are more tired than at the end of the day.

A villager once went to visit his friend who lived in the main city of the country. When he returned to his village, his friends asked him what difference he found between life in the village and life in town. He said, "There is a definite difference. In the village, people go to sleep completely tired with the day's toil, and they get up in the morning completely refreshed. The people in town seem fresh in the evenings and look tired in the mornings. The town hums with life and is awake in the evenings -- the clubs, the hotels and the cinema houses buzz with activity. In the mornings you find these people as good as dead. They get up with great difficulty and drag themselves to work, for work they must. There is no life in them; they look like lifeless, spineless creatures moving about."

The negativity of sleep is lost. From morning till night we talk, and then in dreams also we talk. We find people talking in their sleep! All twenty-four hours we keep babbling. Silence is non-existence; words are existence. Words are positive: silence is emptiness. But for the man who is lost in dreams and who has never experienced the silence within, who has no knowledge whatsoever of the silence within, who is filled with words, words and words throughout -- he remains bereft of the profound depths of life. Words are useful, but they are not an end in themselves. Words are necessary, but they are not enough in themselves. Words are required, but more than words, "no-word" is required. More than words, silence is required.

Remember, those whose words bear substance and weight, those whose words are filled with the breath of life, are the people who have the capacity of silence. All the great truths that have been propounded on this earth have been uttered by men who knew the art of silence. When a Buddha

speaks, each word has a magic of its own. When a Mahavira speaks, his every word is packed with intense silence. When a Jesus speaks, he has thirty years of silence behind him. No one knew where Jesus was and what he did for those thirty years.

Mahavira stood silent in the jungles for twelve long years without uttering a single word. Then when he spoke, his words had a different quality altogether. Then his words had a different power, a different strength that was out of the ordinary. Each word he uttered became profound with the strength of silence. Each word that was born out of his silence had a distinctive weight, a distinctive value of its own.

You can speak the same words. There is no difficulty in that, because Mahavira coined no new words. Buddha, Christ and Krishna spoke the common language of the people. Whatever Krishna said in the Gita was well understood by Arjuna. Nowhere did Arjuna say that he could not follow what Krishna said, because Krishna spoke the language that Arjuna knew well. And yet when Krishna spoke, the words took on a distinctive quality, a certain weight and value which would not have been the same if Arjuna had spoken those very words.

So one meaning of words is that which is given in the dictionary, and another meaning of words is that which penetrates into them from the silence within. Thus it is that often when such a person like Krishna speaks, whatever he says becomes poetry; whereas another person may write poems and yet his rendering will be stale lifeless. In some, the words seem to die as soon as they cross the lips; whereas in others, each word becomes a drop of nectar as soon as it reaches the lips because they have truly set out on the journey to the vast void. Theirs are words that have total silence behind them. Words that are conceived and nourished within the womb of silence are filled with the energy of life.

If we understand it this way, it will be easier to follow. If a child is conceived in its mother's womb and it comes out without undergoing nine months of silence within her, it becomes an abortion and not a birth. It is a dead happening. But when the child goes through the nine months of silence, nine months of darkness and negation, it attains life. In exactly the same way, when there is the silence of a womb within a person, then the word that is born and nourished within this silence becomes filled with the breath of life.

All the words we speak are like abortions. We read the newspaper and run to give the news to others. You read a book and wait impatiently for your son to return from school so that you can lecture him. This is plain abortion. The words are not allowed to nurture in silence. We are all aborted in the mind. No sooner do we hear something than we fling it at others. Others also do the same -- we all fling words at each other.

Whenever anybody approached the Zen fakir Bokoju, the first thing he told him was, "If you want to learn words, go else-where; if you want to learn silence, you may stay. We make use of words here, but only enough to point to silence."

Silence is non-existence and words are existence. All that is invisible, in every aspect of life, is profound. That which is beyond our remembrance and knowledge, that which cannot be caught by experience,

that alone is priceless. He who worries less about the positive aspects of life and that which is within the reach of the senses, and who cares more for the non-existent void, the negative silence, sets out on the journey for life's supreme truth. Lao Tzu says: "Always seek the depths; do not be entangled at the surface. Always seek the opposite." That is the fundamental root of everything because it is through this alone that the beauty, the essence, the vigour and the power of life are attained.

Everywhere the opposite is forever present in the depths of life. If we keep in mind the depth with our whole outlook on life becomes totally different. He who can see hatred in love, is freed from both. Then a unique type of love is born, a love that is totally unfamiliar and unknown to us.

This love is not relationship but a state of being. It is this love that made Christ say; "Love is God." It is this love that Mahavira defined as ahimsa (non-violence) and Buddha as compassion. Lao Tzu gave no name to this love for he said all names are defiled. If he said love, people would take it in its ordinary meaning: the way they love. If he said compassion, they would take it to be their type of compassion. Whatever he said, people would it define as it suited them. Words have been so much used by people who are sick in the mind themselves that they have become aggressive. Words have become contaminated with the sicknesses of man. No word has escaped the virus. Therefore Lao Tzu preferred to give no names. He said, "I give no words. I only say, where both are not, and yet something remains, that is It. That alone is worth attaining."

Let me suggest one more thing before we end. If we ponder over words and silence, we will invariably find the silence hidden behind word. But this silence is joined to the word. There is another silence -- the great silence -- where there is neither word nor silence. It is, however, difficult to name it.

Existence is divided by the law of opposites, and it works accordingly. But the depth of existence is undivided where both the opposites are lost. Then it is difficult to say that one remains. Our language is such that as soon as we say "one", it gives the idea of two immediately. Sit quietly sometime and try to think of "one" without thinking of "two" and you shall know what I mean. God is one, but when we say "one", we automatically remember "two". Our "one" is a part of a chain of figures. Our "one", therefore, has no meaning. This is why Hindus have not said that God is one. They have said, "He is indivisible." They have made use of negation, They did not say, "He is One"; they said, "He is not two." They could just as easily have made a straight forward simple statement, but they knew that "one" gives rise to "two". So they very sagaciously stated that He was advaita, not two. While saying this, they have hinted that He is One, but they have not made use of this word directly. It was enough that the idea of His oneness is caught by our understanding without making direct use of the word.

So, he who understands and knows the law of opposites, will soon find himself outside of it. Existence consists of opposites, but we only see one side of the opposites.

So, there are three things to be taken note of. One is that we see only one side of the opposites and not the other. The second thing is to see the pairs of opposites in their entirety. When we see them in their entirety, a third thing will become apparent to us, which is beyond the pairs of opposites. Where we stand, we see love only; we cannot see hatred. If we see hatred, we do not see love. If we see both, we shall be able to see a third thing which is neither of the two, and which is beyond them.

The indivisible reality is only attained when we are capable of understanding the complete usefulness of the law of the opposites. And this can only be understood, says Lao Tzu, when you seek the negative in the positive. On seeking this, you will find that the positive rests entirely on the negative. And when the positive and the negative are both lost, then that is attained which, after attaining, there is nothing more to be attained.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #6

Chapter title: Not the hunger of the senses be concerned with the hunger of the spirit

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COLOUR'S FIVE HUES, FROM THE EYES THEIR SIGHT WILL TAKE

MUSIC'S FIVE NOTES, THE EARS AS DEAF CAN MAKE.

THE FIVE FLAVOURS DEPRIVE THE MOUTH OF TASTE.

THE CHARIOT COURSE, AND THE WILD HUNTING WASTE

MAKE MAD THE MIND; AND OBJECTS RARE AND STRANGE.

THAT ARE SOUGHT FOR, MAKE MEN'S CONDUCT TO EVIL CHANGE.

THEREFORE, THE SAGE SEEKS TO SATISFY (THE CRAVING OF) THE NAVEL, AND NOT THE (INSATIABLE LONGING OF THE) EYES.

HE PUTS FROM HIM THE LATTER, AND PREFERS TO SEEK THE FORMER.

The ultimate fruit of life can only be death. It can be said that we die each day in the name of living. Death does not come all of a sudden. Nothing happens accidentally or suddenly in this world. That which we call happenings are actually long processes. Death also does not descend unexpectedly, it develops day by day. It is not an event but a process. Death begins from the very moment of birth. On the day of death, the process is complete. Death is a development, it is not sudden.

So it is not that death will take place sometime in the future. It happens continuously. It is happening even now, as we sit here. If we sit for an hour here, we shall be dead by another hour; life will be emptied by one more hour. Another thing: death is not something that comes to you from without. We all think that death comes from outside, that the messenger of death draws out the life breath from within us. This is a wrong conception that arises out of our belief that all pain is inflicted on us by the other. No one brings about death. It is an internal happening. It happens within you. You are gradually disintegrating within yourself. The mechanism that is you begins slowly to give way -- and one day, death occurs. So death is a long process that begins with life and ends with death.

Another thing, it is not an outside happening. It develops internally -- it is an internal process. If this comes within our understanding, we shall find that the process of death takes place every day, and in many forms. The eyes are impaired and finally destroyed by the act of seeing continuously. The ears lose their power of hearing by the continuous process of hearing. The same happens with the other senses. We die in the process of living. The very act of living is the arrangement for death. It wears us out till ultimately the whole system breaks down.

Lao Tzu says: "The various colours blind the eyes." We can never imagine that colour can impair vision. Colours, we think, are the life of vision. To enjoy the multi-coloured vista of nature is the function of the eyes. Colour and form are the nourishment of sight. But Lao Tzu declares that they are death to the eyes. This has a double meaning. One is that by looking constantly, the eyes tire, become weak, and finally lose vision. It is not old age that causes weakness of the eyes; it is the fact that the eyes have been seeing too long; the mechanism is worn out. The same applies to the ears. They are deaf due to the fact that the hearing mechanism is worn out by long and constant use. The mechanism has long outgrown its use and is now fit to be retired.

Seen in this context, we can say that the more the eyes see, the more they die; the more the ears hear, the more they go deaf; the more we touch, the less sensitive we become; and the more we taste, the lesser becomes the sense of taste. This means that each sense organ works towards its own destruction. Hence our whole life is suicidal.

After seeing a movie, you feel your eyes are tired. Your eyes keep open wherever you are, whether you see a movie or read a book or just look. Why is it, then, that they feel especially tired after seeing a movie? The reason is that when you are completely engrossed in the movie, your eyes stop blinking. Blinking is a contrivance that breaks the act of looking, and thus keeps the eyes from getting tired by looking continuously. This constant looking that happens in the movie-house tires the eyes, so much so that you find it difficult to close them immediately.

It is a well-known fact that painters and artists become blind soon. This should not be the case, because those whose eyes have seen so much should be more fresh. But the fact is that so much living with colours tires them out and they collapse. Whichever sense organ we use beyond its capacity tires soon and dies.

This is one meaning. Another interpretation is that Lao Tzu means to say that we can keep our senses live and fresh till the moment of death. A person who keeps his senses young and fresh till his last hour can enjoy the taste of death; he can enjoy the colour of death; he can touch death; he can experience death. But alas, all our capacity to experience is destroyed long before death! Therefore, in spite of the fact that we have died several times, we have no experience of death.

There is a reason for this. We have died several times, but if we ask a person what death is, he will say he has no idea of what death is like. This is because we remember nothing at the time of death. Remembrance can only happen if the senses are alert. Then they can experience, and that experience remains in the memory. Generally, for most people, the senses die before actual death. Therefore, there is no remembrance of death.

It is interesting to note that ninety-nine per cent of those who remember their past lives are people who have died in their previous life as children or youths. Their lives came suddenly to a halt when their senses were as yet alert and fresh. The impact of death on their fresh minds and intellect was thus carried into their next lives. As yet, none of those who claim to remember their past lives have said they were ninety year old when they died. It is not that this cannot be, but it does not happen because a man's mechanism is long worn out before he dies. He who sets out in search of nectar, he who wishes to seek the supreme Tao, must keep his senses alert and fresh every moment. Then alone can he experience death -- and also life.

It is a noteworthy fact that those who see colours constantly not only lose their sight but also their taste and experience of colours. The stream gets dried up and only the hollow remains. That is why the world is never so colourful in later life as it appears to a child's eye. The thrill a child experiences when he touches a thing he never feels again in later life. What is the reason? The reason is only this: that the child's senses are all still fresh and whatever sensations are received by them are registered completely and entirely, within. There is a movement afoot in America to cultivate sensitivity. There is a big institution in Big Sur -- a place in California. Perhaps the most significant experiment of this age is being carried on there. This experiment aims at restoring the abilities of the senses. The experiment lasts twenty-one days. People are re-taught to see, to hear, to feel and to taste.

Now for instance, when you sit to eat, if your eyes and nose are closed and you are given a piece of apple and a piece of onion, you will not be able to distinguish between them. This is because the eyes and the nose play an equally important part in differentiating between things. In Big Sur when, say, an apple is given, the participants are asked to touch it, then to see its colour and form, then rub it against their cheek, then close their eyes and feel it on their cheeks, then put it in the mouth and taste it. And all this is to be done consciously. In twenty-days time, you experience a new taste, a new aroma, a new

feeling from your meals. When this happens, the whole process of eating changes. Then a lesser quantity of food will give you greater satisfaction.

We all over-eat. The reason is that we eat, but we do not get the satisfaction of eating. Then, when we have eaten enough but do not feel satisfied, we feel we need to eat more. We do not know, however, that overeating destroys the sensitivity to experience satisfaction, till one day our mouth loses all sense of taste. Then we try to revive our taste with hot and pungent food. One man says, "I only enjoy hot food." This means, only pungent flavours register on his taste-buds. All other tastes are no longer conveyed by his taste buds, all other tastes are no longer conveyed by his mouth.

In Assam, Bengal and some parts of Bihar where the ancient sadhanas of tantra are still in vogue, the sadhaka partakes of all kinds of intoxicants and still keeps his wits about him. Alcohol is a part of the sadhana. These sadhakas drink alcohol like water, so much so that it has no effect on them whatsoever. No amount of opium or hemp has any effect on them. Then they need to keep snakes and make them sting their tongues in order to get some sensation. Those that progress further in their sadhana need to keep bigger and more poisonous snakes, ones that would cause instant death in ordinary human beings.

It is possible to kill one's senses so much. In fact, we all have killed our senses to some extent. This is why we never experience dictates, gentle, subtle experiences. We need to have sharp experiences. If the strains of the veena are very gentle, they do not register on us. A sharp vigil is required for this. We are jolted into feeling and experiencing only when there is tumult and uproar. Then only are we conscious that some sound is going on. Everything within us is dead.

Lao Tzu says: "Colour kills our eyes, sound kills the ears and taste kills the ability to taste." This death of our senses encases us in a coffin long before our death. Then we continue to live within our coffins, dragging our corpses along.

This has doubly ill-effects on us. The first is that the experience of life becomes weaker and weaker, and the perception of existence is restrained and hindered -- and then we are deprived of the great experience of death which we ought to undergo. He who does not experience death also deprives himself of the experience of life and cannot realise the reality of life. He has known only the frustrations and anxieties of life and not its supreme relaxation. He experiences the tumult, but not the peace and tranquillity of relaxation. He remains a stranger to death.

This, however, is a very superficial ill-effect. The second ill-effect is more profound. All our senses are two-faced. There are the eyes that see without. Within them are the eyes that see within. There are the ears that hear without, but they have an inner mechanism that hears within.

Close your ears. Plug them so that no noise from outside can go in. You will still be hearing the beat of your heart. This sound does not come from the outside. In the same way, close the eyes. Brush aside all the forms and pictures the eyes have captured from without. You will feel new experiences, see new colours, new light, new darkness such as you have never seen before. The eyes begin their journey within.

Each sense is capable of experiences within, But we are so occupied with the world outside that we have completely forgotten the world within us, which can be experienced by the same senses. This world within remains a closed book. Lao Tzu says that those who perceive colours will not only go blind in the external eyes, but will also fail to open his eyes within. He who rests his external ears begins to hear the music within.

He who renounces external tastes gets the taste of nectar within, Kabir says. Nectar begins to flow from within him. There is a sweetness within but it is difficult to recognise it.

Have you ever realised that anger has a taste of its own? When you are filled with anger, try and close your eyes. Forget the anger and try to taste the anger within. You will feel a parched feeling and a bitter, stale taste in the mouth. When you are filled with love, go inwards and experience the taste of love, which is a unique taste altogether. You will feel a sweet softness melting within you; you will feel the taste of an unfamiliar, unknown and unseen sweetness within you. Then you will be able to discriminate the tastes of anger and love clearly. Then, you can experience the taste of all emotions.

Meditation has a taste of its own; tension has a taste of its own. When no thoughts are there, all the senses become quiet and tranquil. Then the taste that accrues out of meditation, is nectar (AMRIT). This taste is called nectar for two reasons. One is that there is no taste sweeter than nectar. The second is that on attaining this taste, we at once come to know that there is no death. I cannot die. My death is impossible. What dies is only the mechanism. I remain after death.

But if we have used up all our energies in the outgoing senses and are completely spent, we can never know of the senses within. Nor is there any energy left to know them.

We all know that if a man is blind, his sense of hearing becomes sharpened. A blind man can tell a person from his footsteps whereas a man who can see has to wait till the person comes before him. A blind man can distinguish people by their voice, and finds directions by sound. He can walk on roads easily also. His sense of touch becomes sharp. When a blind man comes near a wall, he comes to feel that there is a barrier ahead and he must take care not to knock against it. A normal person's instinct is not that much developed. As soon as a blind man comes near a wall, the denser air alerts him and he begins to feel with his stick. This we do not feel.

You can fool a man with eyes by smiling at him and giving him your hand -- there may not be feeling of love within you, but you can put on this act and deceive the person -- but you cannot deceive a blind man. The feel of your hand will betray your feelings towards him. His ways of ascertaining things are different from your ways of deception. Therefore, a blind man becomes wise. He has an understanding born out of his shortcoming.

How does this happen? The reason is that the energy that would have been spent in the act of looking is now transferred to other senses. If all the senses are closed and only one remains open, this sense will become so powerful that we cannot imagine it. That is why animals have sharper senses than us -- because they have less senses than us. When we study the animal world, we find that animals with only three sense-organs have sharper senses than us. Those with two, even sharper; those with one have the

power of all five senses put together. We cannot even imagine the profoundness of the sense of touch in an amoeba, which has one sense only.

You may try an experiment. Close your eyes, your ears, your lips. Then, touch someone. You will experience an altogether different feeling from that which you feel normally. You feel a new current surging through your hand. From this example of the blind man, I want you to understand that if energy is not wasted externally (if we use our out-going senses wisely and sparingly), the senses within will get the added strength of the energy thus saved and you will begin to experience a different world altogether.

Whatever we do, it is a misuse. You walk along the road, reading posters on the wall. This is exactly why they are posted there, because those who stick them up know the neurotic condition of your mind. You cannot pass by without reading each and every one of them. Try not to read them and you will find that there is some mad person within who is goading you on to read them, lest you miss something. You have read these advertisements a thousand times: a vote for someone, some toilet soap, some film. Now, you do not have to exert yourself. You look up and you already know them, but read you must. It has become a habit.

Have you ever realised, how much of what you see is redundant, how much of what you hear is useless? If you sit down and calculate how much of seeing and hearing could be safely avoided, that much extra energy will begin to flow towards your inner senses.

A man comes to me and says, "I sit With closed eyes, but I see nothing within." There has to be some energy left to see within! All the energy has been used up. We are like spent bullets -- only the cartridge is left. We use our energy so much that there is nothing left. You come home tired and spent from a full day's work. Then you sit to meditate -- and wonder why you fall off to sleep as soon as you begin to meditate! Sleep is bound to come. Thank God you have at least that much energy left to fall off to sleep!

Scientists, especially in the East, say that if a man lives till he is eighty years old, it is difficult for him to die. Dying requires a certain amount of energy also. An eighty year old man will be bed-ridden and filled with a thousand ailments but he does not die. Those around him wait for him to die every day; but the last flicker is very necessary before the flame goes off. He does not have this last spurt of energy. He subsists on the most minimum of energy.

It is an astounding fact, but true, that a healthy man dies in his very first illness; but those who are habitually ill, develop the art of sustaining themselves on a minimum of energy. They do not have enough strength even to die. They exist like glimmering lamps that neither burn nor are extinguished.

Energy is required for sleep also. These days, we find many people who cannot sleep. The reason is that there is not even that much energy left by the end of the day for them to relax. They are tense throughout.

Lao Tzu says, and all the ancient yogas have known, that if you wish to enter the inner senses, it is wrong to use more energy than is necessary for the external senses. This is what is called moderation restraint. Moderation only means: use as much as is absolutely necessary, and allow the rest of the energy to flow inward. Look at the outside world only as much as necessary and conserve your power to see, for there is a bigger and greater world within. When the world outside is taken away from you, this world will remain with you. It will still be yours. When your house, your family, your wife, your children, your friends and dear ones, your wealth and property are snatched away from you, this treasure within is still yours.

But alas, we have no eyes to see it. What we have known outside is nothing compared to that which is within. When we hear the strain of the veena within, we realise what terrible noise the music outside is. If some music appeals to our senses, it is only because there is some echo of the strains within. If the light outside appeals to the eye, it is because there is a glimpse in it of the light within. If a taste gratifies the tongue, it is because it has some grains of the infinite sweetness that are stored within. If sex gratifies, it is only because it contains a flash, a shadow, an echo of the ultimate organs within. This is the reason. One should not get carried away by outer gratifications because many doors within can be opened.

Lao Tzu says: "HORSE-RIDING AND HUNTING DERANGE THE MIND. THE SEARCH FOR RARE AND STRANGE OBJECTS MAKES MAN'S CONDUCT EVIL."

Horse-riding and hunting were the favourite pursuits in Lao Tzu's times. We can add new ones that prevail in our times -- and there are many. In Lao Tzu's time, people indulged in betting on horses or going hunting. Now, almost everything that we do can drive the mind crazy. He who begins to gamble on something outside of himself, is bound to go mad because he lays his bet on things which cannot be attained. Naturally, that which is impossible to attain, cannot be attained. Even when and if it is attained, it is not attained. And no matter how much of it is attained, it is ultimately snatched away.

Lieh-Tzu was a disciple of Lao Tzu. Once he asked his guru to allow him leave for some time to go to different places. "You may go," said Lao Tzu, "but be careful. It is easy to set out on a journey but very difficult to come back."

Lieh-Tzu did not understand what he meant. Very few fortunate people can understand what people like Lao Tzu say. To hear is one thing; to understand is another. Lieh-Tzu was under the impression that he understood because the words were simple. Simple words put us in a quandary. Because they are simple, we feel they are easy to understand. But there are no words as difficult to understand as plain and simple words, because no dictionary carries their meaning. Their meaning lies in the inner awareness.

Lieh-Tzu did not care to clarify. He thought the master's words were too simple not to be understood. But he returned from his trip within twenty days. When Lao Tzu asked why he had returned so soon, he said, "With every step I took forward I began to understand that it would be difficult to retrace my steps."

Before I got myself involved more deeply, I thought it best to return." Lao Tzu asked, "What was the involvement that brought you back?"

Lieh-Tzu said, "The first rest house I went to, the owner came out and received me with honour and gave me the best of fare. He served me as he would serve an honoured dignitary."

"Then what was the trouble?" Lao Tzu asked.

"Trouble?" Lieh-Tzu exclaimed. "I could not sleep the whole night. My arrogance made me feel that I too was somebody. Or else, why should these people give me such first class treatment? As soon as I came, the owner touched my feet and all the rest followed suit. Then, the first class eating arrangements and the luxurious bedroom! I was puffed with pride and could not sleep.

"I set out the next morning and reached another rest house by evening. I prepared myself as best I could to make a befitting impression on my new host. I settled my hair, washed my face, even my gait was now different! When I looked within myself, I saw that I was not the same person who had bowed and taken leave of you the day before. This was a different person altogether! I waited for the owner of the serai to come and touch my feet and give me all his attention. No one came. I was terribly hurt. I was given a third rate room and the fare was no better. I could not sleep the whole night.

"This put me in a great dilemma. When the room was first-rate, I could not sleep; when the room was third-rate, I could not sleep. It then dawned on me that I might fall into danger. I should run back while there was still time. The mind, though, was persuading me to try another rest house. Perhaps this man did not know who I was; he was ignorant. At that moment, your words rang in my ears: "It is easy to go, but difficult to return." I ran for my life and did not stop a moment! I was afraid if I waited any longer I would fall further and further down."

It is strange -- nobody wants to turn back. Everyone strives to go further and further ahead, because in going ahead the ego feels gratified while the very thought of going back fills the mind with melancholy. If we come back it seems as though everything is over for us and life seems to have passed in vain. If you go forward, the ego prods you on further and further every day and points out new mirages for you to attain. Then, man runs and runs.

All outside racing ultimately ends in insanity. To be insane means only this: that the man has ventured so far away from himself that he cannot find the way to come back. He has forgotten his abode. He now knows only one thing: that he has to run and run; he cannot stop anywhere. He must run to attain anything. If he gets it, he must run to attain something else, but run he must. It has become a disease, an illness for him. Now there is no other way for him except to run.

I have a friend. He is a colonel in the army. His wife comes to listen to me. I asked her one day, "Your husband comes to drop you off here and he also comes to meet me from time to time; but I have never seen him sitting down with you to listen to me."

The wife said, "He cannot sit in one place. He is a colonel you see. He very much wants to hear you. I tape your lectures and take them home. He switches on the tape and listens to you while he walks up and down the room. Besides, it would not be nice if he came here and kept fidgeting all the time. You see, he cannot sit in one place."

Our mind is exactly like this. It cannot sit in one place; it cannot stop; it cannot relax. It is forever running away. Lao Tzu says, "The mind goes insane."

One who is incapable of relaxing is insane. If you are able to relax, then you are not mad. If you feel you cannot relax when you wish to, then know that there is some measure of insanity within you. If you are not enough master of yourself so that when you lie down the body slips into rest, or when you close your eyes you fall asleep, then know that there is some quantity of madness within you. The measure of madness can vary; there is always the possibility of increasing. It varies throughout the day. Sometimes you find it easy to relax, sometimes you don't.

All twenty-four hours, things are happening around you. Some of these happenings can increase the madness within. For example, a person comes and tells you that you have won the lottery. Off you go! Your mind will become reckless. You will be impossible. You can relax no more: the lottery has given fresh momentum to your already speeding thoughts.

Things happen around you all the time, things that beckon your mind to run ever faster. You are forever ready to run. Relaxation can only come your way if by some good fortune you have no ambitions and expectations.

This, alas, is not in your hands. A man on the road mocks you and your mind begins to race at once. There are crores and crores of people who are capable of exciting you. Even if your neighbour's dog barks at night, the mind starts a chain of thought to find out why he barks. If your own dog does not wag his tail when you come home in the evening, that too becomes a cause of worry to you. We develop relationships in a thousand ways and our ego takes great delight through these. A small thing like the dog not wagging his tail can upset you. If the mind is basically insane, the smallest thing can set it off. Any reason is good enough.

The secret of this insanity is only one. As long as you run for things outside of you, you are creating insanity within you. And the more you make the mind insane, the more miserable and unhappy you shall be. You create a hell for yourself to live in.

"THE HUNT FOR RARE AND STRANGE OBJECTS MAKE MAN'S CONDUCT EVIL." Conduct is a very profound thing. It does not mean that if a man does not smoke his conduct is good. Often it happens that such a man's behaviour is worse because of his non-smoking. He will find some substitute.

You must have noticed that people who smoke, or eat paan, or drink tea or coffee or even a little alcohol, are very sociable people. Those who do not indulge in any of these habits are very difficult to befriend. They are very unsociable, very conceited, very conscious of the fact that they have none of these vices. They look at others as if they themselves are higher and the others are slithering worms and

not human beings. This affliction of the ego is a very dangerous thing. It is poisonous. It is better if a person smokes a little or has other bad habits rather than this inflated ego. That is why I never make the mistake of calling a person good unless he is so good as not to be inclined to view other people's shortcomings as sin. Before he does so, no man is good, no matter how exemplary his behaviour. A man should be so good that he sees no fault in others. To lose the power of condemning others is the highest quality.

Our so-called sadhus and sannyasins can never stand up to this test. They are not of a high calibre of conduct. In fact, there is no difference between their conduct and the behaviour of an ordinary person. There is only an external difference between the two. Both are bound by the same things. For instance, you may smoke and he does not smoke, but the behaviour of both of you revolves around cigarettes. If you try to find out the piety of your so-called sadhus, you will find that he does not eat certain things, he does not wear certain things, he does not drink certain things. He appears to be a sadhu to you because he has renounced all that you indulge in; the difference is very glaring. But invariably these sadhus turn out to be dangerous, because they are just men like you. Had the sadhu been smoking, he too would have been an ordinary man. The trouble and discomfort he goes through to abstain from smoking he calls penance. How can non-smoking be called an act of penance? The truth is, to smoke is a great penance.

You take smoke within your body and throw it out again. The ancient mendicant lit a fire and inhaled the smoke. Now you carry a portable fire and inhale it! Both fire and smoke are present. This is no less a penance, because you take in poison. But this man who abstains from smoking has the upper hand over you. He looks at you with contempt, as if to say, "You will go straight to hell. There is no redress for you."

One cannot set standard of conduct through these base things. At least, people like Lao Tzu do not set their standard of conduct in this manner. Lao Tzu's criterion is wholly different. It is wonderful.

Lao Tzu says: "Those who hanker to attain rare and strange objects in the outside world fall in their conduct." This means: those who do not run after outside objects attain this high demeanour. So a person of high demeanour is one who is so satisfied within himself that nothing outside attracts him. This inner satisfaction, this self-contentment, is the other name for good conduct. So contented is the man within himself that nothing outside stirs him into action. Nothing is of so much significance as to make him go after it. He is so balanced, so fixed within himself. Lao Tzu says, "Such a man has character, such a man has virtue, he has the highest calibre of morality." Truly if a man is so satiated within himself that there is nothing lacking within him, then such a person has an atman. He has an integrated will, a personality, a way of his own, a sound of his own. His life is like a flame that is not affected by gusts of wind. The flame of our personality trembles even without the wind. In fact, we are ill at ease if there is no breeze, because we are ashamed to admit that we tremble for no reason. We invite trouble, so as to have an excuse to tremble.

If a man is locked up in a room, you will be surprised to see that he indulges in fits of temper. If you are locked up in seclusion for three months, you will come to know that anger does not require any outside

help to manifest itself. All our lives we have believed that anger is brought about by the other. This is like the flame making the excuse that it is the breeze that makes it flicker. In seclusion, you will find that suddenly anger overtakes you; suddenly you feel sexually aroused. The other is totally absent. Now you cannot say that so-and-so was the cause of your anger or that the sight of a beautiful woman aroused your sexuality. No, these are already within you, and you were only waiting for an excuse. There is a greater possibility of conjuring up the image of a beautiful woman when you are in seclusion. This in turn triggers off your senses. Thus, you create your own gusts of wind around your flame.

Psychologists say that if a man is deprived of all experiences for a period of three months, he can create all these experiences within himself. He will begin talking with people who are not there. He will speak on their behalf as well as on his own. We cannot sit quiet in our house for a long time. We always wait for someone to talk to.

The state of our mind, the state of our character, is very unsteady. Fluctuation is in our very nature. Lao Tzu says this very trembling, this unsteadiness, is the cause of fallen conduct. To be steady, fixed, is to have character.

What does Lao Tzu mean by this steadiness? Does he say, "Don't eat this, don't drink this, don't wear this"? No. He means no food or drink should be such as to disturb the flame; no clothing should be such as to cause a tremor within. Does it mean that you should shun the company of others if you wish your flame to be unaffected? No, do not shun company, but let no one's presence cause a flicker in your flame. Be so steady, so much so, that when a companion departs, you are not conscious of any tremor in the flame. To be steady does not mean you are to run away. Rather, it means, let all storms keep raging without but the flame of consciousness should steadily become fixed and unswerving.

This happens. If we follow Lao Tzu's advice, if we allow our senses to completely relax, if we keep them fresh, if we awaken our inner senses, if we are not inclined to store useless objects, if we are unaffected by the people around us, then gradually we develop that character that stabilizes the consciousness within. This is stability of character.

This settling down of consciousness is a different thing altogether. It is a great happening when a person's consciousness is settled. He never looks at you critically. He never observes what you eat and what you wear, in order to find your faults. He sees only one fault in you: that you tremble for twenty-four hours a day. It makes no difference what makes you tremble; things keep changing. But this trembling must stop; it should vanish completely. This is why the saint does not gratify the insatiable longings of his external eyes.

These words are worth noting. The desires of the external eyes are such that they are never satiated. By nature they are insatiable. There is no way of gratifying them. It is not that our efforts are lacking. Our zest is lacking.

These desires are insatiable by their very nature. It is just like a mirage. A thirsty traveller spies a lake in the desert. He runs with all his might, only to find that it was an illusion. It appears further ahead. There was nothing lacking in the thirst of this man, nor in his effort to reach, but the lake was just not there. It

was an optical illusion. Since that for which he toiled did not exist, his thirst cannot be gratified. Hence it is insatiable. He never will reach his goal. He will keep running. He will keep on running with the hope that if he runs a little further he will achieve his goal.

All that we seek to achieve in life is just as impossible to fulfill.

It is said that when Nasruddin married for the first time, he married the most beautiful girl in the city. But two years later, he was looking for another wife. His friends asked, "You have married the most beautiful girl in our city. What makes you look for another wife?"

The Mulla replied, "I want to marry an ugly woman. I experienced a beautiful one and found there was nothing but misery. Now let me see if an ugly woman can make me happy."

His friends laughed at him. "If a beautiful woman could not make you happy, how will an ugly one?" they said.

Nasruddin replied, "Perhaps the charm of the opposite may be gratifying."

So he searched for an ugly woman and married her. Two years later, he was out to marry again. "What now?" his friends asked. "You have experienced a beautiful woman and an ugly one. What kind of a woman do you desire now?"

Nasruddin said, "Just you wait and see when I come with the palanquin."

A wave of excitement passed through the village. This man was full of wild things and no body could tell what he would do next.

One fine day Nasruddin returned to his village in a big procession, complete with a band and a palanquin. People were awed to see him sitting astride the horse, decked in his groom's attire. They could hardly wait to see Nasruddin's latest choice. When the palanquin was opened, it was empty! Nasruddin said, "I married an empty palanquin. Every time I brought it back occupied, I was unhappy."

It is said that Nasruddin wrote in his memoirs that what he could not attain by his first two marriages, he attained by his third: peace, joy and tranquillity! This is possible. The empty palanquin is a sign that illusions were broken.

We keep changing objects: from the first to the second and the third and so on, but our chase does not abate. And this chase is insatiable. It can never be satiated because the nature of desires is insatiable. Therefore, the sage seeks to satisfy the hunger that exists in the innermost centre of his being. He is anxious to satisfy this hunger.

Lao Tzu says: "Bring down your consciousness from the head to the heart." As soon as it approaches the heart, a transformation of desires takes place. He says: "Take it still further down, towards the navel."

Then, desires become extinct and a new hunger is experienced. This hunger is called the hunger for spiritual-knowledge. As soon as the consciousness nears the navel, this hunger begins.

Then the question does not arise that I should be something or achieve something. Then the question is :I should know myself as I am. This is a completely new hunger, in which I want my true self to manifest before me. I do not wish to be anything or to achieve anything. I am eager to know myself as I truly am and as I have always been. The curtain should rise and I should see and know my true being.

This is the craving of the navel centre. As soon as a person brings down his consciousness to the level of his navel, an entirely new question confronts him: "Who am I?" All spiritual knowledge is an answer to this question. All yoga, all sadhanas are answers to this hunger, this craving. They are methods and processes to find an answer to it.

We are aware of all the other cravings within us: the craving for wealth, for honour, for position, but we are completely ignorant of the craving to know who I am, to know what I am! This is a hunger that is deeply embedded within the navel. When this hunger is awakened within a person, a new search begins in his life. There can be no search without the craving, without the hunger. We set out to find only that which we desire.

Lao Tzu says: "Therefore, the saint does not gratify his hunger for colour or taste or sound or touch. He does not fulfil the hunger of the senses. Rather, he removes his consciousness from the hunger of the senses and directs it to the navel, where lies embedded the actual thirst: the thirst to know oneself, to be oneself, to attain oneself.

"The saint negates the former and upholds the latter." The saint does not exhort us to leave hunger altogether. He says that there is a hunger which is never satiated, however much you try. These are our external hungers. Try to understand this. All the hungers of our senses are instantaneous. You give the stomach food and in twenty-four hours you shall have to refill it because the food will have been used up by then. It is just like you fill gas in your car. It gives you a certain mileage and is burnt up in the process. The car will not work if you do not refill the gas. If you want to use the car, there is no other way except to fill the car with gas. Just so, you must give food to the body if you want it to work. The body has its requirements which need to be fulfilled in the course of the day. The body keeps on demanding fuel because the body is a machine that has to be filled everyday. But by filling the body, you cannot experience that fullness which never gets finished.

There is no cause for alarm however. This is as it should be, and there is no cause for anxiety. Some foolish people, however become the enemies of the body. "What is the use of gratifying the needs of the body?" they argue, because the body's demands never end." So they give the body as little as they can give if they wish to sustain it. They give the body the minimum of food, the minimum of water and rest. They are merely indulging in foolishness. Actually, they too desire to fill the desires of the senses for once and all and be done with it. This could not be, and hence the distress.

Your folly is that you are under the impression that by gratifying your desires everyday, some day you will reach a point of satiety. You and the one who denies the body are committing the same folly, but

from different directions. You believe in gratifying the body with the hope of reaching the supreme gratification, whereas he denies the body in order to reach the same goal. Both he and you are completely unaware of the spiritual hunger that can only be gratified in a spiritual way.

Remember, petty thirsts are quenched temporarily. The hunger in your stomach is not the ultimate hunger. What is your thirst? Drink half a glass of water and it is satiated. But how long can the thirst be appeased by this much water? In no time, you are thirsty again. If the thirst is small, the result is small. We have no knowledge of the ultimate hunger.

There is only one supreme hunger: to know existence, to be one with it, to see it unfold before us. Call it truth or God, give it whatever name you please.

"Remove your consciousness from the senses," says Lao Tzu. Bring it down into the navel, bring it down from the head. The day it reaches the navel, will be the day of revelation. There will be a new thirst. This very thirst is your prayer, this very thirst is meditation. The search that arises from this hunger, is religion. When a sadhaka reaches the lake that gratifies this thirst, that lake is Paramatman.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #7

Chapter title: The sadhana of Tao -- in the context of yoga

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Question 1

ONE FRIEND HAS ASKED: "YOGA IS A PATH OF ELEVATION, OF RAISING THE LIFE-ENERGY UPWARDS, WHEREAS LAO TZU'S METHOD IS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE: OF BRINGING DOWN THE ENERGY TO THE NAVEL CENTRE. SO THE QUESTION INVARIABLY RISES: WHICH IS THE RIGHT METHOD?"

Such thoughts rise within one's mind because of our habit of breaking everything into two opposing factors. It never occurs to us that there is a connection between opposites. It is this connection that Lao Tzu talks of. You could say: the contrariness of opposites is only superficial.

Lao Tzu says; "Bring down the life-energy from the head to the navel centre. As soon as it reaches the navel centre, it becomes one with existence." Yoga says, "Raise the life-energy from the sex centre. As soon as it reaches the navel centre, it becomes one with existence." Yoga says, "Raise the life-energy from the sex centre (from the muladhara) and take it up to the head (the sahasrara). As it reaches the sahasrara, it merges with the vast existence."

These are two extremes. It is possible to take the jump from either of them. You cannot jump from the mid-point however. So, there are the two points from where you can take-off: one, from the head to the navel or; two, from the sex centre to the head.

On one point both yoga and Lao Tzu agree: that the life-energy should not remain in the intellect. It should only use the intellect as a means either to reach the navel or to reach the sahasrara. Also, a jump taken from either extremity, leads to the same destination.

So there are three things. The first is that we see a discrepancy in all things because we fail to see the underlying propriety in that which seems contrary. If we want water not to remain water, we can either bring down the temperature below 0° so that the water changes into ice; or we can raise the temperature to 100° so that the water changes into vapour. In both cases, it will not be water. In both cases, we will be able to bring about the change: water will no longer be water but will be something else. In exactly the same way, whether the life-energy comes to the first centre or the last, the jump becomes possible.

There is also another fact which we find difficult to understand: that energy moves in a circle. No force on earth moves in any way except in a circular direction. In fact, the movement of energy is always circular. And, when we move on a circle, we find that the finishing point is the starting point. Then alone can the circle be complete. Therefore whether we jump from the navel or from the sahasrara, we reach the same point. The circle starts from the navel and is completed at the sahasrara. When a person jumps from either, he goes beyond the circle.

We think that the navel and the sahasrara are far apart: one in the belly, the other in the head. If we draw a straight line, there is quite some distance between the two. But we are talking about the subtle body and not the gross physical body. The circle is formed in the subtle body. There, the head and the navel are close to each other.

The subtle body is the energy body. It is not made up of matter but of energy. Here, both of these extremities lie close to each other. Lao Tzu says, "Go back to the first extremity." Yoga says, "Go to the final extremity." There are two kinds of people. Therefore both these methods are useful.

There are some people who find it very difficult to go back to the first extremity, especially those who have a male mind. Lao Tzu is concerned with the feminine mind. Man always wants to go ahead and

never turn back. But this does not mean there is no way to reach the truth for the male mind. There is a way, but Lao Tzu does not advocate this way. He is a proponent of the feminine approach. He says, "Retrace your steps, come back." When the idea is to jump why take the trouble to go ahead? Besides, we require no effort to go back; whereas great effort is needed to go forward. To go ahead we have to put in energy, whereas all we have to do to go back is to stop making use of our energy.

Those who are artless and simple in spite of sadhana, the path of yoga is for them. It is astonishing to observe the great tradition of yoga created by India. Very many methods of sadhana have been evolved, but in all this, no thought has been given to the feminine mind. So this tradition is only half evolved.

It is because of the sway of the masculine mind that all incarnations of God have been masculine. All the Tirthankaras of the Jainas have been masculine: Buddha, Krishna, Rama. There is no mention of a single feminine incarnation (or Tirthankara) anywhere. In fact, it is believed (and this belief will become firmly rooted within us if we persist in following the masculine mind) that realisation cannot be attained in a feminine body. The woman, therefore, it is believed, must be born again as a man in order for moksha to be possible.

I feel that the Jaina Tirthankara, Mallinath, was a woman: Mallibai. But the Jainas cannot believe that a woman can attain enlightenment, so they changed her name to Mallinath. The one fundamental point of dispute between the Svetambara and the Digambara sects of the Jainas is that the former maintain she was Mallibai whereas the latter assert it was Mallinath. This is a unique type of dispute, where the sex of a person is questioned. It is almost certain she was a woman, but the traditional trend of thought could not accept that a woman could reach the moksha, because the Indian concept has always been influenced by the masculine mind.

Lao Tzu talks of the feminine-mind. He says: if simplicity is attained by sadhana, it can at best be a very crude simplicity. If effort is to be made so that it becomes artless, that is not artlessness. The very meaning of simplicity is that I should do nothing, and simplicity will result from it. To be natural also means that the very fact that I do not do anything should result in simple naturalness. But I cannot be natural if I have to make an effort to be natural.

So Lao Tzu is a supporter of the other extreme. Both extremes are imperfect, but both are instrumental in reaching the ultimate reality. It is only from the extreme point that the jump can be taken.

If you set out on the path of the masculine mind, then be an outright person. Let your labour, your effort and ambition reach the point from where there is no further to go. At this point of extremity, the jump becomes possible. Or, if you are immersed in the bliss of naturalness, then be so natural, so simple that sadhana itself becomes redundant. From such naturalness (SAHAJA), the jump is possible.

Naturalness is possible only in inaction. He who aspires to rise above cannot be natural, because in the process there is bound to be strife, there is bound to be competition. There is no competition if you just sit back. If you announce that you wish to be the last in line, no one will compete with you for your position.

Lao Tzu says: "Be so insignificant, such a non-entity, that people are not even aware that you exist." Seek the lowest hollow, the loneliest place where no one would want to be. Sit where people remove their shoes. Seek no position. Have no ambitions because the language of ambition itself is wrong.

Lao Tzu is right. Those who are like water -- they also reach. Actually, the first and the last merge into each other at one point. The first is one extremity of the infinite and the second is the other extremity of the infinite. But the first and the last are just two names of the same point, and are relative to the type of path you are on. If you go backwards, the point will be first; if you go around the full circle, this very point becomes the final point.

Yoga says 'up', Lao Tzu says 'down'. The duality of life is evident in the differences between yoga and Tao. So do not worry about it. Choose which ever pleases you. Remember always, what appeals to you that is your path. No matter how much others advocate something if it does not interest or appeal to you, that path is not meant for you. It is better to go astray on one's own path than to proceed correctly on another's; because the former, in spite of failures, leads you ultimately to the goal; whereas the latter, in spite of every care, leads you nowhere.

There is a reason for this. Our own nature, our own aptitude, plays a big role in our lives. So even if the path followed by another person attracts you, influences you, ask within yourself whether it suits you. It happens many times that unfavourable things look attractive even though they are not favourable. The attraction lies in their very contrariness to our nature and because they are unknown, unfamiliar. Always keep your own bend of nature in mind.

If you feel that you will feel no compunction, no agony, in being the last in the crowd; if you feel that you can be non-aggressive, that you can be a passive recipient of truth; if you feel no need to go out in search of the truth -- rather, you will wait with infinite patience, with your doors wide open, for Him to enter (which is a feminine quality); if you have the strength to wait till eternity -- then you will find truth at your door step this very moment. But if you do not have the courage to wait, if you sit at the doorstep fretting and fidgeting, it is better to step out on your journey. It is of no use practising patience when you are restless within. Then, the journey may start within, but the journey is not fruitful. Only strife and confusion results, and you are torn between dualities.

Therefore, each of us has to understand his own nature. So there are only these two paths, these two great paths; one is the path that Lao Tzu refers to as the feminine path and the other is the path of will, the path of yoga. The feminine path is the choice of all those who are not ego-centered. If you come across a follower of Lao Tzu, you will not find him stiff and arrogant like our yogis. He will be very humble. His humility, however, will be very natural. It will not be put on, because he is not pseudo-humble.

If a yogi seems humble, his humility is a mere mask that he puts on to impress the public. This is bound to be because the very path he follows is the path of the ego. If he tries to be humble, he is going against his nature. He has chosen the path of fire and he is trying to be like water. He finds himself in difficulty; his humility is false. He has chosen the path of "Aham brahmasmi". He has set out on this path so that

one day he can say "I am Brahma." Lao Tzu's path is such that one day the sadhaka can claim, "I am not." If these two paths are clearly understood, either one of them can lead a person to the ultimate goal.

You can inflate the ego so much that it explodes. You blow up the balloon so much that it ultimately bursts, even though you have blown it up with the idea of making it bigger and better and not with the idea of bursting it. The balloon has its limitations, beyond which it cannot contain itself. If you enjoy the ego, don't be content with small victories. Let your ego expand so much that one day it spreads over the universe. Then, it is bound to explode. The day a person finds that he can declare, "I am Brahma," he finds that the ego has collapsed completely.

Or, do not feed the ego. Remove whatever air is in the balloon. Lao Tzu says, "Come back!" Have no thought of filling up that which one day is bound to burst. Why labour unnecessarily? But there are people who cannot remain happy without labouring.

There was one disciple of Lao Tzu by the name of Lieh Tzu. Someone said to him, "It is said that Buddha sat under a tree and was enlightened. Also, yogis repeat mantras and attain enlightenment. What do you say?"

Lieh Tzu replied, "As far as my understanding goes, the repetition of mantras or the practising of sadhanas and yogasanas is the work of those who cannot remain without something to do."

The real thing is not that Buddha attained because of sadhana. Rather, Buddha attained because he sat in one place. It is not that a yogi attained by repeating a mantra, but because he sat in one place. The mantra was only an excuse to do something since he could not remain inactive. Lieh Tzu meant to say that those who have attained did so because of the fact that they left everything and became inactive.

There are some people who can do this. They will not even repeat a mantra because this too ultimately proves to be useless. They do not take even this much trouble. Lieh Tzu says, "Do nothing; just sit." But it is very very difficult not to do anything. On the face of it, Lao Tzu's teaching seems very simple, but it is the most difficult thing to do. Even children can be kept busy with the mantra of toys! That is the best way to keep them occupied. There is so much restlessness within that a person sits and counts beads. This is just a ruse to help you to sit because the child within the mind has to be kept busy. It says, "At least count beads if nothing else!"

People come to me for meditation and ask me what they should do! When I say, "Do nothing. That is meditation," they question how that can be. They must have something to go by, some support. That means they are asking for something to do so that they will be able to sit in one place for some time. Lieh Tzu says, "The actual attainment is obtained only by sitting." Everything else is just an excuse, because you cannot sit without doing something. If you sit without doing anything, you attain without any trouble. But to sit, just sit, is a very great happening. Just to sit, even for a moment, means there is no movement in the mind, no restlessness, no traffic within. The energy is now steadfast within itself, everything within is quiet and serene. Now you have reverted to the point from where you started, you are absorbed within yourself. If this happens for even a moment, that moment is the moment of truth. It can happen both ways. It depends on you from where you take the jump. Yoga is a path, so is Tao.

Question 2

ONE FRIEND ASKS HOW A PERSON SHOULD FIND THE INTERNAL CENTRE THAT IS MENTIONED BY LAO TZU AND DEVELOP ITS HUNGER.

Sit with your eyes closed and think, "Where is the centre of my body?" We live through our body, but it is an unfortunate fact that we do not give any thought to the centre of our body. We are completely ignorant of the pivot on which the body functions. Many people believe the head to be the centre of all body functions because it is in the brain that all activities seem to take place.

The fact is, however, that the brain forms much later. When the child is conceived, there is no brain and yet life functions. But that which is formed later, cannot be the centre. People who are emotional, like most women, artists, poets, feel the centre to be the heart because whatever these people have known and experienced -- love, beauty and the like -- are things that have had a direct impact on their heart. That is why, when people talk of love, their hand inadvertently goes to their heart. So those who are emotional take the heart to be the centre of the body.

But the heart does not beat until the child takes its first breath. The child hears the mother's heart beat within. Therefore, the sound "tick-tick" causes not only children but also adults to fall asleep. The sound of water dripping, or the ticking of a watch, induces sleep. Doctors say that the ticking of a clock is a very good tranquilliser. The heart in the embryo does not function like a heart and yet the child is alive.

Therefore, the heart also is not the centre. Lao Tzu says, "The navel is the centre and not the heart or the brain." The child is joined to the mother by its navel. The first glimpse of life comes through the navel. This is scientifically correct.

So, search within. Lao Tzu says, "Keep searching within and bring your consciousness to the level of the navel centre. That is the first step of sadhana." When the authentic centre and the centre of your understanding become one, you will become an united, integrated whole. When the centre of your mind, the centre of your consciousness and your authentic centre concentrate and converge into a single focus, you will find that your life has changed. You are now a new person altogether.

Lao Tzu's disciples have, for ages, been carrying out a simple experiment to prove that you cannot grow unless you locate your centre within. The experiment is this. Take two small tanks of equal dimensions. Fill them with water. Insert an iron rod in the middle of one tank, leaving the other as it is. Put two identical fish and put one in each tank. Given the same conditions and the same diet, you will be surprised to find that the fish in the tank with the iron-rod in the centre develops quickly, whereas the growth of the fish in the other tank, which is without the central rod, is slower. The fish in the former tank swims around and around the rod, while the fish in the second tank has no centre. It swims here and there listlessly in the absence of a centre and is also more prone to illness. This experiment has been religiously carried out by the followers of Lao Tzu for hundreds of years and it has always been found

that the fish in the tank with the centre rod has always been well-developed and healthy, whereas the fish in the other tank was stunted in growth and unhealthy.

The followers of Lao Tzu maintain that a person who succeeds in locating his centre finds his consciousness revolving around and around this centre. It is only then that his consciousness begins to develop. Those who do not find their centres remain stunted and lifeless, like the fish in the second tank, because they have no centre, no base around which they can revolve and develop. They cannot find their direction: where they should go, what they should do. By revolving round the same circumference, the consciousness develops.

Lao Tzu says: "Your consciousness becomes concentrated when it discovers the navel centre. Then it begins to revolve around it." Lao Tzu says: "When you walk, keep your attention on the navel. When you sit, keep your mind on the navel; when you get up, be aware of the navel. Do what you will, but let your consciousness always move around the navel." Become a fish and go round and round the navel, and you will soon discover a new, powerful consciousness arising within you. The results are wondrous!

There are many experiments you carry out. You are sitting on a chair. Now, Lao Tzu says your way of sitting on the chair is wrong, therefore, you get tired. He says, "Do not sit on the chair." This does not mean you are not actually to sit on the chair; that you should sit on the ground. Lao Tzu says, "Sit on the chair but do not put your weight on the chair. Put all your weight on the navel."

You can carry out the experiment right away. It is only a matter of emphasis. When we put all our weight on the chair the emphasis is in the chair. The chair becomes the all in all. You are merely like a coat hanging on a peg. If the peg breaks, you fall down, like a coat which has no centre of its own and which depends on the peg for its centre. Lao Tzu says you will tire yourself this way because you are not acting like an animate, conscious being and are depending entirely on an inanimate object. Lao Tzu says: "Sit on the chair but be fixed at your own centre at the navel." Hang everything on the peg of the navel. Hours will go by and you will find no sign of fatigue. If a man begins to live by hanging his consciousness on the peg of the navel-centre, all mental-fatigue vanishes. A unique freshness pervades his mind, a serene calmness flows within him and he gains a self-confidence which only those who have found their centre attain.

So the first step in this sadhana is to find your centre. and to continue your efforts till the consciousness reaches not only the navel but two inches below the navel. Then one should begin to keep this centre always in mind. When one breathes in, this centre should rise up; when one breathes out, this centre should go down. Then, a constant japa begins: the rising of the centre with the incoming breath and the falling of the centre with the outgoing breath. If this becomes a conscious act, it yields great results. This is very difficult of course in the beginning, because remembrance is the most difficult thing to do. Constant remembrance is even more difficult. You might say, "That is not such a difficult thing at all. I can recollect the name of a person even after six years!" This is not remembrance. This is recollection (SMRITI).

Understand the difference. Recollection means you know something; you pass it on to your memory for recording. The memory stores this information and reproduces it on demand. Remembrance (smaran)

means, constant, non-stop remembering. Try it a little: Observe the rising and falling of your abdomen as the breath comes and goes for just five minutes. After two seconds you will find that you have forgotten. You have started to do something else. Then you will be perturbed. You could not concentrate for even two seconds? The respiration was going on as usual, the abdomen also rose and fell accordingly. but you were not there. Then again bring back your remembrance.

If you strive continuously, your remembrance will increase -- second by second. When you find that you can observe the breath constantly without a simple break for three minutes -- and this short interval of three minutes will seem like three year -- then you will find that you have begun to experience the centre correctly. Then you will feel the body to be separate from the centre.

This centre is the centre of energy. One who is united to this centre, reaches infinite exaltation because he is constantly receiving infinite energy. So, keep a constant remembrance of the navel centre and let your consciousness revolve around it constantly. That is the temple. Keep circling around this temple. Whatever the state within you -- whether there is anger or hatred, jealousy or misery or happiness -- whatever the state, your first duty is to return to the navel. Then do whatever you wish.

Someone gives you news of the death of a loved one. Go back to the navel. Then let the news go within you. "Then," Lao Tzu says, "No one's death will cause a blow to the mind." You may not have observed, or perhaps you have or may be you realised later on, recollecting the incident -- that whenever you have been given news of great joy or sorrow, the first effect has always been on the navel. You are walking on the road, or cycling, or going in a car, and suddenly an accident occurs. The first impact is on the navel. It begins to tremble. Then, the whole body begins to tremble. Lao Tzu says, "Whenever anything happens, go back first to the navel centre." Your first work is remembrance of the navel. Then, do what you like. Then happiness will not make you mad with joy, and sorrow will fail to make you unhappy. Then your centre will stand apart from the happenings that take place on the periphery. Then you remain the witness only. Yoga says, "Practice the sadhana of witnessing." Lao Tzu says. "Remember the navel centre constantly and the witness state will result by itself."

You will step outside of birth and death the day you become conscious of your navel centre, because this centre arises before birth and is the only thing that remains after death, when all else is lost. So he who knows and recognises his navel centre, knows that there is no birth for him nor death. He becomes beyond birth and death.

Keep constant remembrance. Seek the centre and keep incessant remembrance (SMARANA). The first thing is to find the centre, second is to keep on remembering it, and third is to remember the frequent loss of the remembrance. "This is going to be rather difficult however. People come to me and say, "I try to keep my attention on the (NABHI), the navel, but I cannot. What should I do?"

To this I say: Keep attention on the fact that you have lost attention. Make it a part of your meditation. Be attentive to inattention also: don't let it pass unnoticed by you. Whenever you slip, be conscious of the slip and you will go back to remembrance, the current of meditation will join the mainstream again.

Now, the last thing. When the remembrance is complete and the centre becomes clear to you -- when you experience the centre -- then surrender everything to the centre. Say to the centre, "You alone are the master. Release me!" This surrender is easy.

Surrender is very difficult until the centre is experienced. People say, "Surrender to God," but we have no knowledge of God. How is surrender to an unknown entity possible? And even if God is known, you still remain the owner of your surrender. If you feel sometime that God is not to your taste, you will withdraw your surrender. We are the givers and we are the withdrawers -- what can God do? But the surrender that can be withdrawn is no surrender; in fact, it was never a surrender.

Lao Tzu's method is different. Lao Tzu says: "The day the centre is known and felt, you begin to understand and experience that the centre is the master that does not need your assistance. The breath comes and goes; sleep comes, then awakening; birth happens, then death. The current of life flows on from the centre, without your help." Then the question of surrendering does not arise because surrender just happens.

So the third and last stage of sadhana is to experience the surrender to the centre. Then there is no way for the ego to save itself. In the state of such surrender a person reaches the highest attainment.

Another friend has asked an almost similar question

Question 3

HE SAYS: "LAO TZU STRESSES INACTION, WHEREAS KRISHNA LAYS STRESS ON ACTION. HOW DO THESE TWO THEORIES COMPARE AND CONTRAST?"

These two theories are the two ends. Lao Tzu does not tell us to give up action. He tells us to act but act as if not acting. Do your actions as if you are not doing them. Rather, they are happening. Everything is happening -- the breath comes and goes. You do not take the breath, you do not release the breath -- it happens on its own. Life also is like that. You establish yourself in inaction and let all actions take place as they will.

Krishna says the same thing, but from the other end. He says, "Do not run away from action. Do your duty but do not become the doer. Let go of the feeling that you are the doer. God is the doer."

In Lao Tzu's system, there is no place for God because he says that even this suggestion gives rise to duality. He says: "By saying even this, that God is the doer, we plant our ego on God." Besides, it suggests some doer, even if it is God and not us.

According to Lao Tzu, there is no doer. Actions take place on their own. This is a little difficult to understand. It is easy for us to accept God as the doer. If not us, God is the doer. Our logic remains intact. But Lao Tzu says: "Why do you want to involve Him in this business of being the doer, when you

yourself are not prepared to be the doer?" There is no doer; there are only happenings. The wind blows, the leaves rustle, the waves of the oceans rise and fall. The world is a collection of the happenings, there is no doer.

When this comes within your understanding, then you let things happen. You are neither the doer nor the non-doer. Then you let things happen as they will and you merely watch them happening. Then you reach the state that Krishna speaks of.

Krishna said to Arjuna, "Leave all this." Perhaps Arjuna was not as worthy a disciple of Krishna as Lao Tzu's disciples. Therefore Krishna had to say, "Leave everything to God. It is He who does everything. Do not interfere in His work. Take yourself only as a means that He employs in order to carry out a particular task."

Remember, if Lao Tzu were in Krishna's place he would never have given Arjuna such a long sermon. Lao Tzu, in the first place, would not have spoken at all. If Arjuna could read his silence, well and good.

Lieh Tzu says: "I have heard of teachers who teach with the help of words. And, there are teachers who teach without the medium of words." Lieh Tzu stayed with Lao Tzu for twelve long years. Never did he ask Lao Tzu a single question nor did he receive a single answer. Lieh Tzu would sit in a corner and listen to Lao Tzu when he answered the questions of others.

Years later, Lao Tzu himself asked him one day, "Have you nothing to ask?"

Lieh Tzu said, "If I have your permission I will ask."

"Why did you remain silent all these years?" Lao Tzu asked him. Lieh Tzu replied. "I have gained so much understanding sitting silently with you that I did not want to cause a disturbance with words."

To this, Lao Tzu said, "It is, therefore, that I say that you are now eligible to ask. He who finds speech an obstruction is freed from the illness of speaking. Now we can converse because words will cause no hindrance. He who discovers the bliss of silence cannot be hindered by words. Now, we can safely exchange our views."

But the disciple who stands before Krishna is a different type altogether. The situation as well as the times are different. It is a time of battle. You could not afford to be silent for twelve years. The situation is very different. Besides, if Lao Tzu were to tell Arjuna, "There is no doer. Things happen," Arjuna would have run away. When there is no doer, there is no deserter. He would have run away although that would have been wrong on his part because in running away, he would have been the deserter. He would then have been deceiving his own self.

We all are capable of deceiving ourselves; we are great adepts at this art. We are very clever at deceiving ourselves. We will run away and then philosophise, "It is happening. I am not the doer. I am only the witness."

If a man in the same mental state as Arjuna runs away, he is responsible for his actions. In fact, it is the sense of doer-ship that makes him think that he would be committing a sin by killing his near and dear ones. Therefore, he should run away. Krishna stops him from running away and explains to him that this feeling that 'I am doing' is wrong. If Arjuna had reached the stage where his ego had dropped, and then, if he had laid down his bow and arrow and walked away, Krishna would have been the last person to stop him. But then, that going would have been of different kind altogether.

Talking of Arjuna, I am reminded of a follower of Lao Tzu by the name of Rong Kong Unejji. He was a very great marks-man. He used to say, "Pull the arrow but do not let the muscles of the arm move", because if the muscle so much as twitches, you become the doer. Then it is you who has shot the arrow.

Now this was a very difficult thing. The king heard about him.

He called for him because he was curious to see this man. We can believe that a man, while pulling the arrow, may have the feeling of being only a medium and not the doer. He may have the attitude of being a witness to the happening but it is virtually impossible for him to shoot the arrow without using his muscles.

Unejji came to the court and placed his bow on the ground. It is said that no one but he could lift his bow; it was so heavy. He lifted the bow. The king himself inspected the muscles of his arms. He found them soft and supple like a child's. The king was surprised. Unejji said, "Now your majesty will believe me when I say the arrow is not shot; it shoots by itself."

If Arjuna came to this stage where he could say, "It is not I who am going; this going is taking place," then Krishna would never have stopped him. But Arjuna was not in this state. Arjuna was not fit to be a disciple of Lao Tzu. He belonged to the class of warriors, an outright masculine type; whereas all the teachings of Lao Tzu are for the feminine mind.

Arjuna is a symbol of masculinity. He was as a man should be. That is why, even Krishna, in order to bring his masculinity out to the fore, says, "You talk like an impotent man!" He shakes the man in him to the very bones. He tells him that people will call him a coward and he will go down in history as a warrior whose courage failed him in battle. Krishna tried to bring out the pride of the warrior in him so that he would pick up his bow and prepare for battle.

The teachings of Lao Tzu are essentially for a feminine mind. Therefore, his disciples are bound to be basically different. Whether feminine or masculine, the result is the same. One may drown one's ego in the service of God and not consider oneself to be the doer; or, like Lao Tzu, follow the path of non-action, where things happen by themselves and the sadhaka says he is not the doer.

Lao Tzu does not even ask his followers to act. Why should he? If things are happening, they are happening. If they are not, they are not. If they stop happening, they stop happening. You are no one to interfere or come in between. This, however, does not mean that the follower of Lao Tzu runs away from action. Nor does it mean that the followers of Krishna are always involved in actions.

Those who followed Lao Tzu have also fought wars. Unejji, about whom I spoke, was a warrior. He was well-versed in archery. We know of the so-called sannyasins of our country who run away from the world with the Gita in their hands, and yet maintain that the Gita is their very life.

What is one to do? What you should do is neither in the hands of Lao Tzu nor in the hands of Krishna. It is entirely in your hands. It has always been so. Actually, the teacher cannot do anything without your cooperation. And, the teacher can go only that far with you as you are prepared to go. Lao Tzu and Krishna have given the same message, but from very opposite points. One is a message for the male mind, and the other is a message for the female mind.

Again, another friend has asked an almost similar question. He says,

Question 4

"FROM YOUR DISCOURSES, IT APPEARS THAT LAO TZU EXTOLLED THE GREATNESS OF NON-ACTION. AND YET, HE HAS GIVEN SUTRAS FOR SADHANA LIKE CONCENTRATION ON THE NAVEL CENTRE, THE BREATH, ETCETERA. IS THIS NOT CONTRADICTION?"

It is only natural that it appears contradictory, because whenever we mention sadhana, it seems to us that it is always something to be done. This is the fault of our language.

Actually, there is no word for non-action in our languages; all words are for various actions. When we tell a person; "Now go to sleep," it means he has to do something to go to sleep; sleeping is also an act. But we all know it is not so. It is impossible, no matter how hard we try, to bring about sleep. Try to do it sometimes. The harder you try to sleep, the more difficult it is to sleep. So sleeping is not an action, but in language it is so -- like sitting, walking, talking etcetera.

A man cannot make himself sleep. Sleep comes only when all actions stop. The difficulty of those who cannot sleep is: how to bring about sleep. This "What to do?" is a great enemy of sleep, because whatever you do, you will be pushing sleep even further away. Should such a person be told there is no remedy? Should he be told he is doomed for the rest of his life because sleep cannot be brought about? If it comes, it comes; if it does not come, it does not come.

This would be very cruel, and also unwise; because such a person needs help, and help can be given. He will have to be shown methods that are so boring that they fall off on their own. For instance, you can tell a man to count from 1 to 100; then back from 100 to 1; then again from 1 to 100 and back. This is a method to bring about boredom. If a man counts from 1 to 100, then backwards again, then again, in a little while his mind will drop the method unknowingly. And as soon as it drops, he falls asleep. The method was not the cause of sleep and yet it was instrumental in bringing about sleep. All Lao Tzu's sadhanas are such negative methods. For instance, he says, "Find your centre." Now, the centre is there, so there is no need to actually find it. It is there. Whether we find it or not, whether we know it or not, it

makes no difference to the centre whatsoever. The centre is the centre. Whether we live by the intellect or live by the heart, life is centred at the navel. All else are our illusions. Lao Tse says: "Search!" Perhaps, while searching the mind will get removed from your illusions and suddenly you will come close to the centre. And it is revealed!

There is a Chinese story about a king who became insane. He left his luxurious palace and began to live in the cellar, where all the useless things of the palace were stacked. At first his ministers thought that perhaps the king was doing some sadhana. In the beginning, all mad people appear to be sadhakas; and in the end, all sadhakas appear mad. So they thought the king was engaged in some sadhana, because he went into the cellar everyday. But by and by, he stopped coming up altogether. Then he began to forget all matters pertaining to his kingdom. When the ministers spoke to him, he merely listened and gave no answer. Finally the ministers began to doubt his sanity because he refused to come out from the cellar. They tried to convince him that it was not the palace but the basement, where all the rubbish of the palace was stored. But he would insist, "What different shall I do there? Is this not the palace also?"

He challenged the ministers to prove that the basement was not a part of the palace. He threatened to cut off their heads if they gave a wrong answer. The ministers were in a quandary because they could not deny the fact that it was a part of the palace, even though it was no place for a king.

They were alarmed at the king's behaviour, so they went to a fakir in the village and begged him to help them bring the king to his senses. They explained the whole situation to him. The fakir offered to come along with them. The fakir asked the king, "Do you take it that this is your palace? If you do not answer correctly I shall curse you so that your breath will stop."

The king looked all around him. There was nothing but dirt and rubbish all around him. He also felt that this place could not be called a palace, even though it was a part of the palace. He looked at the fakir and said, "You have put me in a quandary."

The fakir replied, "I have put you in the same quandary as you put your ministers. Now be good enough and come up with me. Let us inspect that place also and then we shall decide." Lao Tzu is saying the same thing. He does not tell you where your centre is. Is it a matter to be decided? It is already a decided fact. But you just come down once and see this centre. Then the question where and what the centre is will have no meaning. This coming down is actually a coming back, a coming back home. So Lao Tzu says, "Can you call this a sadhana? You are going back home! It has always been your home."

It is not an activity either. But man, as he is, bound to his own involvements, needs the excuse of some activity. The fakir became an excuse for the king. He came out of the basement. And then, he refused to go down again. He said, "Now, if the whole world tries to persuade me, I shall never go down again. I had completely forgotten that the palace was above the basement!"

So, it is only oblivion, forgetfulness. It is a case of forgetfulness and no more. It requires only an opportunity, the right situation, to be reminded of it again. This vantage point is called sadhana. It is negative.

You cannot remember a friend's name. You rack your brains, but to no avail. I advise you to forget all about it, go out in the garden and dig. You might say, "What has this to do with the friend's name?" but I still advise you to do as I said. You go in the garden and start digging. After a while, you suddenly remember the friend's name. Is it that digging the ground is a way to remember a name you had forgotten? Is there a causal link between the two? No. And yet, there is.

Actually, when you start digging, a situation is created in which the tension in your mind is relieved. When you were trying hard to remember, your mind was so tense and drawn that there was no way for the name to come out. We often say, "The name is on my tongue and yet I can't get it." You are quite sure you remember the name and yet you are unable to recall it. What has happened? You have become so tense that the mind has become drawn and narrow, so much so that there is not place enough for a name to come out. You know the name, you feel it within you, there is hardly a distance of one inch between you and the name, but you have become so tense in the process that you obstruct its passage. I told you to take a sickle and go into the garden. Now, you busy yourself in the garden and the tension is released. In the process, the knot within opened and the name came up. The question is: is there a connection between digging and remembering a name? There is none actually. And yet there is a negative connection. By digging the earth, the mind was deflected to another direction. In the process the mind slowed down. You become tranquil, relaxed. In this relaxation, the bubble within rose up and you remembered the name.

Therefore it happens that many times you know the answer until you are asked. Someone asks, and the confusion starts. A man who goes for an interview is quite confident of himself as he waits for his turn; but as soon as he steps into the room, his mind becomes blank. When he comes out of the room, he finds he knew all the answers. What happens to him? In fact, the intellect becomes so tense that it becomes inoperative. It loses its flexibility. Its power to think is lost, obstructed. This obstruction is just superficial. There are methods of removing these obstructions. All sadhanas, are devices to remove this hindrance. Whenever a sadhaka approached one Zen fakir, the fakir would order him not to talk of God and the soul but to do exactly as he told him. Then he would tell him to fill a pail with water, gather wood, milk the cow, dig in the field, cook his food, etcetera. There was no talk of the soul. And many times it happened that for a full year a new sadhaka found himself cutting grass and drawing water, or taking the cattle out to graze!

One such sadhaka happened to be a university professor. He had never imagined he would have to do these menial jobs. For a year he grazed the cattle and gathered the firewood for his master. In a year's time, the professor in him, the insane arrogance of being somebody, vanished. No intelligence, no doctorate degree, is needed in cutting wood. All he has to do is to work the saw backwards and forwards and the wood is cut. So too, the professorial ego! Together with the wood, the professor's ego was also cut. In a year's time he became an unqualified human being -- a simple man. Then the guru called him and said, "You may ask me anything now, because now you shall be able to hear. Now you have become like the open skies. When you came, you were a closed house with no doors or windows."

So, all sadhanas, and also the negative sadhanas of Lao Tzu are devices that work towards somehow creating conditions to break, disperse and remove the various blocks within us. It is as if a river has

frozen; it flows no more. What is to be done? We shall have to wait for the morning. Let the sun come out and things will change. The heat of the sun will melt the ice and the river will flow once more. We, too, are like a frozen river whose stream is blocked at various places. We shall have to create conditions to melt the ice within us and allow the stream to flow. It is, therefore, that many times a change of conditions brings wonderful results, very wonderful results! A great writer by the name of Catherine Mansfield, who was the recipient of Nobel Prize also, came to Gurdjieff. Such a person should have been given a sadhana that suited her status. But people like Gurdjieff are often crude and gruff. He showed her the road in front and said, "Pound this road, fill in the hollows and make it smooth."

She looked at the long, winding road and her heart sank. "How long shall I have to do this?" She asked. "Till I call out to you," said Gurdjieff: "When I call out, stop immediately. And remember, if I call out in the dead of night and ask you to resume your work, you must do so immediately." Then when she asked how long it would take to finish the road he said, "Do not worry about that, because there are others engaged in the sadhana of breaking this road! Do not give a thought to that, because this road will never be repaired. On one side you will be repairing it and on the other side, others will be breaking it."

The next day she began her sadhana. She was horrified to see that no sooner had she repaired a portion of the road than other sadhakas raked it up again. The road remained as it was. She worked so hard, she was filled with sweat. Every now and then she hoped Gurdjieff would call. But he sat comfortably on an easy-chair, smoking away. She had never known what it was to perform a manual task, so her hands became filled with blisters and wounds. She let out sounds to draw Gurdjieff's attention, but he sat comfortably, making rings of smoke, and not so much as looked her way.

Somehow, the day ended. It was nearing sunset and still he sat on while she worked. Then at about 8 p.m. he said, "Enough for today, Mansfield!" When she came in, she expected him to show some concern for her blistered hands and sweating body, but he did not say a word!

At 2 o'clock in the night, he again called out to her and sent her to work. "How long do you think I shall last this way?" she asked. "It already seems impossible to live."

Gurdjieff replied, "That is exactly what I mean to do. And if you cooperate, you will be no more, but you shall know that which never dies."

Three months later when Mansfield returned and spoke about Gurdjieff, she said, "He is a strange man! He destroyed all that was old in me. I now return an entirely new person. Oh, how compassionate he was to me! I thought he would entrust me with some literary work, perhaps to write a book on him. Then I would have returned as I was. But he gave me such a contradictory task that all my reputation, my dignity, the honour of being a Nobel Prize winner, turned to mud."

For three months she performed this disheartening work. She laboured all day, only to find the next morning that her efforts had gone in vain. Again she set about the same job. And so, day after day, she laboured when success was impossible. This work was so contrary to her nature, but it was just the thing to break her mind. In three months' time, she forgot who she was. When she started the first day, she was very much aware of the fact that she was a great writer. Three months later, she completely forgot

who she was. She was no longer conscious of herself. She was now happy to be an ordinary stone-breaker by the roadside. She said, "This man caused my ego to melt away."

The problem is a simple one: What should be done so that all that has gathered within us will melt and we will become fluid and able to flow once again?

There are two or three smaller questions. One friend says:

Question 5

"ACCORDING TO LAO TZU, GOOD AND EVIL IS LIKE NIGHT AND DAY, AND SINCE GOD HAS MADE MAN INDEPENDENT, HE CAN DO GOOD OR EVIL AS HE CHOOSES. BUT WHY IS IT THAT NATURE DOES EVIL? THE FLOODS COME AND INNOCENT PEOPLE GET DROWNED, OR A FIRE RAGES AND PEOPLE ARE BURNT TO DEATH. THERE ARE SO MANY NATURAL CATASTROPHES."

One difficulty is that we cannot accept the evil, although it is inevitably there for some good. When there are no floods crores of wheat sway on the banks of the same river, what then? When fire burns a house we say, "Why does nature do evil?" But you do not know that if nature bids fire not to burn, the good that occurs from the heat of the fire will also stop. And if nature stops the waters in the river, then that's that. There will be no good; there will be no evil.

Our difficulty is that we place ourselves in the centre of the universe and consider that to be good which is in our favour and that to be evil which is not in our favour. But we do not think that that which is the cause of benefit to us is a cause for injury also. If the cause is to be removed, then both the evil and good that occur through it will stop.

If the rivers do not carry water, there shall be no floods; and if fire becomes cold, no house will burn. But then do you not realise that together with this, all life will get cold? Both things happen together. Therefore, when we accept one thing, we have to accept the unfavourable side of it also. He who does not is unwise, childish.

When I fall in love with someone I should know that this love can end some day. It is bound to end because that which joins, separates also. That which is formed also disintegrates. When I celebrate the birth of a son, I should also be ready for a funeral, because that is bound to follow. That which is born shall surely die. But he who has celebrated the birth of his son, and not kept the funeral pyre in mind, is bound to beat his breast and wail when the time comes, and cry at the injustice of death. "Why, oh why, must man die?" he asks. He never asks why man is born. We accept birth readily but look at death as tragedy and pain.

Why does it seem evil that the floods come and innocent people die? If the guilty died, you would not mind. But who is guilty -- the one who did not give you his vote, or the one who does not frequent your

mosque or temple, or he who does not read the Gita? Who is guilty? Or is he who takes alcohol, guilty? And who are you to decide which person shall take what? Who is to decide that if a sinner is swept away by the floods it is all right? If we take a survey of an ordinary town to find out the number of sinners, we shall find that almost everyone is a sinner, provided we take the opinion of as many people as possible. If we ask all the people in the town, not a single person will go free, because some will call some people sinners, while others will call others sinners. One fact is certain, the whole town will be judged to be full of sinners.

Who is guilty, and who is not? What criteria, what standard of measurement have you? Granted you find a criterion to judge, even then how can you look upon death as evil? All evil seems to be possible during life, but there is no evil in death. Have you seen a dead man committing a sin? If there is any evil, it is in life. In death, there is no evil.

But our attachment to life is very great. Therefore we consider death a bad happening. In so doing, we only express our attachment to life. It proves that we want to live. Life is such an obsession with us that we wish to live and never to die. Even if the body is rotting, putrefying, we want to live, but we will never accept death. Why? Because we look upon death as evil.

What is evil in death? How does death trouble you? All your woes and troubles pertain to life. There is no illness, no law-suits, no riots, no robberies in death. These are the waves of life. Death is supreme tranquillity. Then why do we fear death so much? And how do we know that those who die stand to lose? Do the dead come back to tell us in what difficulties they are? Perhaps they think that it was the innocents who were swept away by the flood and they wonder how they were picked out to deserve such a fate!

It is just our way of looking at things. It is purely and simply a question of our vision. He who implants his viewpoint on existence is an ignorant person, because existence does not care about your viewpoint. When you set about making decisions about the ocean in which you are but a small wave, you are being foolish. A wise person is he who makes no decisions about existence. He lives without resolutions, without decisions, without any attitudes. When there is death, he looks at death; when there is life, he looks at life. He knows death is a mystery and so is life and nothing is decisive.

And because nothing is decisive, existence is a mystery. What is good? What is bad? It is not as easy as we think and say. When we give our decisions, we only betray our ignorance. Even in small things we at once pass our judgment: this is good, this is bad. What is good and what is bad has never been decided and it never will be. This does not mean that you should do as and how it pleases you. It does not mean that you should go and kill a few people because it is undecided whether this act is good or bad. This I do not mean at all.

If this understanding goes deep within you and you develop the attitude that "I am no judge," it is impossible for you to commit a crime. Killing is only possible if we decide that a certain person is bad and is not fit to live. Therefore, the more evil we take a person to be, the easier it becomes to kill him. This is why the courts find it very easy to pass a death sentence. The courts gather all the evidence for and against a person and take a decision.

No killer kills as easily as a magistrate. It is now clear to the magistrate that this man must die, though God the creator was still keeping him alive, as yet He has taken no decision regarding him. The magistrate wears a black cloak and gathers a few ignorant people like him around himself and they get together and pass a sentence against this man. What was his crime? Perhaps he has killed a man. Now this is great! This man has killed someone, so he is a bad man. And therefore, we decide to kill him! Courts pass death-sentences very easily, because the law has great power in its hand. The magistrate passes the order, goes home and sleeps leisurely. He in no way considers himself responsible for the death of this man.

In the absence of responsibility man tends to be irresponsible. And irresponsibility is the greatest disaster. A magistrate is an absolutely irresponsible person. He refers to his books, he hears statements, he examines the witnesses and arrives at his judgment: this man must die! He keeps himself absolutely aloof from the whole happening. He considers himself only the medium of justice and law -- the law is all written down in books. So he is free to go home and enjoy his evening. He will tune in his radio, or play cards, or call friends to dinner, and sleep happily with his wife. He is in no way concerned about this man's life and in no way holds himself responsible for his death.

Voltaire says: "When a man commits a sin with the firm intention of doing good, it is the biggest sin he can commit." So if you want to do evil, you just have to get hold of some concrete moral reason to do so and then you can indulge in your act without any qualms of conscience. All battles in life are fought on this principle; all politics in this world works on this formula. You first have to prove that what you are going to do is not bad, is not wrong. Then it is easy to start the battle. Once you start, the opponent also feels it is his moral duty to kill you.

But I tell you that a religious man never makes a decision. He says, "We are helpless; we are steeped in ignorance. The world is so gigantic, so vast, how can we decide what is good and what is bad?" He never, never makes a decision. Such a man attains to a profoundly deep sainthood. Such a man never condemns, never praises.

"Such a person," Lao Tzu says, "becomes a veritable child, as sweet as he is tender. He becomes artless, like a child."

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #8

Chapter title: Two sides of the same coin: honour and dishonour, greed and fear

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"FAVOUR AND DISGRACE CAUSE ONE DISMAY,

WHAT WE VALUE AND WHAT WE FEAR ARE AS IF WITHIN THE SELF."

WHAT IS MEANT BY SPEAKING THUS OF FAVOUR AND DISGRACE?

DISGRACE IS BEING IN A LOW POSITION (AFTER THE ENJOYMENT OF FAVOUR).

THE GETTING (OF A FAVOUR) LEADS TO THE APPREHENSION OF LOSING IT, AND THE LOSING OF IT LEADS TO THE FEAR OF STILL GREATER CALAMITY.

THIS IS WHAT IS MEANT BY SAYING THAT FAVOUR AND DISGRACE CAUSE ONE DISMAY.

"Praise and scorn, honour and dishonour both bring disappointment and despair. That which we consider precious and that which we are afraid of are within our very selves."

What is the reason behind the statement above? To be degraded after one has been applauded is an insult. Besides, there is always the fear of losing praise and honour, which, when once lost, gives rise to the fear of endless perils.

Before trying to understand this sutra, it is necessary to understand the facts hidden in the echoes around this sutra. The very first thing to understand is that neither honour is a factual truth, nor dishonour; nor favour, nor disgrace. We feel honoured when our ego is seduced and flattered. Dishonour is what we feel when our ego is belittled or hurt. Favour and disgrace are both experiences of the ego, and ego is an untruth, a non-reality.

Ego is the biggest lie in our lives. We are not aware of what we actually are. That which we are, but of which we are not aware, is the atman. And that which we are not but we believe ourselves to be, that is the ego. Ego is an imaginary unit. We cannot live without it for the simple reason that we are unaware of our authenticity. Since we are unaware of our authentic master, we have created a false master.

We are totally ignorant of our authentic centre; and because it is impossible to live without a centre, we have created a false one for ourselves. We revolve around this false centre and keep ourselves alive. This false centre is the ego. All things that please this centre we count as praise, and all things that give it

pain we look upon as disfavour. Since the ego is a false entity in itself, all experiences that take place through it are also false.

Lao Tzu says, "When someone praises us, we feel a sense of happiness; when someone criticizes us, we feel pain." It feels as if it is the other who gives happiness or inflicts pain, but the root cause of all pleasure and pain is within us -- and that is our ego. He who has no ego within him feels no pleasure or pain from others. And he who feels no pleasure or pain becomes established in ANANDA (bliss).

Anybody can give us joy or sorrow. We are captives in the hands of others. We have completely handed over the reins of our feelings to others. A slight gesture on the part of someone and we are filled with delight or sorrow. A slight something and our eyes brim with tears; a slight change and our eyes beam with happiness. Our smiles and our tears are controlled by outside agencies.

But Lao Tzu says that the cause of this outward control is also deep within us: it is our ego. Because of the ego, we are influenced by others. Whether friend or foe, whether praise or blame, it is the other who influences because we have no genuine centre (atman) of our own. We have a false centre, a pseudo-centre, and the very form of this centre is such that it is controlled by others.

Try to follow this. The ego is not within our control. You will be surprised to know this! We all think, "It is my ego and therefore I am its master." It would be well to dispel this illusion. The ego is not within your control. The ego is controlled by others. That is why each word of the other is so precious to us. Many people greet you as you pass on the road and you are filled with pride. If some insult you, your shoulders droop. When you are praised, your inside seems to fill with flowers; when you are blamed, all joy dies within you, all flowers wither and fade. You have no hold on your ego, even though it is within you.

The ego always depends on the other. That is why it seeks others. The ego can never live by itself. If the solitude of a forest makes you restless, it is not your restlessness but your ego's. If the silence in your room becomes unbearable for you, and you begin to look for someone to talk to you, then again it is the ego that is anxious for company. It is difficult for the ego to exist in seclusion; it needs support every minute. Also it is very interesting that the ego is ready to bear up with disgrace or disfavour, but it can never bear to be alone. Never mind if there is no praise, an abuse will do, but seclusion is a downright danger for the ego. When the other criticises me, he at least accepts me for myself; and if he abuses me, it is because he accepts that I am something. My ego can thrive even if my name appears as a criminal in the newspapers. If I am made to walk in chains on the road, that too is enough for my ego to subsist. But my ego cannot exist in solitary confinement.

The basic reason why people like Mohammed, Jesus, or Mahavira sought solitude was to test whether there was any vestige of the ego left within them. If they could live alone and no thought of anyone troubled them, it meant the ego was completely annihilated.

Mahavira stayed in solitude for twelve years. Generally, people believe that he left the world. This is a very superficial way of looking at it. Mahavira had nothing to do with the mundane world. For twelve years, Mahavira searched within himself to see if there was any ego left within him that demanded the

company of others. When he was thoroughly convinced that there was no craving whatsoever within him for the company of others, he returned from the jungles. Now he had his own atman within him. Now, whether people garlanded him or threw stones, it was all the same. He was now his own master. It was then that Mahavira declared, "Now I have become JINN." The word "JINN" means: he who has conquered himself. Before this, he was a slave to 'the other'. Now, he had conquered himself. Let the other do whatever he pleased, he was beyond his reach.

Let us understand it in this way. The ego within you is the creation of all the people around you. It is their hands that have encompassed you. The society in which you live takes care to build and nourish your ego. It is an ironical fact that all cultures teach men to be humble. What is ever more interesting is the fact; that humility is also .a device created by the society for the ego. The father tells the son, "If you seek honour and praise in the world, cultivate humility." The guru tells the disciples, "The more humble you are, the more simple. the more worthy you shall be for praise." Now this is interesting for it is the ego alone that is the recipient of praise. So we create a facade of humility for the ego. We respect the man who is humble and, because we respect him, it becomes easier for him to be humble. Thus, our ego wears the decoration of humility!

Society cannot exist without nourishing the ego because it wants to keep its hold over you. If this is not so, then you are free and not bound by the norms of society. This is why each one of us -- from a child to an old man -- is encouraged and trained to develop his ego in many ways. There is the ego of the good man, the ego of the bad man, the ego of the sadhu, the ego of the sinner. We form a centre within ourselves that is governed and controlled by the outside world.

Lao Tzu says: "Praise and blame appear to be coming from without; but the basic reason is within our own selves." When a person hurls an abuse at me, it is not the foul words that hurt; the fact that these words are hurled at me is what hurts. Similarly, when I am Praised, the praise in itself is not what matters; but the fact that I am praised. Praise is food for our ego. So also is abuse, in a negative way. The words of Bernard Shaw, though spoken in a light mood, convey the feeling that is within each of us. He said, "I shall refuse to enter heaven if I am given a second place there. I would prefer even hell, if I am given first place there." Let us ask ourselves the same question: second place in heaven, or first place in hell? And invariably the choice within will be for the first place, even though it be in hell.

This is not a hypothetical question. This is what we do in actual life. In our frenzy to be at the top, we create a veritable hell around us. And we happily put up with all the misery in the process. A man who earns much wealth -- how much hell he gathers around himself. A man who is ambitious in politics -- how much hell he gathers around him! But we are not conscious of this, for this hell is not apparent. Only one desire, one obsession, takes hold of man: how to be at the very top.

Lao Tzu says however, "Even if you gain the highest position, attain all the fame, you will not yet be rid of misery and pain." Why? Because the more praise a person receives, the more his ego demands. What is received initially is taken for granted, because you feel that it was your right: I am a person worthy of praise. And no matter how far and wide your fame spreads, it is never enough for the ego. Never has there been a man in this world who has felt that the fame he has achieved is enough for him. Rather, he

feels it is nothing compared to his prowess, to his extraordinary ability. He feels the world does not know him well enough, and until such a day it will be unfair to judge him.

My own image is always much greater in my eyes than in the eyes of others. And the more it is praised and extolled, the greater it becomes, because praise is like water and food to it. My image is capable of absorbing all praise and yet asking for more. It is strange, yet true, that all the praise lavished on me gives me no pleasure for I have taken it in my stride. But if I do not get the same attention again (if not more), I shall feel very unhappy. You wished me well today; that is but natural. I am such a wonderful person that you have to greet me. But if, tomorrow, you do not show me the same respect, I will certainly be hurt.

Ego is never satisfied with what it gets, but it is always dissatisfied with what it does not get. That which is attained is inevitably my right; but that which is not attained becomes a source of pain. Then, there is a great attraction to conserve what is attained. I should at least keep on getting as much praise, if not more, as I have attained. All my efforts are now aimed in this direction. Then comes fear -- fear of this praise being snatched away from me; fear of my losing it. So what is attained is to be conserved at all costs. This gives rise to fear and pain if it is lost.

Lao Tzu says: "Man does not gain tranquillity even after gaining praise. He becomes more restless, more miserable. And blame fills him with agony and pain." It should also be understood that blame causes pain in the same proportion as the expectation of praise.

Fourteen hundred years ago, Bodhidharma entered China. He was an Indian rishi. Lakhs of people gathered at the Chinese border to receive him. King Wu of China also prostrated at his feet. When the king looked up at the rishi, he was astounded -- and so were the millions who were gathered there. Bodhidharma was wearing one shoe on his foot and had placed the other on his head. The king said to him, "I am at a loss to understand why you have placed your shoe on your head!"

Bodhidharma replied, "Such is the vision of saints. I come to know that the king will place his head at my feet, so I had to strike a balance. Lest the balance be disturbed, I placed my shoe on my head. I have balanced your reverence by degrading myself with my own hands. I have voluntarily rubbed off your reverence. This transaction of giving and taking is now over. I have not accepted your praise. Know well, O King, if you throw a slipper at me tomorrow it shall not affect me at all for I enter your kingdom with a slipper on my head."

My expectation is the measure of my blame. I suffer blame to the same extent as I expect praise. If I have no expectations, there can be no pain in censure. The pain of censure lies in the anticipation of merit. When you villify me, it is not the villification that hurts but the fact that I expected you to respect me and you turned around and abused me. Praise gives rise to pain and fear. The anticipation of praise lends weight to censure and makes it heavy.

Says Lao Tzu, "Praise and blame both lead us to despondency." Censure begets pain, that is but natural for it uproots the ego. But praise also begets despondency for it is the root cause of censure. Lao Tzu says, "If you do not want others to blame you, do not ask them for acclamation."

This is a difficult task for the mind. We all wish that no one will censure us, but the mind is not prepared for the other part of the condition. It is on this other part of the condition that everything depends. An inch-long expectation of honour becomes a hundred-foot device for dishonour. Lao Tzu says: "Do not ever sit on throne, for you are bound to be overthrown." He also says that one should be prepared for failure for then no one can come in the way of your success. Consider your defeat as your victory. Then no one in this world has the power to defeat you.

This condition is hard to fulfil, and yet it is the fundamental condition for it is concerned with our very roots. If you do not wish for dishonour, seek no honour. We try not to win dishonour but how do we go about it? Our efforts are suicidal. We try all means to attain honour in order to avoid dishonour. We try to save ourselves from disgrace and dishonour by fulfilling all the requirements necessary for honour. We try to be the kind of person that people honour, we conduct ourselves according to custom. We indulge in all the mockery and deceptions that our society approves of so that we may be looked upon with respect and reverence.

But, Lao Tzu says, if you follow this practice, you will make things difficult for yourself. No man can build his own personality as required by others. All such build-up is false impersonation, hypocrisy. Time and again, the real man within manifests himself, in spite of all the precautions that one might take. When such a person succeeds in winning the world's acceptance, he does nothing more than gratify his ego. And the ego is never satisfied. The ego is like the bowl of a beggar. No matter how much it is filled, it is always empty. The thirst of the ego is unquenchable.

"That which we hold as precious, and that which we are afraid of are both present within us." What is it that we value, and what is it that frightens us?

Greed and fear are two sides of the same coin, though we cannot perceive them directly as such. It is a fact that he who is greedy, avaricious, is also a man who is filled with fear. It is impossible for a covetous man to be fearless, and one who is fearful is fearful because of his avarice. It is impossible for a fearful man not to be covetous within. It does not matter what he is afraid of. If a man is fearful of God, then also the reason is greed.

Some religions have used this method of frightening people towards God. We call religious people God-fearing, but this is a wrong nomenclature. If there is fear of God within a person, it is bound to be due to his avarice. The greed of attaining something, the anxiety of losing something, brings about the fear. The idea of being thrown into hell, of bearing misery in lives to come -- this is the fear. God should not be displeased with us. That is a fear. All these are just different forms of avarice. One who is motivated by the fear of God is, in fact, motivated by fear. An avaricious man can have no connection with God, nor can a coward. Only one who has no greed or fear within him can establish a relationship with god. As I said before, the ego is the support of avarice and fear, He who is bereft of greed and fear stands face to face with God. The door opens the moment the ego falls.

We cannot visualize greed and fear as the same thing, not even as two sides of the same thing. Greed is the positive side and fear is the negative. When we talk of honouring a person, that is greed; when we talk of punishing someone, that is fear. But wherever there is reward, there is disgrace and punishment,

and wherever there is punishment, there is reward. Heaven is reward; hell is punishment. Honour is reward; disgrace is punishment.

Society controls and commands your actions by the reins of fear and greed. Society honours those who follow its rules and it will punish one who disobeys its rules. If you walk within the shadow of your community, it will applaud you; but if you try to be different or rise above it, it will censure you. That is why the world penalizes people like Socrates, Jesus, Mahavira and Mohammed. This is only natural, because these are people who strove to rise above the society. And to rise above society is to rise above greed and fear.

The whole pattern of society is fabricated on greed and fear. Whoever tries to rise above it poses a threat to society. Mahavira says, "I have dropped all greed." He says, "I have discarded all fear." When is this possible? When can a person free himself from the throes of greed and fear? It is only possible when a person expects nothing from others. When I become self-satisfied, when I become so fulfilled within myself that I need nothing outside me and I can still live, when my wholeness, my fullness, is perfect within me, my greed and fear dissolve on their own.

But we find ourselves dependent on others for the slightest thing. If someone looks tenderly towards me, a light shines within me. If someone looks at me with disfavour, the light seems to fade within me. I do not have a light of my own within me. Whatever I have, I have received from others; it is borrowed. I am a debtor who has received charity from others. Therefore I am always in fear, lest I fall from grace in the eyes of my benefactors. I am always fearful of losing what they have given me, and I am always coveting that which I have still to receive from them.

Try to think of yourself in this vein: that you are a house built out of charity from others. In ancient Jewish settlements, it was a custom that when a new member came to settle down there, each person in the village made a gift of one rupee to him. If it was a settlement of 10,000 people, he got Rs. 10,000. Out of this, he could build a house and start a trade. Thus, a newcomer could begin his life without trouble. When a fresh member came to settle in the village, this man would also contribute towards setting him up in life. This was a very good arrangement. No man was allowed to be destitute.

But I have narrated this example for a different reason. We, too, come into this world and receive bits and pieces from everything around us. It is on the basis of these little gifts that we erect a house for our ego. Some things are given to us by our father, some by our mother and some we receive from our sisters and brothers. Other things we receive from our friends, our neighbours. All this we gather together and fashion our ego on it. Then we are always afraid, lest one brick or the other is pulled out of our house.

We are in constant tear of the people who have given us something, for they can take back what they have given at any time. Besides, we always keep our eyes glued to that which we still hope to receive. This greed and fear are within us. All the relationships we establish on this basis bring sorrow and pain to us. There is no way of deriving happiness from them because dependence is the profoundest pain and misery.

As things are, your very being is formed from bits and pieces borrowed from others. Picasso once made a picture of a politician. It was an excellent picture. He made no use of paints. He cut bits from newspapers and stuck them in the right shape. Picasso's message was very profound: a politician has nothing to him but an accumulation of newspaper cuttings. They are his very soul. You must have noticed that when a politician falls from power, he is no longer in the news. We never hear of his whereabouts. The only time he is mentioned in paper again is when he dies. Such is a politician -- a collection of newspaper cuttings. But it is not that only a politician is such. We are all such collections. If I tell you that you no longer look beautiful, why does it pain you so much? If someone calls you ugly, why does it affect you so much? You have no knowledge of your beauty. What anyone tells you -- that is your conception of your beauty. Now I pull one brick away from your concept: I say I do not find you beautiful. The wall of your ego develops a crack and you begin to be afraid. If another person tells you the same thing, another brick will be pulled away from your house of illusion. Then what will happen to your beauty?

If I consider you intelligent, you become intelligent. If I call you an idiot, you believe you are an idiot. Why are you distressed or elevated by my opinion? Because you judge yourself by the opinions of others. If Buddha was told he was not intelligent, he would laugh and go on his way because he knows he is not wise on account of others' opinions. He is what he is because of his own self. Why are we pained by criticism? Because we are nothing within ourselves. We are what others have made of us. So our very being depends on what others think of us. Our ego is fashioned according to the wish of others. We are always afraid of what others will say, for we are nothing in ourselves. People came to me for meditation and they say, "What will people say if I do this?" Who are these people you are afraid of? They are the very people who have constructed your ego. You are afraid lest they change their opinion of you. You are frightened to spoil your image in their eyes. They might say: "You have gone mad look what you are doing?" So our souls are pawned in the hands of others. We are only too eager to become what others want us to become. Have we no individuality of our own? Have we no authentic existence of our own? Are we mere paper cuttings: a collection of other people's opinions?

As we are at present, unfortunately, our condition is just this. Therefore criticism hurts. Censure pricks us: it causes our mansion to fall. Praise gladdens us, for it strengthens the mansion of our ego.

It is said that Benito Mussolini was passing by a cinema house one evening. Since the film has just started Mussolini went in unobserved. When, as usual, at the end of the picture, the audience stood up to hail Mussolini, whose picture appeared on the screen, Mussolini, naturally, was filled with pride. He asked the man beside him, "Does it fill you with joy to hail your President?"

The man replied, "For your own good I advise you to stand up and hail the Dictator or you will find it very costly. It seems you are a stranger in Italy. You should know that it is impossible to live in this land without cheering Mussolini."

Another incident I remember is about Churchill. He was on his way to address the Parliament when his car failed. He hailed a cab, but the driver said he could not take him because he wished to hear Churchill (who was going to address the Parliament over the radio). Churchill writes that he was filled with pride

when he heard this. He was so surprised that a cabbie should refuse a fare just to hear him! He took out a high denomination note and giving it to him said, "I am impressed by what you have said, but my trip is very necessary."

The cabbie opened the door of the car and said, "To hell with Churchill! Jump right in, sir!" A minute before he had caused Churchill to bloat up like a balloon, and a minute later he let out all the air from within it! But even Churchill was unaware of the fact that a mere cabbie could cause his being to be elated, or downcast.

All our keys have changed. He whom we look upon as the master has handed over his keys to his slaves. This sutra is meant entirely for this state of affairs. "WHAT WE VALUE AND WHAT WE FEAR ARE BOTH WITHIN US."

In this context, what is said about honour and disgrace means that once a person is honoured. it is an insult for him to accept anything less than that. What is the meaning of insult? It is relative meaning. A man, once honoured, considers it an insult to be placed on a lower step. Whenever a person seeks a place of honour, he seeks a place for disgrace simultaneously. Whenever we climb up, we invariably make provisions to fall down also. Whenever we make arrangements to inflate our ego, be it from any side or in any way, we also make preparations for the contrary. We cannot see the road we pave to the opposite.

When I sit on the chair of honour, I am not aware of the fact that I have prepared a way for my downfall. When I fall, I hold others responsible for my fall; when I rise to the top, I claim all credit for myself. Every height has its lower depth. Each mountain has its valleys. No peak can exist without an abyss. As a mountain rises higher, its valleys go deeper. When a person scales the peaks of success, he creates deeper valleys of failure below. This process goes on every minute and there is no way of escaping it.

We accept birth and we deny death. But death appears together with birth. All life long we strive to keep death away. Our plans invariably fail, for death has happened together with birth. It is not a future happening; it is a part of the past already. Death has happened right with birth; because nothing can have only one pole. The other pole is bound to be there. With birth, there will be death; with honour, there is bound to be disgrace; with success, there is bound to be failure.

It is because of this that a very interesting situation arises. The more a man becomes famous and respected, the more rumours to the contrary are spread about him. There is no way out of this. Balance is the rule. It is impossible to find no censure. Kings, politicians and millionaires are always maligned but even people like Mahavira, Buddha and Christ were not spared. Even though they may never have aspired for recognition and reverence, even though slander and scandal made no difference to them, even then if there were people who revered them, there were others who insulted them. And the number of people on both sides was the same.

If there were people who looked upon Krishna as God, there were other people who were ready to cast him in the lowest of hells. If there were people who called Buddha the excellence of wisdom, there were

others who considered him an absolutely ignorant man. And where there were people who looked upon Jesus as the son of God, there were others eager to put him on the cross.

When Jesus was crucified, two others were sentenced with him. They were ordinary thieves. Jesus was placed between these two thieves so there was no illusion that he was crucified because he was considered to be a messiah. He was crucified as a depraved reprobate, a mischief-maker who was condemned by society. If Lao Tzu was asked why it should have been so, he would have said that it was bound to be.

Jesus had nothing to do with this happening. He was neither happy nor sad about it. But it pained his disciples a great deal. Jesus was the son of God. How could he be crucified like an ordinary mortal? But the fact remains that when Jesus declared himself the son of God, the other side of the coin came immediately into play to strike a balance.

The world is a profound balance. Each thing is balanced constantly; there can be no imbalance. Then what is the remedy? There is only one remedy according to Lao Tzu, and that is to see the opposite in the object of our search. When you seek honour and acclaim, remember that you are seeking dishonour and disgrace also. When you are avaricious, remember that you are giving rise to fear also. When you go to seek love, remember that you have sown the seeds of hatred also. When you cling to life with both hands, know that you are clinging to death also. To see the opposite is the fundamental sutra of Lao Tzu. He says, "Be conscious of the opposite every moment." Both sides must be seen and not only one. Life is made up of pairs of opposites. See the opposite properly.

How can one escape the opposite? He who chooses one chooses the other. He who wants to escape both must not choose either.

The king of the land wanted Lao Tzu to be his Prime-minister. Lao Tzu fled from one village to another to elude the king's men, who were in search of him. When they reached one village, they got the news that he had already left for some other village. The king was puzzled. Here he was eager to bestow on Lao Tzu the highest honour of the land, and this man was running away from him! He sent a special messenger to Lao Tzu to tell him not to run away from him and that he should tell the reason why he refused the great honour he was giving to him. Lao Tzu sent a reply with the messenger saying, "I am not running away from the honour you want to bestow on me, but from the dishonour that lurks behind it."

But we cannot see the opposite. To see the opposite is wisdom. There is not only one direction to one place; there are many. The opposite is always present. If a man regulates his life so that he sees the opposite behind everything, his desires will fade, disappear. The so-called teachers always exhort us to shun desires, to give up the craving for desires. Lao Tzu's sutra is very very deep. He does not tell us to give up desires. He says, "See well the opposite that is behind the desire. Then the desire will fall of its own accord."

If I really begin to conceive that to make a friend is to make a foe -- when this understanding dawns clearly within me and is not just a superficial concept of the mind, when this knowledge goes down deep

within my being, I will make no friends One interesting fact should be taken into consideration at this point. To make a friend is in my hands, but not to make an enemy is not in my hands. If I take the first step, the second is not within my control.

We all take the first step, but hope the second does not come into action. But this is not in our hands. I wish for success. I need not have wished. That much was in my hands. But failure is not within my hands. I desire reverence. That is in my hands. But its opposite is not within my control.

Buddha has made an interesting statement. He said, "Do not worry about death. Instead, try to escape birth. Once you have taken birth, death is not in your hands."

A Brahmin approached Buddha and said, "How can I escape the cycle of birth and death?"

Buddha replied, "Leave death unto death. You free yourself from life only."

Generally, we ask this question. "Death is not in our hands," you cannot escape it. But birth is in your hands; you can escape birth. And if there is no birth, there is no way to die. Birth must lead to death. So Buddha told the man to seek an end to birth. Find out why birth takes place!

The man did not understand. When he asked to be relieved from the cycle of birth, and death he did not have birth in mind. It was death he wanted to escape. He was afraid of death. This was natural since he was an old man. He wanted a birth where there would be no death. He wanted freedom from death.

We all think in this manner. People come and ask me "How can we be freed from pain and misery?" We cannot be, until we also wish to be free from happiness. Happiness is our choice and sorrow is the result.

Happiness is in my hands. Not so sorrow. It is as if I were to say that I will run but my shadow should not run behind me. Then, I turn around and ask for a remedy to be rid of my shadow. To run or not to run is in my hands, but the running or not running of the shadow is not in my hands. If I do not run, the shadow will not run: if I run, the shadow also will run. Sorrow is a shadow; happiness is my choice. Respect is my choice; insult is the result, the shadow. We all wish to escape from the result. We sow the seed, feed manure, water it and strive to see that the plant does not grow. We nurture the plant, but deep within us we do not want it to sprout. We sow happiness, but sorrow is the offspring of happiness. These, unfortunately, we cannot see together. He who does see them together, is a religious man.

A religious man, according to me, is one who sees both sides of a pair of opposites. Then happiness and unhappiness become two poles of the same thing; insult and praise become two poles of the same thing. Remember, as soon as I begin to see in this manner, I at once know what I should do and what I should not do; how far I should go in a particular case and how far I should not go. I stand with a bow and arrow in my hands. As long as the arrow does not leave the bow, it is within my control. Once it leaves the bow, it no longer is in my hands.

A word forms and intensifies within me. As long as I do not say it, I am its master. Once it leaves my lips, I am no longer its master. The first step of happiness, recognition or power is a step of choice. The other step follows invariably; it cannot be avoided.

Lao Tzu says, "What happens if both sides become visible? What will be the result?" When both sides become visible at the same time, when they appear as only one, all desires disappear from our lives. There is no man who would wilfully opt for sorrow.

But man is a strange creature. He does not stop to ponder that everyone wishes for happiness, but all are unhappy. No man can place his hand on his heart and say that he is happy. If this is so, there is bound to be a fundamental mistake somewhere. And this mistake is not the work of one man but of every man. That is why it cannot be seen. The mistake is only this: no one wants unhappiness, everyone wants happiness. They choose to be happy and are rewarded with sorrow. They run to gain happiness and all they get is unhappiness. He who wants to evade sorrow will have to keep away from joy also. This alone is sadhana.

It is difficult to learn to keep away from happiness, but it is not as difficult as going through unhappiness. When someone greets me on the street, I should become alert. I should be prepared for insult or abuse also. If I can hear the echo of the opposite in this man's greetings, then I will be safe. It is not necessary that abuse will follow on the heels of the greeting, but even if it does, it will have no meaning for me. It will make no difference within me. Then both these acts will appear as mere acts. They will belong to the other. I shall not be connected with them. And if I do not establish any connection with them, I am free (mukta).

Lao Tzu, here, is discussing with great profundity the ties that blind man. If I see happiness and sorrow, insult and favour, praise and blame, as part of one process, if I get a glimpse of the oneness of birth and death, then those desires that run towards the mundane world will lose their power to motivate me.

Alice entered the Wonderland. The queen stood next to Alice, who was sitting under a tree. It would be wrong to say she was standing, because she and Alice were both running. For hours they ran. Then Alice looked up. She saw the tree as it was. The queen and she were also where they were. They had not moved an inch, and yet they were tired and perspiring. Alice said to the queen, "Your land is queer! We have been running all day and we have reached nowhere. The tree is where it was; you and I are in the same place!"

The queen replied, "It is because we ran that we are still nowhere. Imagine what would have been if we had not run?"

We too, in like manner, run all our lives and find ourselves back where we were. The same question comes to our mind. In spite of all our running, we are where we were. What a disgrace it would have been if we had not run at all. We try so hard for fame and reverence, and all we obtain is insult and abuse. If we had not tried for recognition, what would have been our plight? We tried so hard to gain wealth, and yet remained paupers. Had we not strived at all, we would have certainly been in hell. If,

however, Alice had asked Lao Tzu, he would have said, "Do not run. Stop and see! If you find yourself where you were after so much running, you should stop and see."

There are only two types of logic in this world. One is the type the queen gave Alice. This is the logic of ordinary intelligence, which always says that so much labour has been done and all that was attained was a few pebbles. "If I had made no effort, my plight would have been even more pitiful." The other logic is that of Buddha, Mahavira and Lao Tzu. They say, "Stop and see. Do not run."

Alice asked the queen again, "Then what is to be done to move away from this tree?"

The queen's answer was interesting. "If you run with all your strength, you will be able to stand where you are," she said, "but if you want to go further than the tree, you will have to run with double that strength." But where is this double strength to come from? It is an absurdity; it has no meaning at all. Double the strength is not needed at all. If all your strength does not take you an inch away from where you are, of what avail will double the strength be? But this reasoning appealed to Alice. She decided to run twice as fast.

We also tend to think this way. When we seek honour in life and do not get it, we double our efforts. When we desire fame in life and it does not come our way, we feel that perhaps we have not exerted enough. But remember, the more effort you put in to win fame, the more ignominy will be the reward. The more we strive for power, the greater is the dishonour and insult, because life is a balance between opposites.

Then what are we to do? Should we stand where we are? Should we stop running? Lao Tzu does not tell us to stop. This is a rather subtle statement. According to him, if we stop running it will still mean that we have stopped with some end in view. If we halt, it may be to save ourselves from insult, from slander, from defeat. The greed for honour, fame, success, wealth and immortality will remain as it was. Lao Tzu says, "I do not advise you to halt. I only ask you to realize the futility of running." Then, when you see the worthlessness of your efforts, you will halt by yourself. No effort is required.

When Buddha was asked, "Shall we attain peace if we shun desires?" He would reply, "This also is a desire. It is a new desire. I do not ask you to renounce desire. I ask you to understand your desires because if you understand them, you will not desire them. Then you will not ask this question. This peace that you desire becomes a subject for your desire. That which remains when all desires die is peace, tranquillity. When all quest for happiness ends, what remains is bliss."

This sutra of Lao Tzu's is invaluable. To practise this sutra, no special sadhana is required, nor any rites or rituals. You can practise this sutra while going through your day-to-day activities. Only remember; if you do not take the first step, you cannot take the second. Be alert when you take your first step and you need not worry about the second. Search yourself within; see where you are going before you take the first step. A child was born in Chuang-Tse's house. Chuang-Tse was a disciple of Lao Tzu. When people came to congratulate him on the birth of his son, they found him sitting on the doorstep, beating his chest and wailing loudly. When they asked him the reason he said, "My guru has taught me to be cautious at the first step. I have seen death in birth. Therefore, I cry."

Then, when his wife died some years later, the king came to pay condolences to him. He found him sitting under a tree, singing a song. The king was shocked. "What is this you are doing, Chuang-Tse? It is all right if you do not feel sorrow, but this is no occasion to sing and make merry!"

Chuang-Tse replied, "At one time I saw death in birth. This time, I have witnessed birth in death."

If we begin to see this sutra in the multitudinous facets of life, we will gradually come to find that much has dropped away from us, without any effort on our part. We have done nothing to rid ourselves of the non-essentials, and yet they have fallen off. And one day, suddenly, the person realises that he is no longer in the race. He discovers, as if by chance, that the ego within him that existed on the support of others has fallen and disintegrated. No sooner is the ego annihilated than he begins to experience that which is authentic existence, one's very Self (atman).

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #9

Chapter title: Only he is fit to be the master whose ego is naught

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT

WHAT WE VALUE AND WHAT WE FEAR ARE WITHIN THE SELF?

WE HAVE FEAR BECAUSE WE HAVE A SELF.

WHEN WE DO NOT REGARD THAT SELF AS THE SELF,

WHAT HAVE WE TO FEAR?

THEREFORE, HE WHO VALUES THE SELF AS HE DOES HIS OWN SELF --

MAY THEN BE ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD;

AND HE WHO LOVES THE WORLD AS HIS SELF --

TO HIS CARE MAY THE WORLD THEN BE ENTRUSTED.

There is a question asked regarding the sutra discussed yesterday. The question is significant not merely from the point of view of inquiry but also from the aspect of sadhana. The question is: "Renunciation of the desire for happiness means relief from all pain. The choice of happiness, of honour, of life, is in our hands. Pain and sorrow, insult and death, are merely results thereof; we cannot escape them. You say the choice of life is in our hands. How is it possible that I should not be born again? How is this in my hands?"

We have to bear in mind, two or three things in connection with this. First and foremost, I have not said that the desire for happiness should be renounced. When I was explaining the sutra, many of you must have thought this is what I meant. But I have not suggested renunciation of the desire for happiness. Nor does Lao Tzu mean to convey this intention or, for that matter, Buddha or Mahavira. Even Christ's opinion is not in favour of renunciation. But whenever people like Buddha, Christ and Lao Tzu speak on this issue, we tend to understand it this way. So the first thing to bear in mind is that more often than not we do not understand what people like Buddha say. And what we understand is often what Buddha never said!

Renunciation of the desire for happiness is not the contention of Lao Tzu. To know happiness as sorrow - that is Lao Tzu's contention. There is a difference between the two. A man renounces only to gain something else. Then renunciation becomes a business deal. Deep within such renunciation we find greed. A man renounces the world to attain bliss. But tell this man there is no bliss and renunciation of the world is not possible. A man renounces happiness to attain bliss, but this is not renunciation because our desires remain the same in the quest of bliss; they only change directions.

Happiness is not to be renounced. We have to know that happiness leads to unhappiness. When a person begins to see happiness as unhappiness, he does not have to renounce -- renunciation takes place. To renounce and to have renunciation take place -- are two basically different things. He who renounces worldly pleasures does so out of greed for another kind of pleasure. Hence, there is no renunciation. When renunciation takes place, it takes place without any desire.

If I am holding pebbles in my hand and someone advises me to renounce them, I am bound to inquire why. Renunciation has no meaning if you cannot explain why. Therefore so-called sannyasins and sadhus advise people to renounce, and hasten to explain why. Lao Tzu does not tell you to renounce. Nor do I. "You hold pebbles in your hands," Lao Tzu says, "Know that they are pebbles, recognise them as pebbles." He does not talk of renunciation at all because in that case the question 'why'? inevitably follows.

If you look upon pebbles as precious stones, you will continue to hold them. But if you can see them as worthless bits of stone, you do not have to make any effort; your hand will open by itself. You do not have to make the least effort, nor will you have to cultivate a new desire in order to get rid of these pebbles. The question does not arise at all. If a stone appears to be a stone, the palm opens effortlessly and the stone falls. When the stones fall, will you go about telling people you have renounced them? If it is a stone you have discarded, there is no question of renunciation. If you acclaim your renunciation, it is proof that you still see diamonds in the stones you discarded.

There is not much difference in the attitude of a man who seeks worldly pleasures and a man who renounces them. They stand back to back with each other. Their view-point is the same. The worldly man believes the stones to be diamonds, so he holds on to them. The renunciate also believes them to be diamonds and therefore he has renounced them. If he did not believe them to be precious, his discarding them would have no meaning for him. So he goes about telling everyone how much he has renounced. The renunciate keeps accounts as much as a businessman. He will tell you how many lakhs he owned, which he has now discarded. The lakhs still remain lakhs; they do not lose their value.

A worldly man does not attach as much importance to things as a so-called renunciate does. Why? The worldly man is conscious of his hold on transient things and is plagued by the thought that he is ignorant, that he is a sinner. The renunciate enjoys worldly pleasure in the name of renunciation. Then all that he has renounced becomes a part of his ego. Now there is nothing left to hurt his ego. The coins he holds now become brighter. A worldly man's wealth can be stolen any time but no one can steal the renunciate's wealth. The wealth of the former can be shared by others, but no one can ever touch the renunciate's wealth; his holdings are well-secured.

Lao Tzu does not advise us to renounce the desire for happiness. He tells us to know what happiness is. As soon as you become aware of what happiness is, it leaves you and renunciation occurs. Those who make a conscious attempt to renounce are people of ignorance. Those in whom renunciation takes place are men of knowledge and wisdom. Sages have never renounced anything.

This may be difficult for the mind to take in, because we are so used to the idea that those who renounce become wise. But the fact is otherwise. When a man becomes wise, renunciation takes place. This renunciation takes place in the natural course of things and no effort is required. Therefore, a sage leaves no trace behind when he renounces. No scars are left behind. Just like a dry leaf falls from a tree, so all that is useless falls away from the man of wisdom. The tree is not aware of the breaking away of the dry leaf. It leaves no wounds behind. But you pluck a green leaf, and the tree is wounded.

So when a person is aware of his renunciation, know that he has not yet reached the stage of renunciation. If so much as a thought passes the mind that "I have renounced", know that you are still very much within the context of worldly experiences.

Says Lao Tzu, "See the unhappiness within the happiness and the death within the birth. Seek out the glimpse of dishonour within honour." You will find it, for it is very much there. All that is needed is to

seek carefully, to probe intently, and the unhappiness will manifest within the happiness, and the thorn will become visible behind the flower. Then, the problem of renouncing does not arise.

Lao Tzu, therefore, does not talk of renunciation. The thorn is seen; the flower drops automatically. The first thing to understand, therefore, is that renunciation of the desire for happiness is no relief from unhappiness. To know happiness as unhappiness is no relief from wretchedness and sorrow. What is required is relief from both happiness and unhappiness.

Our mind is very wonderful. We are ready to give up happiness if that can relieve us from sorrow. But remember, there is no one-sided relief. If you wish to be relieved from sorrow, you should be prepared to be relieved from joy also. There is not a single person in this world who would not be eager to give up unhappiness, so this question does not arise. But at times, we are prepared to give up happiness if it brings relief from pain and misery. But then, this also is an attempt to be relieved of unhappiness. Happiness and unhappiness are two sides of the same coin. He who knows them as such also knows that either both will remain or both will go. If detachment takes place, it will be from both; if attachment remains, it will be to both.

Lastly, one friend asks that how can he direct his life so that he will not be born again. And I say why not? Why should there not be rebirth? Is it because there is pain and misery in life that you do not want to be born again?

Thus, the race for happiness continues. Not to be born again is a desire for the future; all desires are always for the future. All desires are future-oriented. Have you ever thought about why there is no desire in the present? Desires have no way to be in the present because desire needs space; and there is no space in the present. The present consists of an infinitesimal moment which is too little to hold the vast quantity of your desires. Therefore, desires spread into the future: tomorrow, the day after, next year and so on.

This is preposterous. It is the height of desires to extend one's desires into after-life! That you may not be born again is also a desire; and as long as desires persist, the cycle of birth and death remains undisturbed. This is the trouble with religion. The most intrinsic trouble with religion is that when we try to understand it, we at once transform it according to the pattern of our desires.

Religion does not exhort us to strive for no rebirth. Religion tells us to understand what life is and then there shall be no rebirth. This is a consequence, not a reward. A reward has to be desired; a result is what happens, it is never desired. Something is done, and the result follows.

Buddha is not reborn. Not because he laboured consciously for liberation all his life. If it were so, he would have been bound to be reborn. He whose mind dwells in the future dwells in desires.

The actual fact is that the future has no existence except in the mind of man. It is not a part of time, but a part of man's mind. Therefore, when a man becomes desireless, his future disappears. Not only his future -- time itself no longer exists for him.

When Jesus was asked what the nature of the kingdom of heaven was, he replied, "There shall be time no more." Those who asked had something different in mind. They wanted to know whether his heaven had a wishing-tree; whether it had celestial damsels; whether there were springs of wine and enough sources of other pleasures for one to make such a great sacrifice. It is only natural then that they did not find Jesus' answer appealing. Not only would they have found Jesus' answer not appealing, but they must have found it frightening -- because where there is no time, there can be no desires, no wishing tree!

The heaven we create is only an extension of our desires. All the religions, beatitudes and heavens of man's creation are nothing but an extension of his desires, a supplement of his worldly wants and longings, and nothing more.

This friend wants no rebirth. Why? Life is so full of pain and misery -- this is the reason you do not want to be born again. Is it not so? If life is full of pain and sorrow, then understand its misery fully. He who begins to understand the misery of life finds his desires dwindling slowly; for if there is nothing but pain and suffering, what will you desire? Then there is nothing worth wishing for because all desires lead to suffering.

When all desires appear to be leading to pain; when I realise that wherever I go, my destination turns out to be sorrow; whatever I think, I find myself drowned in pain; whatever I desire leads me to nothing but agony, wherever I turn, whatever I do, I see all paths leading to misery and suffering, then will I desire not to be reborn again? This again will become a desire, and all desires produce pain. No, then I shall desire no more. What will happen is only this: that I shall desire no longer.

And when the moment comes when there is not a single desire within me, time fades away. The future breaks into fragments and the past disintegrates. Then the present moment is everything to me. In this moment, existence is but life is not.

Understand this a little. Existence is, but life is not -- in the present moment. He who recognises the existence that is hidden within life, for him there is no rebirth. Rebirth is life. Life is a conglomeration of all desires. Rebirth is a chain series of this very life. It is not anything new. The body changes, but the desires remain the same. The desires are so strong that a new body is required. When there are no desires left, there is no need for a new body. Then rebirth becomes impossible. But do not wish that there be no rebirth, or else there will be no end to it.

Understand desire, the actual reality of desires. Dive deep within the actual fact of desire and you will know that desire alone is suffering. Therefore I have said that the choice of life is in our hands but not so rebirth. If we go on choosing in life and kindling our desires, we are bound to be born again and again, there is no remedy. If I cling to happiness and honour, grief is bound to come, and also dishonour.

If I have desired, I will be sure to come to grief. If I have not desired at all, then it is a different question. But remember, this is an intricate matter, and we are apt to err. We think, "All right, then I shall not desire." Then this becomes our desire. Then we desire to be in a state of desirelessness. This becomes our desire and we are back in the circle again.

We must try and go deep within each desire, understand it, recognise it, undergo the misery each desire brings. Then when this experience goes deep within you some day and all desires become futile, no new desires will be born -- not even the desire to be desireless. Desirelessness is the absence of desire; it is not a new desire. Liberation is not a new bondage; it is the recognition of the futility of all ties. Desire is life; desirelessness is beatitude. To be awakened to this is in our hands. This awakening can take place whenever you wish.

It is strange though, that knowing full well that all desires lead to pain, we knowingly choose not to awaken ourselves. All joys turn into sorrows, all flowers prick like thorns and cause wound within us, but we do not seem to notice. We are forever in search of fresh flowers in our effort to forget those that brought us anguish. One place gives us pain, so we seek other doors for happiness. One opening leads to hell, so we search a new opening to heaven. You do not pause to ponder for a single moment that it was only yesterday that you believed this door would open to heaven and it turned out to be hell. So also with all the other doors you tried before. Wherever you hoped to attain the pleasures of heaven, you found nothing but the suffering of hell. And yet, you are out again seeking new doors to heaven!

You should begin to realise this. This realisation will not come to you through my words, nor through the words of Lao Tzu. But when the constant experience of pain and suffering becomes formidable within you, you will begin to realise the futility of your pursuit.

But our mind is such that we wish to forget our woes and remember our joys. Ask people who indulge in drinking, or who are sitting in a cinema house, or witnessing a concert or dance recital what they are doing, and they will say they are trying to forget -- forget some sorrow, some pain. But pain is not meant to be forgotten. It needs to be known and understood properly. He who understands pain properly is freed from desires of all kind. And he who has no desire left in him has no more births to undergo. His being becomes pure and perfect. This perfect and pure existence is bliss. But do not make the error of comparing bliss to happiness. There is no connection between the two. Pain and misery are, of course, lost in bliss, but so is happiness. Buddha, for this reason, has not used the word "bliss" -- because bliss carries the suggestion of happiness. If you refer to a dictionary, you will find that whatever the meaning they give for "bliss" there is a suggestion of happiness in it. It may be happiness in the other world, or infinite happiness, eternal happiness, but it will be referred to as happiness. The dictionary may at the most make this differentiation: that worldly happiness is transient whereas this is eternal. So Buddha has left this word out altogether. He has made use of the word SHANTI (peace). He would say: "All will be quiet within, there will be peace." You may call this moment of tranquillity by any name. In this moment there is no future, no journey. It is a meeting with the centre of existence.

This is in our hands. And it is in our hands because we have the power of understanding. If you wish, you can concentrate your flow of understanding on the subject of pain and grief. This is what is called meditation. To focus your understanding on happiness is called meditation. He who directs his understanding on the experiences of life attains renunciation and reaches the state from where there is no rebirth.

And now to our sutra for today. What is meant by the statement that honour and dishonour are both within us.

We are plagued by fear because we have taken our ego to be our authentic self. If we do not take the ego to be our soul, then where is the fear? This sutra is a little difficult. We shall try to understand it from different directions.

Lao Tzu does not believe in an individual soul. This is exactly the belief of Buddha. It is also an interesting fact that, for this very reason, Buddhism did not hold ground in India; whereas for this very reason Lao Tzu's philosophy held a firm footing in China. Buddha has pronounced the profoundest words that a human being could utter. But his saying was so deep and profound that it was beyond the understanding of those nearby. His utterance was so profound that no sound reached our ears; and when it did reach, it was completely changed and deformed. Then the meanings we got out of his words were our own meanings.

Buddha said, "Stop all this talk of atman, because this very thought that 'I am the atman', breaks me from existences and makes me a separate entity." This seems difficult because if the atman is not, then everything seems to be lost.

People would ask Buddha, "If there is no atman, then to what avail samadhi, to what avail sadhana and virtue? Why all these? If the atman is there, one can understand that these are needed in order to attain the ATMAN." It is the same old language of greed. If a man does penance, if he renounces wealth to gain the soul, this comes within their understanding.

They asked Buddha, "If there is no soul, what is the reason for penance? If there is no soul, what shall be liberated? If we attain enlightenment and there is no atman, what will be left?" This inquiry is only natural, because people understand only the language of greed and no other language.

Buddha said, "Your sorrow is that you are. As long as 'you' are, you shall remain miserable."

This was a very difficult piece of advice. To leave desires is understandable because then at least 'I' will be there, the one who desires. Everything can be renounced, but 'I' should remain. But Buddha says, "If you remain, everything remains. Your very being is where the world is, because you are nothing but a collection of desires."

Do you realize that if you set your desires aside one by one and stand apart from them, your state will be like an onion? You remove one skin of the onion after another, and what is left in the end? Put aside your desires one by one, and you will find that you no longer are. At least, that which you think you are will not be there. What remains is far beyond your conception, far beyond your knowledge. Therefore, as far as you are concerned, what is left is the void. You will be lost.

The words of Buddha could not take root in India because Buddha denied the atman. He said there is no atman. To know that you are not is knowledge -- according to Buddha. This was too difficult to accept. But Buddha's words found a fertile ground in China, because Lao Tzu had already prepared the ground

before him. Lao Tzu had taught that man is fearful because of greed, man is fearful because he has taken his ego to be everything.

The 'I' within us, this feeling that 'I am'. is the cause of all our greed and sorrow. In fact, 'I' am not; everything is. And in this everything, I too am. But not as 'I'. I am, as a wave is in the ocean. The wave is in the ocean; it is a part of the ocean. Though it appears apart from the ocean, it is not. It is one with the ocean below, only it assumes some kind of form on the surface. We know that the wave is a part of the ocean, and yet we look upon it as separate from the water below.

I am a wave. But if a wave assumes its own individuality, its misery starts. If a wave considers itself to be a separate entity, its birth becomes significant and its death becomes significant. Now who else except itself can save it from the fear of death? All around, it sees waves falling; all around it sees the grave of its companions. It also knows that its end is near. As it rises high to touch the skies, it feels its feet losing ground underneath and it knows the end is near.

This fear of extinction, this fear of death -- what is the reason for it? The fear is not because the wave will be no more; it is because the wave has considered itself apart from the ocean. If it had considered itself one with the ocean, where would the fear be? The ocean existed. It was when the wave arose, and it still exists when the wave ebbs. Then the time in between of the rising and falling of the wave will become a mere play which is not to be taken seriously. The wave is the ocean, once this is understood, there can be no fear.

The fear is only because I consider myself alone and apart. Then I have to protect myself against everything else; I have to fight death. And in fighting, man exhausts himself and is finished, for there is no way of escaping death.

Says Lao Tzu, "What is meant by the statement 'Insult and honour are both within ourselves?'" We are afraid because we have taken the ego to be our very self. We have fear because we have a self. When we do not regard the self to be the self, what have we to fear? The basis of our fear is the assumption that 'I am'. If I am, the fear of the extinction of myself will always be with me. If I am, the fear is always there that one day I may not be.

Try to understand this. If I am, I may not be. Then fear catches hold. Buddha says, "Know that you are not." Then life holds no fear for you, because the greatest fear in the world is the fear of extinction. All other fears are born out of this one fear. Lao Tzu also says the same: "When there is the self. pride, the feeling that I am, then there is fear." If the 'I' is not, then where is the fear?

There is one thing however that must be taken into consideration. Should we believe that 'I am not'? Nothing comes of mere believing. Who will believe? The believer who believes that 'I am not' still remains. If I believe that I am not, I still am -- I am the believer. This becomes my belief. So Buddha says, "It is not a matter of belief. Seek and find out whether you really are. Search for the self. Are you in the body? Then search the body. Are you in your thoughts? Then search your thoughts. Are you in your emotions? Then search there too. Search, search tirelessly. Where are you? Then, in the end, when you have examined all sources, you will find that you are lost -- you no longer are!"

This, your non-being, is not a belief, nor a mere concept or dogma. This is the mistake committed by the pundits. They have understood Buddha wrongly. They have said, "The doctrine of Buddha is that there is no atman (self)." The pundits of India then set out to prove Buddha wrong. This was not a tenet with Buddha; it was a deep, profound experience. If it were a mere doctrine, it would be wrong.

Nagarjuna, a disciple of Buddha, has written a shastra called, MOOL MADHYAMIC KARIKA. This book has no equal in the world. Naturally, for it is next to impossible to find, again, a person like Nagarjuna. He has proved in this book that nothing exists. Neither you nor I, nor the mundane world -- nothing is. It was only natural that such a person would find himself in difficulty with the world. It was so easy to prove him wrong. Anybody could question, "If nothing is, then what is this book for? If even you are not, who has written this book? Who is the one who argues? And if the readers are non-existent, whom are you trying to reach?"

This was Nagarjuna's difficulty. What he says is the result of his deep experience. In truth, what he means to say is that there is no individual existence. There is nothing like the wave; only the ocean is. But when we say 'ocean', we set a boundary. "Therefore," Nagarjuna says, "no analogy can be given to that which is because whatever simile we give can only be within some boundary." So Nagarjuna says that we should recount, one by one, all that we are not. Understand the negation, not this, not this. Recognise it. Then, when you come to the end of this journey of negation, what remains is what is, there is nothing else.

Lao Tse says, "What is our fear?" Why do we recoil from criticism and long for praise? Praise means that someone has described you as a big wave, and blame means that someone has described you as a small, insignificant wave. And Lao Tzu says: "You are not." As long as you believe yourself to be the wave, praise will give joy and blame will be painful. Those who seem to be your friends will be those who appreciate your wave, while those who try to crush it will seem to be your enemies.

Buddha was unknowingly served poison by someone. This brought about his death. The man was a poor man who had lovingly invited Buddha to his house. People in Bihar gather mushrooms in the rainy season and dry them for later use. Sometimes they become poisonous, This poor man could offer Buddha nothing but these mushrooms, which he did not know had become poisonous. Buddha knew with the first morsel, but he ate all the same. By the time he reached back to his dwelling, the poison had spread into his blood stream. As he lay on his deathbed, his friends asked him, "Why didn't you tell the man that the mushrooms were bad?"

Buddha said, "They were bad, but who was there to say?" When they insisted that it was a question of life and death, Buddha replied, "If I was there, I could have died. But I am not, so the question of death did not occur to me. If I am, I must die."

But should we believe this? This is the difficulty. People believe; there are crores of Buddhists who go about with the belief propounded by Buddha that 'I am not'. But this makes no difference. No one reaches the state of Buddhahood by mere belief. This has no value. What is required is that one should know.

Go deep within and inquire, 'Am I?' As your search goes deeper, you shall know. On the surface it seems that I am the body. But Buddha says, "He who believes that he is, knows nothing -- whether he believes he is the body or whether he believes in the soul. He who knows that he is not, knows his being."

When I say I am not, my being still is but this being has no connection with the ego. When I say the wave is not, the wave is there all the same but it is not limited to being a wave; it is the ocean. If a wave were to delve within itself, in search of itself, it would soon find that the wave is lost and what it finds is the ocean. In exactly the same manner, when a person delves within himself, he finds that the individual is lost and God is attained.

Lao Tzu does not use the name of God, because in the languages of man, this word also proves false. We have spoken His name with so many lips, we have identified His name with such innumerable stupidities and we have caused so many disasters on account of this name, that Lao Tzu chose to be silent on this point. He says, "Know only this: That you are not. Then praise will not affect you, because who is being praised? Then scorn will not hurt you, because who is being scorned? Then life itself will not affect you, because then whose life is not?"

Be one with the untouched, unspoiled ocean. When we do not consider the ego to be the self, then what is the fear? What is meant by fear? To consider oneself apart is to fear.

"Therefore, he who honours the world as he honours himself...." When can this be? It can only be when there is no ego in me, when there is no feeling of the individual self in me. If I am, I cannot give you the same honour as I give myself. Why?

The words of Nietzsche, spoken out of pain, though strange, are true all the same. He says, "If there be a God somewhere, he can only be second to me. How can I rate anyone above myself?" This is an interesting fact. Even if you want to, you cannot rate anyone above you. There is no way of doing it, because the inner mechanism does not allow it. Even if you consider someone above you, it will be you who has given him this status. He who appoints the status is always above the appointee.

If I go and surrender myself at someone's feet, even then it is I who am surrendering. I am the master of the surrender, it is my action. If I so wish, I can withdraw my surrender. Who can stop me? It is I who have taken the decision to place my head at someone's feet. The resolve to surrender is entirely mine. So even by surrendering to someone, I do not place him above me; this is an impossibility. But does this mean that surrender has never taken place in the world? It has happened, and it does happen, but only when it dawns on me that 'I am not'. As long as the 'I' exists, this surrender is my resolve.

Buddha's cousin-brother Ananda received initiation from Buddha. He told Buddha that after initiation Buddha's orders would be the ultimate command for him. While he was still uninitiated, he wished him to grant him three favours which, as an elder brother, he expected by right. He took three promises from Buddha. This was a very profound incident; the one who received the initiation (Ananda) was one of the most wonderful people on earth.

Buddha said, "Where is the hurry? Even if you ask me later on, I shall never refuse you."

But Ananda said, "But who will ask, when I no longer will be? As yet I am ignorant and consider myself your elder brother, and take it to be my right. So it is better to ask now."

The promise was given, and Buddha kept his word till the end of his life. And for forty years Ananda followed Buddha like his shadow. He was closest to Buddha, as no one else could be.

Then Buddha died. A conference was held to compile all of Buddha's teachings. Ananda was the one person who knew everything that Buddha said, to whom he said it and when. His statements should have been considered the most authentic, because nothing ever happened around Buddha that Ananda did not know. Yet he was refused permission to take part in the conference. The bhikshus were of the opinion that Ananda has as yet not attained enlightenment. Ananda pleaded with them, but they were adamant. When he asked them why he was debarred, they said, "The thin line of ego that you drew (by asking for three promises from Buddha) before you annihilated your ego, is still the obstruction."

Ananda accepted their verdict. He vowed that he would not step into the hall before he destroyed this last vestige of his ego. For twenty-four hours he sat outside the hall, lost in meditation.

The conference went on within the hall. After twenty-four hours. Ananda knocked at the door. It was opened. The bhikshus were surprised to see a completely new Ananda standing before them. His face was filled with a strange lustre, his whole personality -- the way he walked, the way he carried himself -- was different! The bhikshus exclaimed. "Ananda, you are no longer the person we knew. You have become a totally new personality."

Ananda said, "In this meditation, I became conscious of this fact: Who was the big brother and who was the younger brother? What promise? What assurance? My surrender was so conditional. A slight bargaining became a condition! Today I have asked forgiveness. I no longer persist, I no longer insist. If you let me in, I am happy. If you do not, I accept your judgment. I shall be content to sit outside."

All the members assured him that now there was no trouble in taking him in. "Your insistence before, of being the only authentic witness of Buddha, forced us to close the door on you. Now you can come in, for there is no difference now between within and without," they told him.

If surrender is conditional, if it is an act on my part, then I am still the master. This -- the sense that 'I am' -- is what comes in the way of surrender. When this is no longer there, then what happens is surrender.

Lao Tzu says: "This sense of 'I am' is the root of all suffering." But how is one to annihilate this? Many people have tried their utmost to destroy it, but have found that all their efforts have made it even stronger. That which does not exist cannot be destroyed. Understand well: that which exists can be destroyed. but that which does not exist can never be destroyed. He who tries to destroy that which does not exist toils in vain.

It can be understood; it can be explored. Where is this 'I'? The sadhana that Ramana Maharshi taught his disciples to: "Ask yourself, 'Who am I?'" If we were to describe Lao Tzu's method of sadhana, it would be: where am I? When we ask "Who am I?" we have taken for granted that 'I am'. Now, the only thing left is to know who I am. Lao Tzu says, "First find out whether you are. Then find out where you are." So

inch by inch, ask at every step, 'Where am I?' The fun of it all is that I am nowhere! Then, when a person seeks everywhere -- the body, the mind, the life-breath, the soul -- and finds he is not there, he knows that something is. Something is there, but the 'I' is nowhere. This something -- the unknown, the 'X' quantity -- is the ocean.

Even when we discover the 'I am' -- this unknown, this ocean -- it is still in the capacity of a wave, however big, however deep. He who says he is nothing but the body is an atheist. He who says he is the mind -- he too is an atheist. He who says, "I am the soul," is also an atheist. Lao Tzu and Buddha go a step further. They say, "I am not." When everything is annihilated -- "neti, neti" -- when nothing is left behind, something still remains, something that has no name.

As soon as one enters this unknown, fear vanishes. Then there are no temptations.

"Therefore, he who respects the world as he respects his own self...." When does this take place? The world can be respected only when our own self is completely lost. As long as the 'I' remains, nothing can be more valuable or significant. Then all outside expressions of humility and surrender cannot move the ego one inch from its position. 'I' shall always be above whatever I say. Then even if I surrender at someone's feet and say I am the dust under his feet, it leaves my ego untouched, all-powerful. All my declarations to the contrary do not affect my ego at all.

When can this happening take place when I consider the world worthy of the same respect I hold for myself? The day when 'I' no longer am, there will be no distance between the world and me. Then I shall feel that it is my own self that has expanded and spread into everything, or that everything has penetrated within me and manifested itself. Then there will be no distance between 'I' and 'you'. That day, the very being of everything and everyone, will be my own being. Then only can I respect everything and everybody as my own self.

Jesus has said, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." But as long as the 'I' exists, this cannot be. When the 'I' is annihilated, then only can the neighbour be loved as much as thyself.

"AND SUCH A PERSON CAN BE ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD." This is a very difficult arrangement suggested by Lao Tzu. Lao Tzu says that such a man can be entrusted with the government of the world because power in his hands can never be dangerous. But such a person does not desire power. Those who desire power are persons in whose hands power is most harmful. There is a famous saying of Bacon: "Power corrupts." This is only half the fact. Power corrupts, because only the corrupt seek power. If you are immoral within, your immorality cannot manifest without power. Therefore, when power is attained, the corruption that is within becomes manifest.

Generally people are surprised when an erstwhile servant of the people becomes a changed man on attaining power. Then they say power corrupts everyone. It is not so. He served the people while he was weak. The service was out of weakness and not because of an intrinsic quality of the man. As soon as he comes into power, the real person within him stands revealed. Therefore, the real quality of a person is only known when he wields some power. Power gives him the freedom to do what he chooses; he no

longer has to pretend. Thus, power does not corrupt a man. Rather, it gives freedom of action to the immoral.

Lao Tzu says, "Only he can be entrusted with the government of the world whose ego is annihilated." When the ego and power join together, immorality results. If the 'I' is dissolved, power alone cannot produce immorality. It is the ego alone that can become unchaste, immoral.

He who loves the world as much as his self can be entrusted to look after the world. But the difficulty is that such a person will not accept power. Then what does Lao Tzu mean? Lao Tzu says, "Do not give power into the hands of those who seek power because it is dangerous. Do not revere those who seek respect, for that too, is dangerous. Do not glorify one who seeks fame because it is like feeding his illness. Rather, honour one who seeks no honour and entrust power into the hands of one whose ego no longer is."

A few things need to be cleared up in connection with this sutra. In the 2500 years after Lao Tzu, many revolutions took place in the world but they were all unsuccessful. All revolutions are failures. Each revolution declares that power is now in the right hands, and each time those hands prove to be the hands of false men. There is something more than revolution required for the right type of government, and perhaps revolutions have no connection with it because they all turned out to be failures. No type of revolution can fulfil the conditions of Lao Tzu's sutra, because power goes to him who seeks it.

Some people, like Kropotkin or Bukharin (Bakunin?) were so troubled and harassed that they said, "Power should no longer be in anyone's hands. There should be anarchy." All power turns out to be too costly ultimately, and new revolutions are required each time in order to halt the powers that be. Then again, the government formed thereafter has to be overthrown by yet another revolution. Those that are installed into power with so much toil and labour, and against such odds, have to be brought down the next day with as much difficulty.

For 2500 years, the people of the world have been engaged in one single work. That is to raise people to power, thinking that they are the right people. When they come to power it becomes clear that the wrong men have been chosen -- and so, the circle continues. When I say for the last 2500 years, it is only because the history of mankind is not clear before that.

Lao Tzu says this vicious circle cannot be broken by revolutions but by individuals. Whenever power falls into the hands of such a person, as Lao Tzu is talking about whatever be the direction in which he attains power -- this power can never be dangerous or harmful; it can never prove too costly. Perhaps that is why the power in God's hands does not prove harmful or costly on earth, because it is as if it is not.

Can you feel the presence of God anywhere? His very absence is His presence. He is present in His absence. How many times have people cried and said, "If Thou art, reveal Thyself!" How many challenges have been thrown to Him? But no challenge reaches Him, because that which can hear the challenge is pride. Pride does not exist in God. So God is forever non-present. This whole vast universe is directed by His hands only because there is no director; there is no ego.

People like Lao Tzu believe that such a state of the world as mankind dreams of, can only come to be when we place the affairs of the world in the hands of an egoless person. But Lao Tzu has said this with other things in view also. His main purpose for saying this is that when there is no ego within, whether one is seated on a throne or on the dusty ground makes no difference.

So observe yourself within. See the mercury of your emotions rise and fall. Then observe when it rises and when it falls. One person vilifies you; another puts a garland around your neck. Observe the fluctuations within. When the abuses and the garlands create no disturbance within, and the mercury level remains the same, then know that you are balanced.

I shall now tell you of a secret sutra from Lao Tzu. It is not written anywhere, but has been handed down by word of mouth to his disciples down the ages. It is a sutra on the method of meditation. Lao Tzu says: "Sit cross-legged. Feel that there is a weighing scale within you. Each side of the scale is near each breast. The pointer is between both your eyes, where the third eye is supposed to be. The strings of the scale are in your brain." Lao Tzu says, "Be conscious of this scale within you for all twenty-four hours of the day and be mindful that the pans on both sides are at the same level, and the pointer is straight in the middle." Lao Tzu says: "If you can balance these scales within, you have accomplished your sadhana."

But it is very difficult. You will find that a slight breath, and the sides of the scale go up and down. You are sitting quietly. Suddenly a person enters and the weighing scales move up and down. Lao Tzu says, "Balance your consciousness. The opposites should be equalised and the middle hand should remain fixed in the centre."

Lao Tzu's disciple Lieh-Tzu was on his death-bed. He was one of the very special disciples of Lao Tzu; the other was Chuang-Tse. People were gathered around Lieh-Tzu. They asked questions; he answered. In between, he shut his eyes and smiled. Those around him were restless. "The time is running out; death is approaching. Do not waste time by shutting your eyes. Answer all our questions," they told him.

Lieh-Tzu said, "What you say is right. All my life you asked these questions, and all my life I answered you. Yet nothing has fallen on your ears. Let me concentrate on the weighing scales within me in my hour of death." So he looked within and checked his scales. Then he answered their questions.

"But your balance within has been steady for a long time. What is the need to check it time and again? Especially now when there is no occasion to do so. There is no one abusing you; there is no one falling at your feet. And here we are, eager to hear you!"

Lieh-Tzu said, "That is the thing! I know each one of you. For the last sixty years you have been listening to me. I am checking my scales to see whether they have been affected. For sixty years these foolish creatures have been asking the same questions and I have been giving the same answers. I am afraid my balance may be disturbed. I look within; the balance is unaffected. I smile to myself. But when I look at you again, I am reminded of my balance within and I check it once more lest it is disturbed."

Whether life brings happiness or unhappiness, light or darkness, honour or dishonour, keep your eye on the balance within and keep adjusting it. One day it will reach the perfect balance, where there is not life but existence; where there are no waves but the ocean; where there is no 'I' but all.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #10

Chapter title: The invisible, inaudible and intangible Tao

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LOOKED AT, BUT CANNOT BE SEEN -- THAT IS CALLED THE INVISIBLE (YI).

LISTENED TO, BUT CANNOT BE HEARD -- THAT IS CALLED THE INAUDIBLE (HSI).

GRASPED AT, BUT CANNOT BE TOUCHED -- THAT IS CALLED THE INTANGIBLE (WEI).

THESE THREE ELUDE ALL OUR INQUIRIES AND HENCE BLEND AND BECOME ONE.

This is a sutra pertaining to the supreme mystery of existence. But all words used to express this mystery fall short of it. Not only do they fail to express it, but the very opposite meaning is conveyed through them. This has to be understood from different aspects.

The human word is imperfect, incomplete. No word spoken by man is perfect. No word can be perfect, because all words are the creations of the intellect, and the intellect is but an infinitesimal part of existence. Whatever is created by a part cannot be perfect.

Intellect is a very small part of our lives also. We are much more than the intellect; we are much greater than our intellect, more vast. The intellect is but an iota, a mere drop, in our being; it is not the ocean. Words are formed by the intellect and therefore they are imperfect, because that which is derived from

an imperfect source cannot be perfect. Therefore, all words formed by the intellect fall short of expressing the supreme mystery.

All our words are influenced by our senses. If we say that the supreme truth can be seen, it means that the eyes can behold it. If we say that the supreme truth can be heard, can be touched, it means that the ears can hear it and the hands can feel it. The hands touch, the ears hear, the eyes see. But whatever the eyes see will be limited, for the eyes have their limitation. Similarly, whatever the ears hear will be limited, and whatever the hands touch will be gross. The senses work in a limited field. Hence, their experiences are limited. Then, when we set out to conceive of the vast, boundless existence, all our words, which are influenced by our senses, become useless because they all bear the trace of the confined spheres of the senses. To set a limit to the limitless is to destroy its very nature.

Whenever, we think about any object, duality steps in. Thinking is a process of division. It is a method of looking at things by breaking them up -- just as when the sun's rays pass through a prism and give us the seven basic colours. The prism breaks the ray into seven parts that form the seven colours. The ray in itself is colourless. When the colours are blended together, the resulting colour is white. In a like manner, the intellect breaks everything into two. We say: hot and cold. This is again a state brought about by the working of the intellect. What we call cold is a measure of heat, and that which we call hot is a measure of cold. Cold and hot are not two different things. They are the two different states of the same temperature.

The intellect, however, refuses to accept this, for if hot and cold are two conditions of the same thing, then ice and fire should appear to be the same. The fact however is that ice is an infinitesimal part of the temperature of fire and fire is a part of the temperature of ice. They are the extreme degrees of the same temperature: at one end it is ice, at the other end it is heat. That is why, the thermometer can measure both. If cold and heat were two different things, we would have had to have separate gauges to measure them.

The intellect, however, breaks all things into two. Take for instance love and hate. It is easy to understand heat and cold for they do not form a part of us, but the mind is not prepared to accept hate and love as two conditions of the same thing. How can love compare with hate, or forgiveness with anger, or enjoyment with renunciation, or the craving for wealth with the longing for beatitude? But these can be gauged by the same thermometer. Hate and love are two ends of the same emotion. Therefore any love can change into hate, and any hate can change into love. And it happens that way: love turns into hate, hate turns into love; friends become foes and vice versa. If hate and love were not one and the same, there would be no way for a friend to become a foe or a foe to become a friend. Machiavelli, in his unusual book, THE PRINCE, has advised kings not to tell their friends what they do not want their foes to know for a friend can turn into a foe any time. Also, not to create such misunderstanding with an enemy, because the enemy of today can become an ally of tomorrow. The enemy is a friend in seed-form. He has the potential within him of becoming a friend. Friendship and enmity are two ends of the same relationship.

The intellect, however, breaks everything into two -- even birth and death, though they are two extremities of the same life. On one side is birth; on the other side death. There is no gap between the two. Birth turns into death. Can we point to any part of life where birth ends and death begins? Birth extends and expands into death. When we view life from one side, we see birth; if we see it from another side, it appears as death. But they are the two ends of the same happening, two names of the same thing.

Because the intellect breaks everything into two, all the statements that it makes are incomplete. When we say, "God is light" -- as many shastras have said, as the Koran and the Bible and the Upanishads have said -- it only depicts our sentiments, our emotions, our expectations. As far as poetry goes it is all right; but as for stating a fact, it is a lie. For then, what is darkness? If God is everything, what about darkness? God is both light and darkness. Actually, light and darkness are two ends of one and the same thing. There is no darkness without light. Darkness is a particular condition of light. There is no light where darkness is also not present, and there is no darkness where light is not present.

Similarly, there is no birth without death and no death without birth. They are two ends of the same thing. But the intellect breaks them into two, and then darkness is identified with satan and light with God. There is the auspicious and the inauspicious, goodness and evil. The mind says that God is auspicious. Then what will be inauspicious? The truth is, they are not two; they are one. Whenever the mind sees an object it is promptly broken into two -- this is its way of seeing.

Understand this well. Things are not two; it is the way the mind perceives that makes them two. If we put aside the human mind for a while and look at things, will there be beautiful things and ugly things? Things will be as they are -- neither beautiful nor ugly. When things are viewed outside the prism of the mind, they shed their colour and become colourless -- and one.

Is it not an interesting fact that the rays of the sun divide and become colourful; and as soon as they unite, all colour is gone? All seven colours unite and form white, neutral; they divide and colours are born. One cannot imagine that the lovely colours viewed through the prism do not exist outside of it. The rays are always present in the sky but the raindrops act as prisms and cause the rainbow in the sky. The rays of the sun passing through the raindrops break into seven colours. One who has no authentic knowledge of the rays of the sun will insist that the sun's rays are of various colours and that they cannot be colourless.

This is the trouble with our intellect. When a thing is viewed through the intellect, it is only natural that some believe God is light and, some, darkness. The mystical order in which Jesus was first initiated was the Essenes order of Egypt. This is the only religious order that looks upon God as darkness: God is total darkness. This also is poetry, and darkness has its own rhyme. There is no reason why this poem should be expressed in terms of light only. It seems at times that by comparing God to total darkness, the Essenes have given a profoundness to God that no one who has seen God as light has been able to give.

There is a kind of stimulation in light, whereas there is supreme tranquillity in darkness. Light has a boundary whereas darkness is boundaryless. Light comes and goes; darkness is forever. Light has to be brought about from some source, whereas darkness is sourceless. Light is born out of a lamp, or the sun

or electricity, or some such source -- it requires some fuel, whether from a lamp or from the sun. Scientists say that even the sun is running out of fuel. In three or four thousand years time, it will get cold. So light can be used up. Not so darkness.

Therefore, there is profound vision behind the Essenes perception of God as total darkness. This does not come easily within the grasp of our understanding for we are very much afraid of darkness. All those who have identified God with light have done so out of fear. We are afraid of darkness, so we cannot look upon God as darkness because then we shall have to love darkness. We are less fearful in light, so it is easier to look upon God as light. All these are our desires and expectations.

But this concept also has its disadvantage. There is nothing wrong in believing God to be darkness but to look upon God as darkness is as erroneous as considering Him to be only light. This is the trouble with the Essene, for his intellect, too cannot accept both darkness and light together.

The intellect divides everything into two. God is pure: we have invested Him with the most beautiful, most excellent, most pure qualities. Then the difficulty of all that is inauspicious comes in.

But there has been a sect of people who considered God as inauspicious. There has been a sect who have worshipped satan. In present times, the first church of satan has been constructed in America. There are thousands who look upon satan as God. Evil is God. And their reasoning is powerful. They say, "Where is goodness? It is only a conception. Evil is a fact. Where is the benign, where is the propitious? It is only in our imagination. Evil is the reality, evil is present -- and that which is present is God. How can that which is only in our dreams and imagination be God? Non-violence may be in dreams; violence is present."

So there are priests and people who have their own church where they worship the devil. But they carry out their activities in secret, for those who believe that goodness is God are not so good that they will allow the devil worshippers to exist if they come out in the open. They will destroy them. This is the very argument in favour of the devil worshippers. These people, they say, who believe in God as being goodness have done so much of evil that it proves their point: that evil is God. When it is only evil that manifests itself behind the veil of goodness -- the reality is evil -- then why not accept it? The believers of Satan say that man is weak and hence he is unable to accept evil. "Evil exists, However much we may try, have we ever escaped it? So we accept the evil, we worship it, we acknowledge it."

Those who worship evil, deny the good. Those who worship the good, deny the evil. The intellect divides all things into two and then chooses one.

The supreme truth, which is the totality of everything together -- all the seven colours together -- is, in itself, colourless, transparent. If you call it red, it would be wrong; if you call it yellow or blue or any other colour, it would be wrong. But our eyes can only see colours; the colourless existence is beyond our perception.

Now let us try to understand this sutra.

"LOOKED AT, BUT CANNOT BE SEEN..." Things can be seen, for seeing is in my hands, but He is nowhere to be seen. I can, with all my might, look for Him; and yet when my eyes do locate Him, nothing is visible except vast emptiness. Thus, the most secret sutra of sadhakas is: as long as you keep seeing things, know that you have not seen God. In meditation also, as long as you see something -- whether light or bliss, whether Rama or Krishna, Jesus or Buddha -- know that you have not yet seen Him. Then, when will He be manifest? When nothing is visible and only the seeing remains. There is an emptiness all around, a void. The eyes look objectlessly and there is pure light. Then, know that that is He.

He forever remains unseen. You see Him and yet He remains unseen: "LOOKED AT BUT CANNOT BE SEEN." The significant happening does not take place in His coming into view, but in the act of seeing. The transformation that takes place is due to my effort to see and not to His being seen. Therefore, when someone says he has had darshan, he does not mean he has seen Him; he means his power of perception has become so pure that he can look into the void. The mirror has become so immaculate, so free from defect, that no reflections form in it. It is empty, it is void. In this state of void, it gives a reflection of the void: the invisible, unseen reality (truth).

Saint Augustine said: "Do not ask about God. As long as I am not asked, I know Him. As soon as you ask, I am in a quandary. Therefore I pray to you, do not ask. I have seen Him; but I cannot describe Him for you."

The Sufis have a book -- THE BOOK OF BOOKS. It is a blank book which has nothing written in it. It has 200 pages -- all blank. No publisher was ready to publish it; for 1500 years it remained unpublished. Recently a publisher volunteered to publish it, but then, only when a Sufi offered to write a foreword of ten pages. This foreword gives the history of the book -- who wrote this book first, who he handed it over to, whom this person then gave it to. You can read this book. Though there is nothing to read, the experiment is worth trying. Try and read each empty page with as much interest and concentration as you would a printed page. You will want to close the book quickly. But history says that such and such a fakir read the book. He read it again and again, and then all over again. One fakir read it fifty times in his life. One fakir did not partake of food till he read it through each day. What could these people be reading?

If a person fixes his eyes on the empty pages with full concentration, his eyes also will become blank and empty. This must have been an experiment in meditation. What will he read? Even if the mind reads, by and by all words within will be lost. Eventually, there will be nothing left within, and then the mind will become as blank as the blank paper before it.

This method was prevalent among the Sufis. People asked: "Have you read the KORAN, have you read the BIBLE? Well and good. But have you read THE BOOK OF BOOKS?" It was considered the book of books.

Saint Augustine says: "I see Him, but when you ask, I find myself in difficulty." This sutra says: "LOOKED AT, BUT CANNOT BE SEEN."

Understand this well. He can never be seen. The sadhaka who engages in the effort of seeing Him ends up in some imagination of his own.

People come to me and say, "Give us some anchor, some support to go by -- Rama, Krishna, Buddha -- someone to meditate on!" If I say, "Just meditate," it becomes difficult for them. Whom to meditate on? Where to fix the eyes? Some place, some form, is required and the eyes get fixed on it.

But as long as the eyes do not remain on the formless, you cannot have any experience of the ultimate mystery. Till such time, whatever we see, whatever we know will be the forms of our own intelligence. However holy, however pure the visions -- whether they be of Rama or of Krishna they will only be the furthest limit of the mind. As long as the mind continues to make shapes and forms, one cannot meet He who is formless. Therefore, He is called formless.

"Listened to, but cannot be heard...." Everything in this world is audible. Each object has its own vibrations and waves of vibrations. Everything in the world can be heard; only God is inaudible. He seems to emit no vibrations. From where can we catch the wavelength of His music, what is His melody?

Hear Him we must, but there is only one way to do so. Your ears should begin to discard all sounds, all outside vibrations. A moment then arrives when the ears hear no sound; they become soundless. Then, only the silence remains. When the ears stop catching all outside vibrations, then what is 'heard' is He who is forever inaudible, He who is never heard.

Svetketu returned home after completing his study of all the shastras. His father asked him, "You have learnt all that could be heard, but have you heard that which cannot be heard?" Svetketu was very proud of his attainment. He had mastered all the knowledge of the Vedas. He was confident that he knew all that could be known and his father would be proud of his attainment. But the very first question his father asked was: "Did you hear that which is inaudible?"

Svetketu replied that he knew of no such shastra. All shastras are audible. Therefore, all that he learnt was audible. The Indian name for scriptures is shruti or smriti: that which can be heard and that which can be remembered. Therefore, God cannot be in the shastras; He is inaudible. Shastras can be heard, can be remembered, but He remains far behind. Svetketu replied, "That which is inaudible, I have not heard."

His father said, "Then go back. All that you have attained is useless. All that this knowledge can do is to provide for your livelihood. I sent you to become a Brahmin, not a priest. You could have earned your livelihood in other ways also, for you are a Brahmin by birth. But you will have attained nothing. You can only call yourself a true Brahmin the day you hear the inaudible. Only when the Brahma is heard or seen can a person become a Brahmin. you will have to go back."

Svetketu went back and did not return for years. He went and told his guru what his father had told him. The guru said, "I could only tell you what can be told; I could only teach you what can be taught. Foolish boy, how can I tell you that which cannot be heard?"

Svetketu said that it was impossible for him to return home without hearing the inaudible. The guru then showed him what to do. He said, "Take the cows of the ashram and go deep into the jungle. Do not return till there are a thousand in all." There were four hundred cows in the ashram.

"What will I do in the jungle?" Svetketu asked.

The guru replied: "Worry about the cows, not about yourself. Forget that you are, and get completely involved in the service of the cows. When the four hundred cows become one thousand, you may return."

Svetketu left the ashram with the cows. He also left his Self behind, as his guru had ordered him. He went deep into the jungle and began tending the cattle. Each day he took care to water and feed them. He saw to it that they were well-rested. He passed his days serving the cows with one-pointed attention. Years came and went. At night he went to sleep watching the stars. Each morning he got up with the sun. There was no one he could talk to. There were only the cows around him, who looked at him with their blank eyes. One of the reasons why the cow is looked upon as the Mother by the Hindus is because of her eyes. No other animal possesses such an expression of the formless and the void in his eyes as the cow. When a person's eyes develop this expression, he attains meditation.

Svetketu had nothing else to do except look into their eyes. He began to forget himself more and more. And so, days passed into years. Svetketu so lost himself that he was unaware of the fact that the number of cows was now a thousand.

Then, the story goes, the cows gathered together and addressed him. "Svetketu," they said, "we are now one thousand. It is time to go home."

So Svetketu returned home with the cows. He went to his guru's ashram. The guru came out, and taking Svetketu in his embrace, said, "There is now nothing left to ask. You can now go back to your father."

Svetketu asked, "How did you know that I have heard the inaudible?"

The guru replied, "My son I saw not one thousand cows but one thousand and one cows returning." The thousand were the cows, and the one extra was Svetketu himself. He had become like a cow so much were his eyes filled with the void. He walked between the cattle as if he himself was one.

Then, a very strange thing took place. As Svetketu came into the village and his father saw him through the window, he told his wife, "Svetketu has returned as a Brahmin. Now he will come and touch my feet and I shall be in a dilemma, for I am not as yet a Brahmin; I have not yet heard the inaudible. So I shall run away." The father left home from the backdoor.

When Svetketu went inside the house and found his father was not there, he asked his mother. She said, "Your father has gone away to become a Brahmin. He will only return when he hears what you have heard."

The inaudible can only be heard when the ear ceases to hear all sound. The invisible can only be seen when the eye drops all forms and images. Truth is attained by him whose dreams are lost for ever; when the eyes no longer make pictures or weave dreams but are blank and empty.

"GRASPED AT, BUT CANNOT BE TOUCHED...." No matter how much we understand Him, no matter how much we grasp Him.... The truth is that the tighter we clench our fist, the more He goes out of our hands. He is like the air. As long as the palm of the hand is open, the air remains. As soon as it is clenched, the air slips out.

Comprehension is the clenched fist of the intellect. Therefore, an intelligent person is always tense. The fist of his intellect is always clenched. But the harder one holds on to intellect, the less it is there. This is why a man cannot be a pundit and a wise man at the same time. It is very difficult, because a pundit is like a closed fist whereas a wise man is like an open hand. If the palm is open, all the air of the world can be on it; but if it is closed, even the air on the palm slips out.

Grasp and it is lost. No grasp can hold it because our grasp is so small and He is so big. So if we insist on holding Him, only the grasp will remain in the end. He who clenches his fist is left with only his fist. The pundit finds he is left with his mind only, a mind that is closed on all sides, with not a single opening. The wise man has nothing left in his hands. His hand is empty. Therefore, everything comes within his hands.

This sutra says: "GRASPED AT BUT CANNOT BE TOUCHED."

We shall have to go deep in order to investigate what is meant by understanding. When we comprehend something, what do we do? What is the process of comprehension? If a strange animal is brought before you and you are asked to understand it, what will you do?

In the mountains, the neel-gai (white-footed antelope) lives. It is not a cow, but it is somewhat like a cow. You can say it is like a cow because you know what a cow is, whereas you do not know this animal.

A woman once came to visit me. She had brought her little son along. She had warned the child not to pluck the flowers in the garden. While the mother was busy talking to me, the child went into the garden. He saw the gardener pruning the shrubs and removing flowers and branches. He came running in and said, "Mamma, there is a big boy cutting flowers and leaves!" The child was only acquainted with children; and in trying to explain the man, he could only liken him to a big child.

The first process of comprehension is that we compare the known with the unknown. We connect what we know to what we do not know. To understand is to reduce the unknown to the language of the known. This is what we do when we try to understand something we do not know; and when we do this, we say we have understood. If God also was an unknown entity we could have understood Him by the above method. But He is unknowable; this is the difficulty.

Science accepts two things: the known and the unknown. These are the two divisions of the world. The unknown means that which is unknown today but which can be known tomorrow. We will try and understand it some day. In other words, we will widen the circumference of that which we know till it covers the unknown. Thus, the unknown will become the known. It is a matter of time. As the days pass,

the unknown will become less and the known will increase. Then a day will come when we shall say, "All is known."

Religion believes in three classes: the known, the unknown and unknowable. Science believes in two: the known and the unknown. This is the difference between religion and science. Religion says there are some things known and some things unknown. These are the two divisions created by the intellect: known and unknown; light and darkness; birth and death. Behind these -- what remains is the unknowable. That which is behind the integrated intellect is the unknowable -- that which will never be known. You may turn the unknown into the known and the known into the unknown but the fundamental support behind the two shall always remain unknowable.

This is the difference between religion and science; this is the reason for the quarrel between the two. Science says, "We are ready to concede the unknown. If you say God is unknown, we agree. But we shall know Him some time in the future." But religion says, "God is unknowable. You can never know Him." Unknowable means that which cannot be transformed into the language of the known.

The ultimate reality of life shall always remain unknowable. There is a reason for this. The reason is that my being is so tiny. This infinitesimal 'me' is the knower, and what I want to know is an enormous, infinite expanse. The knower is but an atom in the boundless existence.

My knowing depends on very ordinary things. A small pellet of opium can knock out my consciousness; one injection of morphine and I lose my power to know and feel. How puny is my power to know? A stone hits my head and I am knocked out, and with this insignificant power at my command, I set out to know the vast, unbounded, infinite existence! Besides my power of perception, my very being can be destroyed by a single injection or the thrust of a knife. And with this negligible power I set out to investigate the limitless ocean of existence! Religion says, "We can never know." And what religion says is scientific and logical. How much is our power to know? Let us investigate, our power of perception a little more deeply.

The child in the mother's womb is completely unconscious for nine months. It knows nothing. When it is born, it sleeps for twenty-two hours, then twenty hours, then eighteen hours and so on. What happens when it grows up? If we live for sixty years, we spend twenty years in sleep, in unconsciousness. The remaining forty years we spend in conducting our research into life, investigating. If we investigate into these forty years and we find that we have known that which is to be known for even forty seconds, it is too much! We find instead, that these forty years we have also spent in an unconscious state. We do not even have the required amount of consciousness needed to know for a single second. We keep slipping into unconsciousness and insensibility; and with this mind filled with insensibility, we set out to explore the vast unknown.

If you are told to concentrate your attention on the flame of a lamp for five minutes and exclude all other thoughts, you will know how difficult it is. For five minutes you cannot hold your attention in one place. A thousand obstructions will come in the way. A thousand thoughts fill the mind. The mind wanders here and there, the eyes begin to blink, you forget the flame altogether. You do not have the

strength to concentrate on a flame for just five minutes -- from where will you gather strength to know the everlasting, all-persuading expanse of existence?

Then also, I am here today, but I was not here yesterday and I may not be here tomorrow; whereas this infinite expanse has always been and will always be. When I was not, it was there; when I shall be no more, it will still be there. How can I, in my momentary existence, know the whole? A wave leaps up to the sky and, in the process expands in order to know the whole ocean! Then it falls down and is lost in the ocean.

Man's consciousness is just such a leap. How can he know God then? Does religion then say that ignorance is in our very being and that we can never know? No. But religion says that as long as the effort to know is there, knowing cannot be, for in the very effort lies the ego, the consciousness that 'I am'.

As long as the fist is kept closed, knowing cannot be. The fist is infinitesimal, puny. Open it, and the palm of the hand contains the whole; there are no more boundaries. Open the intellect, break all its doors, let it merge with the vast space, maintain no boundaries, and knowing takes place. And yet, this sutra exhorts you to understand this: that even then, it remains untouched, unexplored. But the knowing takes place, and you will understand it as such. It becomes clear to you then that it is intangible.

How does this happen? There are many reasons. The first reason is what Kabir says, "I searched and searched, and in the process I lost myself." The process of seeking is such that the seeker is lost. And when the seeker is lost, who is to touch and what shall be touched? The seeker is no more! The seeker's very being -- the ego, the 'I' -- is the only obstruction. Nicodemus asked Jesus, "What shall I leave in order to attain God?"

Jesus replied, "To leave everything will not be enough. You will have to leave Nicodemus himself."

Nicodemus replied, "I can leave everything else, but how can I leave myself? I can leave all else and run away, but how can I run away from my very self? Wherever I go, the self will be with me."

Said Jesus, "That is what you have to learn. The day Nicodemus is left behind, you shall meet God."

Knowledge occurs the day the knower is lost. Wisdom dawns when the knower within is no more: when the palm is no longer closed.

The ego, however, is very close-fisted in every way. Until it is completely satisfied that something still remains in its palm, it does not open up. That is why people go on asking, "How can I believe that God is unless I see Him?" That is to say: until He comes within my grasp.

Karl Marx has said, "Unless we can dissect God in our laboratories, we cannot believe that He is." But in order to do this, we shall have to provide a table big enough to contain Him. Then also it is going to be difficult for Marx, because he will be standing at one edge of the table -- a puny, insignificant creature -- beside this vast entity that is God. How will he begin his work? It will be like a mosquito setting out to analyse the Himalayas! The ratio between the mosquito and the Himalayas can, however, be measured.

The difference found would be nothing compared with the difference between man and God. The mosquito is at least of some consequence viewed before Everest, but before God, Marx is not equal to even a mosquito! And yet Marx maintains that he shall not believe in God until he has fully analysed Him!

It is not Marx alone who feels this way. We all feel the same way. We say that we shall believe in God only if we can. Until we see that He is, He is not. It is necessary for us to be a witness to him in order for Him to be.

Lao Tzu says, "GRASPED AT, BUT CANNOT BE TOUCHED..." because he who was to touch is annihilated by then. Hence He is called 'intangible', for he who was to touch has been lost long before. In fact, the seeker can touch only when he is no more, when his 'I' has melted away. There is no way to know Him except by complete extinction of the self.

The entire flow of our life is in our being, and the entire flow of religion is in not-being. Therefore, we are unable to establish any relationship with religion -- because the whole process of our thinking is based on the fact that 'I am'. Darwin has said that the existence of the whole of mankind can be defined by the existence of a single term: the struggle for survival. Darwin is right. But Buddha cannot be convinced by this statement about struggle for survival. If we are to understand Buddha correctly, existence mean, the struggle to not be. It is an attempt to lose oneself; to destroy one's very being. We all strive to be -- to be more and more Buddha strives for non-being; to be empty, to be void, to lose oneself. If we compare ourselves to water, we can say that we strive to become like ice: hard; strong, assured of being. If Buddha is ice, he would want to melt and become water -- liquid. And if he could help it, he would like to turn into vapour so that no form remained. He would not even like to be vapour because vapour too has some kind of form.

Religion is the courage to be annihilated. Therefore. when a man turns towards religion, he should first find out whether he is prepared for annihilation, for extinction. Is he prepared to bear the hardship, the agony of losing himself? Then only can he move towards religion.

We proceed in the direction of religion, but for the wrong reasons. So our religion becomes False. We approach religion in order to be something more, to attain something more. We say that we want to attain heaven, bliss. Our intention is to secure our life after death. We strive for a life without death because in this life, death is certain. So here, also, we are struggling for survival. All our efforts are to save ourselves. That is why we find our priests teaching us, "Only those who are with us will be saved. On the day of judgment, we shall be your witness." Such teachers find followers by the thousands because all of us desire to be saved. This desire can be easily exploited.

It is hard for a teacher like Buddha to find followers because he says, "Die! Lose yourself, be no more, for your very being is your woe. Become empty, void."

Lao Tzu says, "He is called intangible because one who is to touch Him is lost when He appears." As long as we are, we can touch, we can grasp, but. He does not appear. The two (you and God) cannot meet; it is impossible. And yet, the meeting takes place -- on a different plane. My non-being and His being meet.

As long as 'I am', He is not. When I am not, the whole existence undergoes a transformation -- and then, He is. My non-being itself becomes the eye that sees Him, the hand that touches Him. My non-being becomes the very ground of his manifestation. My non-being is the throne for He who is the Lord. As long as 'I' am perched upon the throne, there is no place for Him.

Zen fakirs have said, "When a guest arrives, we make room for him. He who goes to invite the supreme guest must vacate the full house of his being." Not an iota of ground can be left for the ego.

Therefore, He is called intangible. He is thus, invisible, inaudible and intangible. And thus, He is outside the scope of our investigation. He escapes all our inquiry; He slips out of our grasp in every way and remains forever unknowable, incomprehensible. We must understand this.

He escapes from all our inquiry. I have told you that there is one difference between religion and science, and the distinction is one of categories. Science believes there are two parts to existence whereas religion believes there are three. It is this third part that is the main stay of religion.

Inquiry is the source, the foundation, of philosophy. There can be no philosophy in the world without inquiry. But inquiry is not the mainstay of religion. It is for this reason that people from the West say there is nothing like philosophy in India. To a certain extent they are right. Philosophy has never existed in India in the same sense as it existed in Greece and as it exists in the West today. India, China, indeed, the whole of the Orient, say that God is beyond the grasp of inquiry. None of our questions reach Him because they are too small, too puny. What kind of questions do we ask? Questions also arise out of experience, remember this.

We ask, "How can we believe God is unless we see Him with our own eyes?" Our experience of knowing is seeing. Whatever we see we believe, because then there is no question of its being false. We have not investigated this matter enough.

In dreams, also, we see with our eyes. When we are dreaming, everything seems real. It is only on waking in the morning that we find it was a dream. Would that some day we were to wake up to realise that that which we called life was nothing but a long dream! A man can remain in the dream-state for as long as seventy years or more! And he will never know that what he saw was a dream.

We have more faith in our eyes than we should. If you go to the desert, you may see a lake of water at a distance -- your eyes tell you it is there. Not only your eyes see water, but they also see the reflection of trees and shrubs on its banks. This is nothing but an illusion created by the rays of the sun. You soon realise it, when you reach the spot. You may find some trees, but the lake is certainly not there.... And you had actually seen the ripples in the lake! The eyes saw all this. The eyes deceived you!

When we raise questions concerning God, our questions are connected inevitably with the eyes. We say, "I must see Him, I must hear Him, touch Him." Our questions are involved with the experiences of our senses. Remember though, all inquiries as arise out of the experiences of the senses cannot reach even the fringe of existence, because God is beyond all senses. We shall never be able to touch Him from anywhere.

Our experiences are the foundation of our inquiry. Then how can we inquire about that which we have never known? How much is such inquiry worth?

This seems very difficult. How can we inquire about that which we do not know? Suppose you go to a foreign land where roses do not grow. You try to tell them about the rose. What will you say? You may say, "The rose is very beautiful." They might place a diamond before you and say, "Is it that beautiful?" They will raise questions according to their experience of beauty. Now you will find yourself in trouble. If you say, "No, not this kind of beauty," they will feel offended. Then what do you mean by beauty?" they might ask. Now if you say that to a certain extent the diamond can be compared to a rose, they might ask, "Is the rose as lasting as a diamond?" You will then have to state that the rose blooms in the morning and dies in the evening; and they will scoff at such beauty. You may try in vain to state your point, you may say that the diamond is a dead, lifeless thing, whereas the flower is a live thing -- but they will refuse to agree with you. The reason is only this: that their questions and inquiries arise from their own experience.

There are questions that seem appropriate in language but are meaningless in existence. I can ask, "What is the fragrance of the colour green?" This seems appropriate in language. If a blind man is told that the green colour is very beautiful, he can ask you how it smells, because his experience of things is through smell and sound. His question would not be inappropriate because he can only try to know things by identifying them with things, already known to him. You will say his question is irrelevant. What has the colour green got to do with odour? But this man will say, "If this has nothing to do with odour, it has nothing to do with me." His experiences are all through the sense of smell.

Lao Tzu says, "He is beyond the grasp of our inquiry because inquiry arises from the known. Inquiry is useful in the investigation of the unknown; but if the unknowable is to be sought, inquiry is useless. Therefore, inquiry is the base of philosophy and science but not of religion.

In our country, there is an entirely new word coined: 'mumuksha', as opposed to 'jigyasa' (inquiry). This word is the foundation-stone of religion. We do not ask questions about God because all questions come out of our own experiences and He is beyond all our experiences. Therefore, all our questions regarding Him are irrelevant. So we ask nothing about Him. Rather, we begin to ask questions about ourselves. Thus starts mumuksha.

Understand this a little. A blind man asks, "Does the colour green have any odour?" This is an inquiry. But if the blind man says, "I cannot see, show me the way to understand this colour you are talking of so that I may know it," then this is mumuksha. "What is the colour green like?" -- this is inquiry. "How should I change so that I can see the green colour of which you talk?" this is mumuksha.

Inquiry leads to thought; mumuksha leads to sadhana. Jigyasa (inquiry) gives rise to reflection; mumuksha gives birth to meditation. An inquirer wanders in thoughts only. Where religion is concerned, the mumukshu reaches the destination which is beyond the grasp of the inquirer. He who tries to know truth through intelligence will be a failure. He will know nothing, because thoughts make us blind. To one who can be in the no-thought state, that which is unknowable becomes manifest immediately. He finds it right next to him. God manifests within and without, and on all sides.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #11

Chapter title: The image of the eternal and the formless, the ancient and the void

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NEITHER BY ITS RISING IS THERE LIGHT,
NOR BY ITS SINKING IS THERE DARKNESS.
UNCEASING, CONTINUOUS,
IT CANNOT BE DEFINED.
IT REVERTS AGAIN TO THE REALM OF NOTHINGNESS.
THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED THE FORM OF THE FORMLESS;
THE IMAGE OF NOTHINGNESS.
THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED ELUSIVE.
MEET IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS FACE.
FOLLOW IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS BACK.
HE WHO HOLDS FAST TO THE TAO OF OLD,
IN ORDER TO MANAGE THE AFFAIRS OF NOW,
IS ABLE TO KNOW THE PRIMEVAL BEGINNINGS,

WHICH ARE THE CONTINUITY (TRADITION) OF TAO.

The flowers bloom in the morning and wither in the evening. The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. There is birth and it ends in death. Each happening has a beginning and an end. But existence always is. There is no morning, nor evening for existence, neither birth nor death. In this sutra, Lao Tzu tells us about the beginningless, infinite continuity of the nature of existence, that is beyond both birth and death.

Whatever we know, we can encircle within a limit. On one end of this boundary there lies its beginning, and on the other, its end. All that can be confined within boundaries can be defined. Definition can only mean that which we can encircle within our thoughts. But it is impossible to define that which has no beginning and no end, for the simple reason that we cannot confine it within the circumference of our thoughts. From where should we draw the line and where should we end it? Therefore, existence can never be defined. Existential objects can be defined, but not existence itself.

Let us understand it in this way. This sutra is rather difficult, so we shall have to unfold its secret from many sides. We see a flower and we say it is beautiful. The moon comes out in the sky and we say it is beautiful; we like a face and we say it is beautiful; some music touches the chord of our heart and we say it is beautiful. But have you ever seen beauty? Some song is beautiful, some flower is beautiful, some star in the sky. You have seen things that are beautiful, but have you seen beauty itself? Then, a difficulty arises. If you have never seen beauty, how can you say a certain thing is beautiful? You see beauty in a flower, but you have never seen beauty itself. The beauty of a flower blooms in the morning and withers by dusk. A face appears beautiful today, but tomorrow the beauty vanishes. That which is here today is lost tomorrow: that which you saw in the morning is gone by the evening. Have you seen 'that' apart from the objects? Have you ever seen pure beauty? You have seen beautiful things but not beauty.

The flower can be defined -- it has its own form, its own shape, its own marks of recognition. But beauty itself cannot be defined. It has no boundaries, it has no form, no marks of recognition. And yet we recognise it, or else how can we say the flower is beautiful? But if the flower alone is beautiful, the moon at night cannot also be beautiful, because what is there in common between the flower and the moon? This means that beauty is that which is in a flower, in the moon, in the eyes and yet apart -- it is something different from all these. The eyes that looked beautiful a moment ago look hard and ugly with anger a moment later. The same eyes that looked beautiful, now are ugly -- something has been lost. This proves that beauty is not a flower or the moon or the eyes; beauty is something else. Have you met it face to face? Never.

We have never seen beauty, never known it, therefore beauty cannot be defined. And yet, we recognise beauty. When the mystery of beauty enters the flower, when its smoothness and tenderness permeates within it, we say the flower is lovely. When this same mystery enters into the eyes of someone, the eyes appear beautiful. When the same mystery manifests within the notes of a melody, it sounds sweet to

the ears. But what is this beauty, this loveliness? The flower can be defined, so can the moon and the eyes, but what is beauty? It is indefinable. Why? Why can we not define beauty?

We know what beauty is. We come across it on some unknown path. It enters our heart in some unknown way and it thrills our soul in some unknown manner. And yet, we do not know what it is. Whenever the intellect tries to grasp it we find it is lost. It is somewhat like this. Darkness fills a room. We take a lamp to see where darkness is -- and it is lost! Wherever the boundless is, if we approach it with our intellect, it disappears. The intellect can only recognise things within its boundaries. The intellect can only know that which is bounded. A thing can come within the grasp of our understanding only when the intellect can decide its limits -- only when it can form its periphery and divide it in parts. It is, therefore, that the intellect goes on dividing things into smaller and smaller sections. The smaller the fraction, the deeper is the understanding.

Science has reached the atom. Its understanding of the atom is profound, whereas the vast expanse is beyond its grasp. The smaller the thing, the better the intellect can comprehend it. Now that science has analysed the atom, it has also divided the atom into electrons, protons and neutrons. The intellect is keen to divide even these further; because the smaller the thing, the better it can be examined and defined. The bigger the expanse, the less possible it is for the eyes to find its ends; and when the intellect cannot measure, it falls into difficulties and goes astray.

Says Lao Tzu, "Nothing is illumined when it appears, and nothing is darkened when it disappears." Such is the imperishable, uninterrupted mystery which defies all definitions. It always is; it is eternal. Suns rise and set, flowers bloom and die, life comes and goes, creations form and fade. The universe is created and annihilated, but God always is. That something, by whatever name may we call it, always is. It is never born, it never dies, it is eternal. This is the pure existence.

I talked to you about beauty in order that you might understand existence. We have never seen existence. But we have seen or experienced the evidence of existence: we see a tree, a river, a human being, the sun, the moon. They all have an existence, but existence as such, we have never experienced, only objects of existence. But the objects that exist, are all transient.

Let us try and understand this, for this is one of the profoundest questions of philosophy. The greatest philosophers in human history have considered this question at great length. We say, "This is a table, this is a man, this is a house, a flower, a star, and so on." These are, but are they existence? Existence, is-ness, the happening of existence, is in everything and yet we cannot see it. Now, suppose we break the table. There were two things: the table and its existence. The flower was; now it is no more. The flower is no more, but the existence within the flower -- have we destroyed that too? We have never seen existence, we have only seen objects. There is a man; he dies. There were two things in a man: there is his body, made of flesh and bones, and there is his being. The body dies and dust turns to dust, but his being -- does that also die?

When we crush a flower, remember that we crush only the flower and not its beauty. How can we destroy that which we have never seen, never grasped, never even touched? How can we destroy that which is beyond the conception of our senses? We can destroy a flower or blind an eye, but we cannot

destroy the beauty that peeped from behind the flower or shone through the eye. Suns are formed and dissolved, creations come and go, men are born and they die but this being within them, this existence, forever is -- it flows forever.

Lao Tzu says, "Its manifestation does not bring light, nor does its disappearance plunge things into darkness" -- because it neither rises nor sets. We do not know it by things that appear and disappear, for it is deeper than these. That which does not manifest itself even in the light of the sun, and that which does not set with the setting of the sun -- that alone is. That which is not when the flower is, and that which is not extinct when the flower is not -- that alone is. That which is not born at birth and that which does not die at death -- that alone is.

When a person is born, the first boundary line is drawn. A certain person Rama is born. We draw a line: he was born on such and such a day. Then this man dies. We draw another line: he died on such and such a day. This is the boundary within which the individual, Rama exists. But it is not the boundary of existence. Let us go a little deeper and perhaps we will understand.

Which day do you call your birthday? This is a debatable question. Is it the day you were born, or is it the day you were conceived in your mother's womb? Generally, the day the child is born is looked upon as the birthday. Then what should we call the day when conception takes place? We can go back a little and say the birth takes place on the day of conception.

Let us go still deeper. One half of the embryo was present in the mother long before conception and the other half in the father long before conception. The beginning of birth, according to science, took place on their meeting. So this happening of birth is the meeting of two lives that were already existing. This, then, is not the beginning, for both the lives were already present: one was hidden in the father and one in the mother. Their union brought a new life into being. This is the beginning of the life of an individual, say Rama. But this is not the beginning of his existence, for his existence lay hidden within his father and mother -- it was present and fully alive. It manifested itself in the union of his father and mother.

Let us go back even further. That which was hidden within the father was hidden within the parents of the father. What was hidden in the mother was hidden within the parents of the mother. And so we go back, and further back. Then the question arises: when did this life actually start? When you were born is your birth, but the life within you was not born with you. If we go further and further back, all the past history of the world, all the known and unknown, will be exhausted; and yet the mystery will remain unsolved. You were alive within the first man that was on earth. But how did he come to be? For him to be, it is imperative that existence must have been before him.

So existence is a continuation. Birth is a simple happening, according to science, but rather complex according to religion. The nucleus formed by the union of the mother and father is merely the beginning of the body. The soul enters this body.

Therefore, when Buddha's father told him that he had given birth to him and he was his father, he replied, "I was born through you, but you have not given birth to me. I came through you, you were the

door through which I entered, but you have not created me. I was, even when you were not. You provided a passage for me and I appeared, but my journey was very different from yours".

His father was displeased with him, because Buddha was going about begging in the very country of which he was the king. His father tried to reason with him. He said, "Siddhartha, no one in our family has ever begged."

Buddha replied. "I know nothing about your family but as far as I remember my past journeys, I have always been a beggar. In the life before, and in those preceding it, I have always begged. I am a very ancient beggar. About you, I know nothing".

The two talked in different languages. They could never have come to terms. Buddha's father spoke the language of science, of logic, while Buddha talked the language of religion. From the angle of religion, the happening of life that takes place in the mother's womb is infinite. The soul that enters into life is also infinite. It is the union of two infinities within the mother's womb.

So, in this sense, I always was. Every particle of my body has always been. Every particle of my soul has always been. There has not been a single moment in this existence when you were not or when I was not. The form may have been different, the shape may have been different, and also the name, yet there has never been a moment when you and I were not, nor will there ever be. You have been born many times; you died many times. Lao Tzu says, "NEITHER BY ITS RISING IS THERE LIGHT, NOR BY ITS SINKING IS THERE DARKNESS. UNCEASING, CONTINUOUS, IT CANNOT BE DEFINED." You can be defined - your name, which place you come from, where you live. You can be defined. But how can the infinite existence that manifests in you be defined?

People would ask Buddha what his name was. He left his palace, his kingdom, and began to wander in unknown places where nobody knew him. But his very personality attracted attention, for its unparalleled beauty could not remain hidden behind beggar's attire. And when people asked him where he came from and what his name was, he would say, "Which name of mine shall I tell you, because I have been born many times. Sometimes I was a man, sometimes an animal and at times even a tree. Which name of mine would you like to know?" It is only natural that those who asked him must have considered him a mad man. "Which name should I tell you?"

He in whom the knowledge of existence thus begins, finds himself in many difficulties with the worldly-wise; for then he discovers that no definitions work. As the order of things begin to attain infinite dimensions, all definitions break down, fall to pieces.

Imperishable is existence, inexhaustive. Things happen, things pass away, but existence remains forever.

Why is existence indefinable? Because it is boundless, infinite. It is impossible to investigate it fully. It is not that our means of investigation are poor, but that existence has no beginning and no end.

Christianity has decided on the historical birth of this world. Christian seekers maintain that the world began 4000 years before Christ. Those who worked on this have even worked out the exact time. They say that 4004 years ago, at 9 a.m. in the morning, the world came into being. They have even mentioned

the minutes and seconds! But when science looked into this matter, Christianity was proven wrong and all its findings were proven childish. Scientists discovered that the earth was four thousand million years old at least. The account of 4004 years, so many hours and so many minutes was absolutely childish. This was a great blow to Christianity, though it had nothing to do with the Christian religion. If we investigate religion in the right perspective, we find that religion cannot say from where and when things start and where and when they end. Religion believes only this; that whatever is, is. It neither begins nor ends. Existence is beginningless and endless; it is infinite. Thus science has no quarrel with Lao Tzu's views. Lao Tzu says, "We accept the imperishable existence, which never began and which will never cease." That the world began 4000 years ago is a childish statement but the present statement that the world is four thousand million years old is also childish. The extension of time makes no difference. Whether it is four thousand or four thousand millions, Lao Tzu says that things cannot begin in this world; existence always is. The forms and the shapes may change, but that which lies hidden behind these forms is eternal; it is everlasting.

This unknown factor of existence enters into state of void time and again. For Lao Tzu, the state of non-being is also existence (being). For Lao Tzu the state of being and non-being are the two sides of existence.

When people like Lao Tzu and Buddha talk of this state of nothingness, we misunderstand them. We think that when they talk of nothingness, it means there is nothing. This is a mistake. When a Buddha or a Lao Tzu talks of non-being, it is a state of existence. To manifest or not to manifest are two forms of the same thing.

I speak, and then I become silent. If we ask Buddha he will say, "To speak and to be silent are two states of the same energy." The energy speaks at times and is silent at times. The energy is not extinct in the state of silence; it is just quiet. Not to be is the disappearance of to be, not its extinction. If this is properly understood, many things become clear. Not to be is not to be extinct because, according to Lao Tzu, nothing is ever destroyed in this world.

Now, even science concedes that matter is indestructible. You cannot destroy even a grain of sand. You may crush it, but then that which was together in one piece will be manifest in the particles. You burn an object and it turns to ashes, but that which was present in the object is still present. How will you destroy that? You can, at the most, destroy one form and create another. More than this you cannot do.

Water can be changed into ice, and ice can become vapour. The river can become the ocean, and the ocean can become a cloud. The cloud again becomes the river; you can never destroy it. Not a single drop can be destroyed; it is impossible. Science has discovered an interesting fact: that ever since existence came into being, it has not decreased by a single particle, nor increased by a single particle. There is so much change all around us, at all times, yet the sum total is constant. How vast is the universe. and how turbulent: stars form and disintegrate; worlds are created and destroyed; people come and go, through so many lives. There are so many people, so many palaces and so many graves -- and then, silence. So much turmoil while life lasts; then the silence of death. And yet, the universe is none the richer or poorer by a single grain.

The universe means the sum total of everything. There is nothing outside of it. Then how can it increase? And also, how can it decrease, because not a single grain can fall out of it. The totality of the universe remains always the same. Forms change, but that which assumes the forms is always the same. Things appear and disappear but existence is the same as ever. Lao Tzu says, "AND IT REVERTS AGAIN AND AGAIN TO THE REALM OF NOTHINGNESS."

Existence has two dimensions. Its manifestation means, its assuming various forms, and its reverting to nothingness means its becoming formless. We hear a song. A minute before, the melody was not there. Then we heard it and a minute later it was again no more -- it reverted to nothingness. A flower blooms. It was not there a moment before. Then the day dawned and the sun bathed its petals with rays. The flower opened, it sang its song of life, it spread its fragrance. Then evening came and the flower withered. It fell to the ground and was no more.

Each object thus appears and disappears. But not to be does not mean that it becomes extinct. Not to be means to be absorbed into nothingness, to be lost once again into nothingness. Not to be means to be unmanifest. Manifestation and unmanifestation are the two sides of existence.

A person came to Lao Tzu. He was an atheist. He said to Lao Tzu, "There is no God."

One of Lao Tzu's disciples who was a theist was there. He said, "God is."

Lao Tzu said, "You both are correct. Each of you is talking about one aspect of God. There can be no opposition, no argument. between you. One aspect of God is His manifestation; another aspect is His non-manifestation. The atheist is talking about His non-manifestation and the theist is talking of His manifestation. You both are right. But you both are wrong also, for your contentions are incomplete."

Lao Tzu says, "God is, and God is not. Both these are true at the same time, because both are His ways of being." Lao Tzu thus becomes difficult for us to understand because it then becomes difficult to define God. One person asserts that God is. He can make a definite statement. Another asserts that God is not. His statement is also definite. But Lao Tzu maintains that God is, and is not. This defies all definitions. But what Lao Tzu says is correct. What Lao Tzu says is right, because nonbeing is also a way of being. There is no contradiction and no opposition between the two.

If this becomes clear to us, then we shall understand that birth is a way of being and death is also a way of being. In birth we manifest, and in death we revert to the realm of nothingness. To be awake is a way of being. Then, we are active. To be asleep is also a way of being. Then we are inactive. In waking, we are active in the outside world. In sleep, we are active within ourselves. Consciousness and unconsciousness are two aspects of our being. In the state of consciousness, there is a lot of movement within us. In the state of unconsciousness. everything is silent, even consciousness.

We have to break the hostility that exists between this state of being and not being. Then only shall we be able to understand Lao Tzu. There is absolutely no contradiction, no enmity, between the two. They are two aspects of the same thing. And yet, it becomes difficult to define, because time and again the manifest reverts to the realm of the unmanifest. This persistent movement from manifestation to

unmanifestation makes it difficult to define Tao. "THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED THE FORM OF THE FORMLESS." The formless is its form. It is such that it has no form.

This also we shall find difficult to understand, for we tend to see things in terms of contradiction, whereas Lao Tzu's way of seeing things is by uniting them. We know of people who believe in the manifestations of God, we know of people who believe Him to be without form, and we know of the quarrels between them.

Islam says that God is formless, so Muslims do not allow the images of God to be anywhere. There was a temple in Mecca with three-hundred sixty-five idols of worship. Each idol depicted one form of God, and there were three-hundred sixty-five idols, one for each day. The people who created these images must have been very imaginative. Each day they worshipped God in a new form. Thus, each day they worshipped one idol. This was a priceless concept: each day they worshipped a new form. And yet they must have been adherents of the concept that God is formless. How could the form change if they worshipped form? It is only the formless that can change form so easily. That which changes from every day proves that it has no definite form. It can manifest in any form.

In our country, Hindus have created thousands of images of God. From an unhewn stone underneath a tree to the creations of Khajuraho there are innumerable images of God in India. The concept of thirty-three crores of devas is found only in India.

There is a constant struggle between those who believe in God as a form and those who believe God is formless. One who believes in the formless cannot visualise the formless taking a form and one who believes in God's manifestations cannot understand why He who manifests himself in so many forms and shapes cannot manifest in a stone image. The stone also is a form of God. How else could it exist?

It was only much later that images began to be carved. In the beginning, any stone could be smeared with vermilion and an idol was created. And the appropriate deva manifested himself for his worshippers. When you see a stone smeared with vermilion you will fail to see how it can become a God. Perhaps the village people did not know the art of sculpture, you think. That is not so. Any shape is His shape, all forms are His, so any shape will do. This is the idea behind it.

These two concepts seem conflicting because to us, form and formless are contrasting terms. Lao Tzu sees no conflict in them. The basic concept of Lao Tzu is the concept of harmony everywhere in life. All qualities are His. He is also the quality-less. He is form and He is the formless. That is we say: the form of the formless. We accept His forms because we know He is formless. The very state of non-being we look upon as His being. His absence is just a form of His presence.

Now it becomes more difficult to define. If we rely upon words, we can draw lines of limitation. If we say God is full of attributes, we can set aside the aspect of attributelessness. If we believe in the form aspect, we can set aside the aspect of formlessness. And vice versa. But if we say that He is both, the boundary lines become hazy and definition more difficult.

He is an image of emptiness, of nothingness. An image can only be carved out of matter; it means shape, form. How can the formless be depicted in an image? And yet, Lao Tzu says, "HE IS AN IMAGE OF NOTHINGNESS." This is a subtle attempt to join the opposites. He is not. This is also a dimension of His being. It is difficult to understand, because to us if one is, the other is not.

There are things within our experience however which are, and yet we cannot define their existence in any language. You feel love for someone welling up within your heart. You feel it, but you cannot express it. This is every lover's predicament. He can give no proof of the love he experiences. If you ask a lover to give proof of the love of which he talks all day, and of which he dreams all night, the love which fills every pore of his body, which he breathes with every breath, he becomes helpless because he has no way to prove it. Even if he attempts to do so, he finds all his efforts have gone in vain. He may throw his arms around his beloved, he may press her to his heart, and yet nothing is manifested. The experience lies within, and nothing that he can do helps to manifest the experience. He may even give his life, yet that which was within cannot be manifest.

Love is. But it is as if it is not. Love is, the way God is. That is why Jesus has used the word "love" to define God. He said, "Love is God." This does not mean God is a lover. This is a mistake on the part of Christians who have said, "God is very loving." That is not what Jesus meant. Perfect love cannot discount hatred. What is meant by the term "God is love" is that love is the only proof we have where being and nonbeing exist together. Love is; we feel its presence in full measure. If a man is prepared to lose his life for the sake of love, it goes to prove how real is the presence of love within him and how much more important it is to him than his life. But there is no way of proving its existence, its presence, its being, we cannot put our finger on it.

Jesus gave the simile of love for God only so that you can know Him through the experience of love. But we have no knowledge of love at all, so we find ourselves in great difficulty.

All methods of contemplation that are far removed from love end up by denying the existence of God. For example, mathematics. It is far removed from love. Science does not accept the existence of God because science has nothing to do with love. Poetry accepts God because poetry is very near love. Dance and music similarly, accept the existence of God because they are so near love. Everything that is near to love accepts the existence of God, while everything that is removed from love finds it difficult to accept His existence. They cannot accept the fact of His being and yet not being, Lao Tzu says: "Nothingness is His image." He is not, and that alone is His being. For these very reasons He is called unapproachable, inaccessible and, hence, unknowable.

"MEET IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS FACE. FOLLOW IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS BACK." These are profound words. Meet Him and you cannot see His form. He has no form. He cannot have, because all forms are His. If He had a form of His own, all forms could not be His. Lao Tzu's famous words are: "He is nowhere, for He is everywhere. He is no one, for He is everyone."

And though He has no form, it is possible to meet Him. That is why those who get involved and obsessed by form fail to meet Him. Some are obsessed with Rama, some with Krishna and some with Jesus. These are forms. He exists in these forms also, but no form is His. In other words, all forms are His. This needs

to be kept in mind or else we are bound to err. The devotee of Rama seeks Rama's face everywhere. but He is faceless. Then, this very face becomes a hindrance.

The face of Rama is helpful up to a limit -- for in Rama's face one can get a glimpse of Him -- but it can help only this far. If it persists, the face becomes more significant than the glimpse of God that it gives.

Shri Aurobindo has said that all steps that are helpful at first become a hindrance later. The path that led the way misleads the seeker and leads him astray after some time. Therefore, choose the path carefully and remember how long it can be useful. This is very difficult -- I know. Each step should be taken as long as it remains a step. As soon as it begins to bar your way, step aside. The face of Rama is helpful because the ease with which the image of nothingness is reflected in it is difficult to gauge in other faces. Nothingness becomes manifest in the face of Rama. So far it is helpful. But what happens is that the face gradually assumes more significance, so much so that it stops reflecting the nothingness that is manifest in it. This is what always happens.

When a seeker approached Buddha for the first time, he was not attracted. Buddha's eyes express complete detachment, and in this expression the seeker begins to see that which is beyond Buddha. Then the attraction begins, and it becomes stronger and stronger. As the attachment increases, that which was beyond Buddha begins to stop manifesting. Then the seeker is left with only the face of Buddha. Therefore, Buddha told his disciples not to make images of him. The reason was not that he was against idols but because he saw the above situation happening in his sadhakas. They were losing sight of that which was beyond him.

But the face of Buddha was so beautiful that people did not respect his wish. It is said that the number of images made of Buddha outnumber all other images, so much so that the word "But" which is a derivation of the word "Budh" began to be known as an image. This word means: an image -- in Persian, Arabic and Urdu. Perhaps people were not familiar with images before and Buddha's was the first image carved out of stone. Yet he had forbidden his followers to make images of him.

This is the difficulty. If the beyond is manifest, the face is useful. If the beyond becomes unmanifest, the face becomes a hindrance. The image becomes an opening, the gate to the formless, if the remembrance of the formless remains.

Lao Tzu says: "MEET IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS FACE. FOLLOW IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS BACK." This will be easier to understand if we identify it with love. Has there been a moment in your life when you had the good fortune to love someone? I ask you this, because it is with utmost difficulty that one in a million experiences love. People talk about love, but we only talk about that which we have not experienced. In so doing, we seek to pacify ourselves. If you have really experienced love towards someone, you will find that in the moment of love, the beloved's face becomes hazy. This is hard to believe, but it is so, that whenever your heart fills with love towards someone, the beloved's form becomes dim and in that moment you get a glimpse of that which has no form. That is why those who have had this profound experience have talked of the beloved as God himself.

This is why it is difficult to understand whether such a person is talking of his beloved or talking of God. When we read an epic of love, we are always confused: is the poet talking of God or talking of his beloved? Is Omar Khayyam talking of his beloved or talking of love. Is he talking of wine or of samadhi? It is difficult to make out. No wonder, so many wine shops are named after Omar Khayyam!

The lover is united with the formless in moments of love. The form disappears and the formless appears. The alchemy of love is such that it begins with the form and ends with the formless. In the beginning it is always the form that attracts; but this is due to the flash of some inner light which does not belong to the form. The flame is not seen, but the soft light of it is visible.

A house of glass attracts us, but if we stop here it would be a mistake. The light within the house is the actual goal. A beautiful form attracts. This is as it should be -- it is not wrong, it is no sin -- but if the body becomes the be all and end all and there is no knowledge of the flame within, then there is trouble. If the form attracts and the formless is experienced, a moment comes when the form is completely forgotten and only the formless remains.

If a person loves even one person truly, there is no need to seek God separately. The beloved then becomes the door to the absolute. Because we cannot love, we have to pray. Because we do not love, we have to do sadhana and various other things. If one can truly love, sadhana, prayers, etcetera, become redundant. Therefore Meera can say, "There is no way, no sadhana, no method, no knowledge, no meditation," for she has experienced love. Therefore Kabir can say, "Leave all yoga and mantras and the various exercises. His name alone is enough." But His name is enough only for one who has had a glimpse of the love within. Otherwise it is not enough, however much you repeat it.

This is the difficulty. Kabir says His name alone is enough, because the name, taken with love, is sufficient. What more does one need? Then we presume that the name itself is enough, but we have no experience of the love within. So we repeat the name like parrots mechanically all our lives, saying: this is what Kabira said, this is what Nanak said. The name is enough, but only for the heart which has love within. And where there is love, the name becomes unnecessary. Love alone is enough.

Says Lao Tzu: "MEET IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS FACE. FOLLOW IT AND YOU DO NOT SEE ITS BACK." With the union, all boundaries fall. There is no way to experience the union, try as you will. Therefore when a person says he has seen God, know that he has seen a dream -- a beautiful, religious, joy-giving dream. If a person says he has seen the face of God, know that his imagination has reached the point of fantasy. No one has ever seen His face and no one ever will because no face is His, no form is His. Existence is devoid of all form.

Lao Tzu goes on further to say: "HE WHO HOLDS FAST TO THE TAO OF OLD, IN ORDER TO MANAGE THE AFFAIRS OF NOW, IS ABLE TO KNOW THE PRIMEVAL BEGINNINGS, WHICH ARE THE CONTINUITY (THE TRADITION) OF TAO."

This last sutra is for the sadhaka. All that has been said before were pointers towards the supreme mystery. This sutra gives a reference as to how this supreme mystery can be attained.

Time is the creation of man. For God, there is no Time. Past, present and future are creations of man; for God they do not exist. The only word we can use for time with regard to God is eternal, eternity. The division of time is our creation. Future means that which has yet not happened to us and present means that which is now for us. But God surrounds all. For Him, the past, the future and the present are all here and now.

In actuality, for God there is only the present. It is some -- what like this. You make a hole in the wall of a house. If a person peeps through this hole and looks in, he might see me. Then he looks from another angle and he sees you. But then, he cannot see me. Then he may look again from a different angle and see others, but then he cannot see you. Those that he cannot see become the past; those he can see become the present; and those he is about to see become the future. For one who is outside the house, the people within the room are divided into three parts; but for a person within the room, they are all together at the same time.

God is present at the centre of existence, and we are all at the periphery. Our vision is limited. The eye is not capable of seeing all that there is. We can only see a few selected things. That which escapes one's vision becomes the past; that which has not come before our vision is the future; and that which is visible to us is the present. For God there is only the present; for Him, there is no past and no future.

It is not correct to use the word "present" with regard to God because present means that which is between past and future. But for Him for whom there is no past and no future, there can be no present. Therefore, Eckhart has used the phrase "the eternal now". For God, everything is in the present; whereas for us, if we were to investigate, the present is nothing.

We say there is past, present and future, but do you realize how long your past is? If you are fifty years old, the past spreads as far back as fifty years. If you were to remember your past lives, it would extend to crores of births. Our future, too, is infinite. If you are to live for fifty years more, the future is fifty years long; and if you were to take into account the lives after death, the future extends to infinity. So the past is infinite and the future is infinite. And what is our present? Hardly a moment. If you were to investigate more deeply, which moment would you call the present moment? As soon as you name it, the moment slips into the past. If I say, "This moment when it is 9.35 a.m. is the present," by the time I have said it, that moment has slipped into the past.

We have so little of the present in our hands that by the time we declare it, it becomes the past. The fact is that the present holds only one meaning for us: it is the point where my future passes into the past. And this point we never experience. If we begin to experience the present, if we begin to grasp the present, if it begins to fill our consciousness, this is what is called meditation.

We cannot grasp the present because the mind works with such speed, and time runs out so fast, that we cannot grasp the point between two moments. We cannot stop time, it is not in our hands, but we can stop the mind. It is very much within our power. If the mind comes to an absolute halt, we can be one with the present moment. Our union with the present moment is our union with God. Then by and by, the past and the future fade away for us and only the present remains.

For people like Lao Tzu and Buddha, there is no past and no future. The present is everything. When a person reaches the stage where the present becomes everything to him, he is united with God; he becomes God. The greater the length of our past and future, the further away we are from God; the shorter the distance, the nearer we are to Him. The day the past and the future fade away completely, we are one with the absolute.

Now let us try to understand Lao Tzu's sutra. He who remembers the eternal, whether he is in a shop or in the market or in the office or in the house, whether eating or sleeping, if he is living in the eternal now, he alone is capable to know the primeval beginnings which are the continuity of Tao. Tao means religion, Tao means power, Tao means the rule (RIT). Tao means the supreme mystery, where there is no time, where there is no making and breaking, where there is no life, no death. He attains this supreme continuity.

Time is the gate. If you are swinging between the past and the future, you are still in samsara (the world). Samsara means: past-wealth-future; the present is absent. If we wish to go beyond samsara, we have to take the jump from the meeting point of the past and future. The pure present is moksha; the perfect present is Tao.

When Lao Tzu was asked, "What is your greatest teaching?" he would reply, "This which I am saying now."

When Van Gogh was asked, "Which is your best painting?" he would answer, "The one I am doing right now." For him, that which was happening here and now was everything.

He who remembers this eternal now and begins to live in it from moment to moment finds the way. He discovers the bridge to the eternal Tao. Leave the past, leave the future and catch hold of the present. Bury the dead past, drown it for ever.

But we drag the burden of our past behind us. That is why the old are bent. The weight of the body is nothing compared to the burden of the past. It is like a mountain on his back.

When you see an old man sitting with his eyes closed, you can be well assured that he is digging into his past. He will be reliving his childhood, his youth, his successes and failures, his life and loves, his marriages and divorces. The burden becomes heavier and heavier.

Take this burden off your back. It is dangerous because it will never allow you to merge with the eternal. See children, see youths. What are they doing? They are living in the future: the castles they want to build, the journeys they have to make, the goals they wish to attain. They have their ambitions, their dreams -- they live in them. Watch children. They are a great expanse of the future. Look at the old. They are the past. The child has dreams.

Between the two we miss that which is the present. As I told you before, our present is the point where the future becomes the past. In the same manner, our youth is the point where the future becomes the past and our dreams begin to crumble.

Have you ever seen an image of Buddha or Krishna or Mahavira in which they are depicted as old? It is not that they never became old, but we have conserved only their youthful images. There is a reason for it. The reason is, the youthful image conveys the fact that for Buddha and those like him, the present was everything. Youth became eternal. The body became old, but their consciousness never became old because there was no burden of the past on it. The mind is the reason behind it. If a person learns to live continuously in the present, he experiences a perpetual youth, an everlasting freshness. In his life, a new flower filled with fresh innocence opens each moment.

"NEITHER BY ITS RISING IS THERE LIGHT,
NOR BY ITS SINKING IS THERE DARKNESS.
UNCEASING, CONTINUOUS,
IT CANNOT BE DEFINED."

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #12

Chapter title: The signs of a saint: he is alert and irresolute, egoless and playful

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THE SKILFUL MASTERS (OF THE TAO) IN OLD TIMES, WITH A SUBTLE AND EXQUISITE PENETRATION, COMPREHENDED ITS MYSTERIES, WHICH WERE SO DEEP THAT THEY ELUDED MAN'S KNOWLEDGE. AS THEY WERE THUS BEYOND MAN'S KNOWLEDGE, I WILL MAKE AN EFFORT TO DESCRIBE OF WHAT THEY APPEARED TO BE.

CAUTIOUS, LIKE CROSSING A WINTRY STREAM.

IRRESOLUTE, LIKE ONE FEARING DANGER ALL AROUND.

GRAVE, LIKE ONE ACTING AS A GUEST.

SELF-EFFACING, LIKE ICE BEGINNING TO MELT.

UNPRETENTIOUS, LIKE WOOD THAT HAS NOT BEEN CARVED.

VACANT, LIKE A VALLEY.

AND DULL LIKE MUDDY WATER.

This is a rare sutra. It is an uncommon sutra because it is entirely opposite to our concept of a saint. Lao Tzu does not look at a saint as we do. Lao Tzu's saint is a more integrated individual, more complete. The one whom we look upon as a saint is an imperfect individual. It would be better to call him a good man rather than a saint. We can understand a good man and an evil man. He who does good is a good man; he who does evil is an evil man. We attribute all that is good to a good man and all that is bad to an evil person. But Lao Tzu talks of a saint as an integrated person. He is not something opposite to the evil man, and he is not only a good man. He is both, and beyond both. He is both good and evil at the same time, and hence he is capable of being beyond both.

We shall have to understand a few things before we try to understand this sutra. Then we shall be able to go into the heart of this sutra.

Lao Tzu tells us a significant fact: "THE SKILFUL MASTERS (OF THE TAO) IN OLD TIMES, WITH A SUBTLE AND EXQUISITE PENETRATION, COMPREHENDED ITS MYSTERIES, WHICH WERE SO DEEP THAT THEY ELUDED MAN'S KNOWLEDGE."

First and foremost, science discovers new truths continually. Therefore, there are original thinkers in the world of Science who discover new things. In the world of religion, original concepts have no meaning, and there are no new discoveries. In the world of religion, truth is neither old nor new. It is eternal. The same truth is discovered again and again. For an individual it can be new because he knows of it for the first time, but it is not new. Truth always is. The discoveries of science are new today and old tomorrow; but the truths of religion are neither new nor do they become old, for that which was never new can never be old. Religion is a personal search for the truth that always is. Therefore, whether it be Krishna or Christ, Lao Tzu or Mahavira, they all talk of the rishis who have also attained this truth before them.

This is noteworthy. When a scientist talks of his discovery, he will say that no one before him had discovered this fact. If someone else has discovered it before, his search is in vain. If someone else had discovered the law of gravity before Newton, his discovery would have had no meaning. This is inevitable in science. Therefore, each scientist has to prove the originality of his discovery. In religion, it is just the other way around. Here, if a thinker tries to prove his originality he will be considered wrong, because the truths of religion are not borrowed, not stale. They are neither dead truths nor false truths.

Whenever a person discovers them, they are new and fresh. This does not mean, though, that they were not known before. Thousands have known it before. Truth is always the same.

The truths of science are true today and untrue tomorrow. That is how they can be new. We can understand it this way: that only untruths can be new; truth cannot be new. You can discover new untruths that are unlike the others, because untruths can be your very own. Each man can have his own untruths, but each man cannot have his own truth. Truth is only one. And whenever a man opens his heart, he will discover this truth.

In science, man seems to be opening the door to reality (truth); but in religion, man opens his own heart to reality (truth). That which lies hidden in the depths of the heart is one. Therefore Krishna says, "Long before me, the rishis have said the same." So also says Mahavira: "Before me, the Tirthankaras have known it." Christ also says, and Mohammed also says, that the prophets before them have also known. None among them declares himself the pioneer, the original discoverer.

Lao Tzu also says: "THE SKILFUL MASTERS (OF THE TAO) IN OLD TIMES, WITH A SUBTLE AND EXQUISITE PENETRATION, COMPREHENDED ITS MYSTERIES." But he also does not mention their names. This, again, is noteworthy. Lao Tzu believes that history has been incapable of remembering those who have penetrated into the deep mysteries of Tao, because history takes note of only those people whom it can understand. There have been many in this world who have known the supreme mystery, but this knowledge was so profound and deep that when they lived it and spoke about it, people could not understand. Therefore, these great visionaries of truth were forgotten. We have the words of many of them, but the names were lost. There are still others whose names we have but whose words are lost. There are still others whose words and names are both lost. Lao Tzu talks of those saints who are not mentioned in history at all; because they were so deep that they were beyond the understanding of ordinary people.

Man's understanding covers a very small circle and what he can understand is very gross. The greater the man, the more difficult it is to understand him. It is just like in very bright light the eyes close. When we try to look at the sun, the eyes close. In exactly the same manner, our understanding closes before those who have experienced the supreme truth; we cannot understand them. What is the reason?

In this connection, we must understand the difference between science and religion. To understand science, we do not have to increase our understanding. We simply have to add some more information. If I can count up to ten, I do not have to increase my power of understanding in order to learn to count up to twenty. I only have to become acquainted with the figures up to twenty. My understanding remains the same. I can count up to 1,000. I only have to learn the juxtaposition of the digits. My collection of information will increase, but my understanding remains the same. Scientists say that a child's understanding does not grow after the age of eighteen. Understanding stops developing after eighteen, but the collection of information goes on. This does not mean that there is no difference between a boy of eighteen and an old man. But the difference is in the accumulation of knowledge only, and not in understanding. The old man has a bigger collection of information, while the young boy has less.

Scientists say the understanding stops developing much earlier in most cases. In the last world war, when the I.Q. of the recruits in the defence forces was taken in America, the shocking result was that the average I.Q. was the I.Q. of a thirteen and a half year old. This means that the I.Q. of a thirteen and a half year old and an eighty year old man may be the same.

In science, we have increased only the collection of knowledge. Hence our education depends less on understanding and more on the accumulation of information. Our education, instead of developing our understanding, develops the power of memorisation. So it is that all our examinations are based on memorisation and not on intellect.

But in religion, it is the other way around. Religion is never understood by memorisation. Understanding has got to develop. The stronger the understanding, the easier it is to understand religion.

I said that our average age of intelligence is thirteen and a half years. There is a beautiful story about Lao Tzu, that he was born old. This is very symbolic, because from childhood Lao Tzu had the I.Q. of a hundred year old man whose understanding had developed along with his age.

Collection of information, and understanding, is the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge can increase even without developing wisdom, but wisdom is not possible without developing understanding. Religion talks of a totally different realm which only comes within our understanding when our intellect undergoes a total transformation.

Says Lao Tzu: "THE SKILFUL MASTERS (OF THE TAO) IN OLD TIMES, WITH A SUBTLE AND EXQUISITE PENETRATION, COMPREHENDED ITS MYSTERIES, WHICH WERE SO DEEP THAT THEY ELUDED MAN'S KNOWLEDGE." Even today, religion is beyond man's knowledge. Perhaps religion will always be beyond man's understanding, for man's understanding is adequate only to comprehend objects but not competent enough to understand experiences. It is suitable for understanding others, but not capable of helping us to understand ourselves.

It is very easy for us to understand others, but very difficult to understand our own self. We do not have the understanding to understand ourselves. It is like this. If my eye-sight gets weak and I can only see objects at a distance and not at close quarters, it means that my vision has got fixed at a long distance. If I want to see objects closer to me, I shall have to make use of spectacles. So long-range objects are easier for me to see than short-range objects. In almost the same manner, man's understanding is fixed on the long-range, so that it is easier for us to see others, to understand others. The further a thing is away from us, the wiser we are about it, the closer it comes, the lesser becomes our understanding of it. And when it comes to our very self, we are absolutely ignorant.

This is why we find we are so clever in advising others, but not our own selves. When we see a man advising another, he appears very wise, but what he does when the same situation occurs to him is very idiotic. What is the reason we can advise others? The other is at a distance. Our understanding gets focused at a distance, and we can see things clearly. As our understanding draws nearer and nearer to us, our eyes become unfocused. When our eyes try to see things closer and closer to our own selves,

when we finally look towards our centre, everything becomes dark. A different kind of understanding is required, an understanding that can focus on the self.

Religion means the power to become centred on our own selves: a profound, self-centering understanding that gives the power to look at one's own self as we look at others, as we advise others. The ability to go beyond oneself, to be apart from oneself, to be untouched and unaffected by oneself, gives us the strength and power to enter into the deep mysteries of religion.

We are very wise people, especially where useless things are concerned. The more useless a thing, the greater is our understanding. The more purposeful a thing, the more dumb our intellect becomes. We are master craftsmen in discerning all the trash in life but when faced with a diamond, we go blind!

Says Lao Tzu: "Many have entered the world of religion, but they were beyond the understanding of the ordinary man." Why? He gives reasons also.

There were many misunderstandings regarding these men, because they were beyond the ordinary intelligence. We shall realise how profound our misunderstandings are when Lao Tzu explains the attributes of the e persons. And because they are beyond our understanding, their attributes cannot be defined clearly. We can only make an effort to understand their behaviour. Why?

We have a language that is capable of comprehending life as we live it, but we have no language to comprehend that life which we have never lived. If a useless thing has to be explained, we have clever words to express it. Do you realise that when you are angry you become so garrulous, but when it comes to expressing love; you fumble for words? You can hardly find words when it comes to prayer! We have language for anger but no language for love. The language of love can only develop if we have a closer understanding of ourselves. The language of anger is easy because it concerns the other, who is apart and away from us.

We cannot express our love half as much as we can express our anger. The lover is always lost for words. What should he say, how should he say it? But the same lover will not find himself lacking for words when he is filled with anger or hate. He will have enough to say, and more. We have no language to express that which is closest to us.

Therefore, says Lao Tzu, we can only endeavour to say something about these people. It is difficult to be precise about them; we can only surmise. And then, too, it will only be a faint inference that is derived after groping in the dark. And remember, no inference, no guesswork, is strong enough to go by. The world within is so tender, so subtle, so delicate that if your grasp is a little hard it will be lost. To grasp the mystery, your palm should be open. Do not try to tighten your grasp.

"CAUTIOUS, LIKE CROSSING A WINTRY STREAM..." Lao Tzu tries to paint a cloudy picture. And knowingly so, so that our intellect may rise and enter into the haziness of that mystery. Lao Tzu gives no precise words; he only gives suggestions. He says, "They are as alert as man would be when crossing a frozen stream on a cold wintry morning, when the waters seem to freeze the blood as one steps into it."

Let us ponder over this. The very thought of crossing an icy stream will cause each hair on your body to stand up. You will be mindful of each step you take, lest you fall into the stream. You will forget everything: the past, the future. Each step in the present will alone remain significant. Or say you are crossing a narrow mountain path where one wrong step would send you hurtling down into the yawning abyss below. At such a time would you remember your past or think of the future? Impossible, for the slightest distraction would cause you to lose your life. You would be alert and awake, perhaps for the first time in your life. Each step you take will be taken in full consciousness, with one-pointed attention.

The Zen fakirs of Japan, who have been greatly influenced by Lao Tzu, have improvised many methods to teach mao vigilance, alertness. One of these methods is the method of the sword. One cannot imagine the use of a sword in meditation, but this sutra of Lao Tzu's is the reason behind it. The Japanese fakirs knew that if you tell a man to sit and be tranquil, he cannot be; he becomes even more restless than he normally is. Those who have tried to quiet the mind this way have experienced that the mind becomes more restless than ever. It begins to run faster. All the things you normally would not think of rush to the mind. All kinds of thoughts invade the mind and there is utter chaos and confusion within. Try to sit quiet for half an hour. That half an hour will be like a mad dance within. People may think you are absorbed in meditation, but you will know that you have gone berserk within. What is the reason?

Says Lao Tzu: "Total awareness can only be there in the face of danger." In life there is danger every moment, only we do not know it. Therefore, we go about oblivious, unconscious of this danger. It is as if a man is blindfolded and he does not know he is walking on the edge of a precipice. One false step and life will come to an end. Such a man would be lost in thought even as he walked on a precipice. Remove the bandage from his eyes and his thought will stop at once and he will become aware of the danger that faces him.

So the Zen fakirs say, "Wield a sword, and wield it so that only the sword remains. The danger should become so terrible that the mind has no chance to go backward or forward. It should stop that very moment." That is why we see emblems of swords before Zen temples. Where the art of swordsmanship is taught -- such a place is called a meditation class.

Lao Tzu says: "Such persons have become alert. This is their first characteristic."

If we are asked to define a saint, we would say that saint is one who does not partake of alcohol, who does not eat meat, who does not eat at night, who lives in a hut, who goes about naked.... We would define him in terms that have nothing to do with saintliness. But Lao Tzu lays stress on awareness. This is the underlying principle of everything that is mentioned in our general definition of a saint, but our definition does not include awareness itself.

A man can be a non-vegetarian in his state of unconsciousness. He can be a vegetarian in his state of unconsciousness. A child born in a vegetarian household is a vegetarian; another is born in a non-vegetarian family and remains a non-vegetarian. Both are equally in a state of unconsciousness. If these two children are interchanged in childhood, they would easily pick up the habits of their environments, and feel no difficulty in doing so. One man drinks blood as easily as another drinks milk. The

unconsciousness in both cases is equal. If the one who eats meat thinks he is doing it in full awareness, he is mistaken; if the one who drinks milk thinks he is doing so in full awareness, he too is mistaken.

Our whole pattern of life is insensitive. Whatever we do is done in a state of insensitivity. In this insensitivity we can be tutored in a very competent manner to do anything. If meat is placed before a vegetarian, he will be sickened at the sight of it. This is not because of any spiritual quality, but only because of previous influence. He is simply not trained to eat meat. In a like manner, some people turn sick at the sight of milk. Both are in an equal state of unconsciousness.

You will never feel sick at the sight of milk; you will say it is a perfect drink. But there are sects who believe that milk is a part of blood. And it is. That is why blood increases on the intake of milk. Blood consists of white corpuscles and red corpuscles. The white corpuscles gather together and form milk. Therefore milk is a complete food, because the body obtains blood through the intake of milk. Those who are taught to look upon milk as a part of the blood are upset at the sight of milk.

There are others who claim that eggs are vegetarian. They argue that as long as life has not become manifest, an egg can be eaten as much as a vegetable. Such people, who consider themselves vegetarians, are not upset at the sight of an egg. All this does not depend upon your awareness. Rather, it depends upon your education the way you are brought up.

A person like Lao Tzu does not lay much store by what you eat and what you drink, or when you sleep and when you rise. His emphasis is on the deeper facts: do you go through life with such alertness and awareness as comes to a man who has to cross an icy stream on a winter's morning? Is every act of yours performed in complete wakefulness?

It is an interesting fact that whenever a person becomes fully aware of his inherent characteristics, his life undergoes a transformation. Then it does not matter what you eat. Rather, it becomes more important and significant for you whether or not you eat in a state of complete awareness. In a state of awareness, it is only inevitable that what is useless drops on its own and only that which is authentic remains. There is no way for the inauthentic to remain with such a person. In fact a thing's authenticity can be proven by the fact that it remains with a person of full awareness. If it falls away it was inauthentic.

Whatever I do in full awareness is a deed of virtue. That action for which I must be in a state of unconsciousness is a sin. Non-awareness is sin; awareness is virtue. So in the first definition of saintliness that Lao Tzu makes, he says: "He is extremely alert -- like a man who has to cross a stream in the winter season." Here the emphasis is on quality and not action. The emphasis is entirely on inner wisdom, rather than on the outer behaviour of the person.

Each man has his own way of acting in a situation.

For example, one man who has to cross the icy stream on a winter's morning may run through it; another may just wade through; yet another may whistle loudly to take his mind off the cold water; and still another may silently cross the stream. But one thing common among all these persons is the quality

of alertness within. How each performs the act is secondary. what is incumbent upon each is the quality of alertness.

There was a well-known fakir in the time of Lao Tzu. But by profession, he was the royal butcher. For thirty years, this man used to slaughter animals for the royal table. Lao Tzu would tell his disciples that if they wanted to know what an alert person was Like, they should see this man. No one could believe him. A butcher -- how could he be alert?

One disciple, however, volunteered to go to him. He saw him slaughtering hundreds of animals. One thing was certain -- he was an expert in his job. The disciple asked him how often he changed the knife he used. He replied, "Never. I use the same knife my father and forefathers used. I am so aware and alert when killing the animal, that the blade falls exactly in between two particular bones. As the blade passes between these bones, it automatically gets sharpened. So you see, we have no problem of blunt blades!"

When the man questioned again whether he felt nothing when he slaughtered the animals, he replied, "Only that is killed which can be killed. There is no way to kill that which cannot be killed. What I kill is already dead. That which is alive cannot be destroyed by any weapon."

This fakir spoke the same words that Krishna has spoken in the Gita. But Krishna's words we can comprehend; not so the words of this fakir. Lao Tzu's disciple went back and told him, "The man speaks words of wisdom, but his actions do not corroborate his words. Perhaps he is only talking."

Lao Tzu told him, "Go with your sword and cut off the butcher's hand."

The man went as he was bidden. As soon as he lifted his sword, the butcher stopped him saying, "Be careful to strike exactly at the joint, or else the sword will lose its edge. You are but a novice. Hence I warn you." The sword fell from the disciple's hand. He left. This fakir was alert not only when he slaughtered animals. When it came to his own hand, he was equally as alert.

The emphasis of Lao Tzu is on alertness and not action. To be vigilant is an inner quality, an inner happening, an inner perception, a wakefulness. Actions pertain to the outside; they can be different. Even two saints do not behave alike -- they cannot. But the inner quality of wakefulness of even a thousand saints is one.

Two fools can behave alike. Even a thousand fools can show the same behaviour. Their inner wakefulness is not the same. It is like this. The movements of a battalion of soldiers are uniform. On being ordered to turn right, a thousand men will turn right simultaneously. On being ordered to turn left, they will at once turn left. A soldier's actions have got to be so in uniform with the rest of the troop that he loses all his individuality. His intellect decreases to the same extent that his uniformity of action increases; this is but natural. A soldier has no use for his intellect. If he used his intellect, there would be no wars in the world. So a soldier is not required to use his intelligence. The less intelligence, the better the soldier, the more obedient, the more uniform.

On one side we see a battalion of soldiers acting as one man. On the other hand we see two saints who, even though they may be together, behave differently. Buddha and Mahavira will not act in the same manner even if they happen to be in the same situation but the inner alertness will be the same in both.

Saints are known by their alertness, while ordinary people are recognised by their actions. Since we are recognised by their actions. Since we are recognised by our actions, we tend to recognise saints in a like manner. Then, the difficulty arises. This is the reason behind all the controversies regarding saints. How can a person who regards Mahavira as a saint look upon Buddha as a saint? And how can one who worships Buddha acclaim Krishna to be a saint? Their actions are so different! We have no way of putting Mahavira, Krishna and Christ in the same category because we judge a man by his actions. That is the difficulty.

Then also, we each have different concepts regarding behaviour. If I am born in a Jaina household, my mind will be prejudiced by the conduct of Mahavira. Then I will go about the whole world with this code of conduct. Jesus will not fit into my concept of behaviour, so I will think that Jesus was not a wise man. Jainas do not believe that Buddha attained ultimate knowledge, for if he did, he would have behaved like Mahavira.

A profound Jaina thinker has written a book in which, in all good faith, he has taken considerable pains to prove that Mahavira and Buddha have given the same message to the world. But the title of his book is BHAGWAN MAHAVIRA AND MAHATMA BUDDHA. When I asked him why this differentiation, he replied; "Buddha did not reach the state of Mahavira, Therefore, at the most, we can call him a Mahatma. We cannot place him in the category of Bhagwan, with Mahavira." I asked him whether he had made this distinction knowingly. He replied, "No, but since you asked, it came to my mind."

Thus, our concepts are moulded. Mahavira stands naked. One who looks upon Mahavira as Bhagwan thinks that Buddha must still be attached to his clothes. This is only natural. If he cannot even renounce clothes, what else can he renounce? So Buddha can be looked upon as a good man, a mahatma, a saint, but he cannot be compared with Mahavira.

The same argument holds good for Krishna or Mohammed or Jesus. The same prejudice exists for a Christian. He feels that only Christ could sacrifice himself for the sake of the world. What has Mahavira sacrificed? Nothing. So however great Mahavira was, he was a selfish man. He meditated for his own self; he sought liberation for himself alone. Whatever he attained, he attained for himself. Christ was a different entity. He gave up his very life for mankind. He suffered himself to be hung on the cross for the well-being of man. Therefore, a follower of Christ finds that Mahavira and Buddha served no one except themselves; and this, according to him, is deep selfishness. He who is not rid of his selfishness, how can he be rid of his ego? A Christian believes that only one who laid aside all his self interest and sacrificed himself in the interest of others can become egoless.

A follower of Mahavira would say, "The cross was the result of some past actions. Jesus must have committed some sins in his past life for which he had to hang on the cross. And here was Mahavira. Not even a thorn dared to prick him!"

Jainas believe that when Mahavira walked, even upright thorns laid flat on the ground. How could the world dare even so much as by a pinprick to hurt so holy and virtuous a person?

These are the types of behaviour and conduct into which we are moulded; and all problems start from them. Each one of us designs the frame of our conduct around some saint or other. This frame of conduct will never tally with any other saint. Then each of us stands by our own choice and excludes everything else. And so, we become poor and miserable in spirit.

Lao Tzu does not discuss outer conduct at all. He talks only of things within. If Mahavira chooses to go about naked and if Buddha chooses to put on clothes, that makes no difference between the two. Buddha is as alert within his clothes as Mahavira is without them. If Mahavira is alert in meditating on the self, Jesus is as watchful and awake in his meditation on the entire world.

This inner quality of alertness is the most valuable thing. If this quality is missing, all selfishness of selflessness is beside the point. If this quality is present within a person, his self-interest and non self-interest are equally virtuous. If I, in my blindness, set about to serve others, it is as bad as being blindly selfish. It is not that self-interest is bad and non-self-interest is good. To be blind is bad; to be alert is good.

Understand this well, for a great deal depends on this. Our way of thinking, our way of living and all our responses depend on this. What is of importance is the 'within' and not the without. The actions without are but a shadow of the state within us. The shadows are bound to be different, because each individual is different.

Meera dances. Buddha could not dance even if he tried. Mahavira dancing would be ridiculous. But Meera is nonetheless as alert in her act of dancing as Mahavira is in his silent meditation. A devotee of Meera would say; "How dry and colourless Mahavira is -- like the stump of a tree! There is not a single green leaf in his life. Not a flower blooms, not a bird sings; there is no fragrance around him. He is dead to the outside world. Look at Meera, hear the sound of her ankle bracelets, the melody of her love songs, the strains of her Veena! Life stands out in all its splendid joy!"

But the follower of Mahavira will say, "Meera's devotion smacks of desire and love. This sighing and pining for Krishna is the sign of a troubled and unhappy mind. This desire for Krishna is a longing for passion. Why else should she cry out, 'When will you come, oh Lord? My bed is empty without you!' What else can it be but an outpouring of desires; desires that are suppressed? This is nothing but desire in the form of prayer."

If we rate conduct as all important, and as the first inevitable requisite, we shall do justice to one saint but we shall be doing injustice to all the rest of the saints of this world. And this is what is happening everyday. Unless and until we accept the inner self and realise its value, we shall never be able to understand the various saints who appear in this world.

Lao Tzu is concerned with the inner qualities of a person. He says: "He is extremely alert and wide awake, as a person would be when crossing a stream in the cold season. Within him is a lighted flame, alert and vigilant."

"THEY ARE IRRESOLUTE, LIKE ONE FEARING DANGER ALL AROUND." This is a priceless sutra. They are always irresolute, like one feeling danger all around. We would normally feel that a saint should be resolute, he should be strong of purpose, but Lao Tzu says the opposite. He says that a saint is irresolute. This is difficult to understand because we do not have a deep perception of life. Let us try to understand this sutra.

One man says, "I have made a firm resolve never to lie again." Against whom does he make this resolve? Against his own self. Where is the need for such stringent rigidity? Because he knows that the liar within him is stronger than him. If he is not stern with him, he is bound to lie. So he says that he has vowed strongly, and the stronger the oath, the earlier it is broken. The more his vows break, the more resolutions he makes; but against whom does he raise his defences? He within whom the opposite no longer exist has no need for vows and oaths.

We take a vow against the opposite that is hidden within us. I vow not to give vent to anger, for I know that anger resides in me. I vow not to indulge in sex, for I know the sex-desire lies hidden within me. I swear to be a celibate for I know that sexual desire is within me and to suppress it, I have to be very resolute. And so I go along, suppressing all the opposite tendencies within me. But what about those people within whom there is no opposite strain to make resolutions against? They are bound to be without any resolutions. Do not take this to mean that they are always wavering, or that they do not have the courage and therefore are irresolute. They are so brave that they have no need to be resolute.

Mahavira did not get up each morning and resolve to practise non-violence. Non-violence was so natural to him that it required no resolve on his part. If he was shaken out of sleep, even then nonviolence would be present in him. Therefore, Mahavira did not have to take any vows.

Buddha never prepared himself for the questions he might be asked. That is only necessary when the person does not have the capability to respond. Then he has to prepare himself against all contingencies -- how he will answer when he is asked this and that. But one whose mind is alert has no resolutions. He is asked and the answer comes; there are no pre-resolutions.

Bernard Shaw was asked by a friend what he had decided to speak about at the meeting he was going to attend. Shaw replied, "Since it is I who am to decide, and I who am to speak, I shall decide what to speak about when I am called upon to do so. If someone else had to decide and I had to speak, then preparation would be necessary. Since it is all up to me, I shall decide at the right moment."

The friend advised him that it was always better to come prepared, in order to avoid mistakes and errors. The man was right. If he had to speak, he would be able to speak only if he had prepared his speech. And the fun of it is, that such a man invariably makes mistakes. But he who speaks extemporaneously can never fumble or go wrong, for he speaks what comes from within.

Irresolute means: I am prepared to accept whatever the moment brings. I shall respond to the moment as best I can and shall make no provisions beforehand. I shall not decide today how I am to live tomorrow. He who decides today how he is to live tomorrow, kills his tomorrow today. His future becomes the past. If I decide each word I speak beforehand, I become a machine and not a human being. A man who makes pre-resolutions is a man who has no confidence in himself. Such people can only live by pre-resolutions.

Those who are fully confident in themselves make no resolutions. Each step they take is self-deciding. When Jesus was about to be crucified, one of his disciples asked him, "What will you do when you are crucified?"

Jesus replied, "Let them put me on the cross at least. I have no idea what I shall do. I shall witness the happening just as you will, so how can I decide now?"

Our weak mind decides first before it acts. Remember, only a weak mind makes decisions. It is a general belief that a strong mind is a decisive mind. That is as it should be. If a weak mind makes a decision, it will be stronger than those weak minds which make no decisions. But Lao Tzu talks of saints whose minds are no more. There is no question of a weak mind. There is no mind at all! Weakness remains as long as the mind remains. The mind is the weakness.

What have saints to decide about? Nothing. They live each moment as it comes; they live from moment to moment. There is no provision for the moment which is to come.

There is a well-known prayer of Jesus in which he says, "Give us this day our daily bread." Jesus says to the Lord to give him his bread for the day; that is enough. Why should he worry about the morrow? Today means now, this moment; this moment is enough. Jesus is always irresolute. He has no resolutions because he has his own self within him. Those who do not live with their self can only live by decisions.

A person comes to Buddha and asks a question. Buddha gives him a reply. Another man comes and asks the same question. Buddha gives him a different reply. Ananda, his disciple, would ask him, "Don't you think you are inconsistent? A moment ago you gave one answer to one man and a moment later you gave a different answer to another man; and yet they both asked the same question."

Buddha replied, "The question they asked was the same but they were both different individuals. Besides, the first man asked me in the morning and the second put the question to me in the afternoon. How much Ganges water has flowed away from morning till noon? I am not bound to what I said in the morning. It is now afternoon, so my answer shall be of the afternoon. When it is evening, the answer will be of the evening."

If we set out to find consistency in Buddha's words we shall have to search deep. Then only will the consistency appear. On the surface there is nothing but inconsistency. We shall find one statement contradicting another. Only mediocre people are consistent. If you probe into them you will find that their views at the time of death are the same as they were born with. In other words, they have never

left their cradles. One who is alive is inconsistent in a mundane manner but he has an intrinsic consistency within. This is difficult to recognise except by those who are in search of inner consistency.

Buddha tells one man, "There is no God." To another he says, "God is." When a third asks, he remains silent. Now all three answers -- God is not; God is; God both is and is not -- look very inconsistent, but there is a deep consistency within. When Ananda insists on an explanation, Buddha says, "What was not told to you, you should not have heard. It was not your question. You did not ask it. So why have you taken in the answer? If you take upon yourself all the answers I give others, you will find it impossible to sleep! Why are you so restless and upset about them, when I, who gave the answers, am sleeping comfortably?"

Ananda says, "It may be all right for you, but I cannot rest. How can you give three answers to the same question? In the morning you said, 'God is not'. At noon you said, 'God is.' In the evening, to the same question, you gave no reply! How can this be?"

Buddha replied, "How can I be inconsistent? An inconsistent man is one who has a decided doctrine. I am like a mirror. This mirror took on the form of the first man who asked in the morning. I have no doctrine of my own. Can you ask the same of a mirror: that you showed one face in the morning and quite another in the evening?"

Buddha says further, "The man who came in the morning was an atheist. He believed that God is not. He came to ask me so that he could quote me as a witness if I said, 'God is not.' He was wrong. Without seeking, he assumed that God is not. I had to shake him out of his belief so I said firmly, 'God is!' Now he will have to begin his search anew. Now I shall follow him wherever he goes. Whenever the thought comes to him that God is not, my form will come before his eyes and he will remember: this man said that God is.

"The man who came in the afternoon was a theist, just as the previous one was an atheist. He too has not searched, but only assumed that God is. He is as full of ignorance as the atheist. I had to shake him out of his ignorance also and start him in his search for truth. I told him, just as firmly, that God is not. Now, when this man goes to the temple, he will see my face before his mind's eye as he offers worship to the idol. He too had come to ask me in order to add weight to his belief and go deeper into puja. But his worship was false because his belief lacks the authenticity of experience. He knows nothing.

"One believed, without knowing, that God is not. Another believed, without knowing, that God is. They are both the same. This seems contradictory to you, Ananda, but that is why I had to give contradicting answers. There is an underlying consistency in both answers. Both had to be shaken out of their state of ignorance.

"The man who came in the evening was neither a theist nor an atheist. His search was not to find a witness for his belief. His curiosity was plain and innocent. He had asked, "Does God exist?" He had no belief of his own. If I were to answer this man either in the affirmative or the negative, perhaps my yes or no would have become his belief. He was so innocent that the use of words would have proved

dangerous. Therefore I kept silent. My silence has shaken him also, and he has got his answer: if you want to know whether God is or is not, do not ask; be silent.

"These answers seem inconsistent -- seen from the surface. Deep within there is a thread of consistency that is too deep, too mysterious to understand; it is beyond the grasp of mere words."

Such persons are irresolute. They have no rules and doctrines to go by. They have no strong ties. Rather, they have no ties. They are free, as if they are always ready to fly away in the skies. They are always alert and watchful. The more certain a person, the more insensitive he is. The more irresolute a person, the more alert he is. You want to be certain so that you can sleep peacefully. You do not wish to be alert all twenty-four hours of the day.

People come to me and say, "Tell us for certain that God is."

I say to them: "However much I may say, what difference is that going to make to you?"

They say that they will then rest assured and their belief will get stronger. Their decision that God is will be confirmed by me. Why do they do this? It is not that they are keen to seek God. It is only to reassure themselves of their belief so that they do not need to go through the arduous task of seeking; they do not then need to be alert.

There is danger in the path of the search for the self. It requires hard labour and all your energy. You need untold courage; you have to pay the price. To save themselves from all this bother, it is easier to go to a man of wisdom and get his confirmation. So they say: "Please only say yes. Why do you hesitate? Assure us of His existence so that we can be freed from anxiety."

Why does a man want to set his mind at rest? Because then he can revel in his insensibility; he does not have to do anything. The more undecided a man, the more spontaneous are his actions, because the more alert he is.

You may not have noticed the fact that when a stranger comes and sits next to you, you are at once on your guard. You sit up, you are alert! Then you begin a conversation with him. You find out his name, where he stays, what he does. And then, your back slides back into the chair. You are now satisfied and assured that he is just "one of us". There is no need to be alarmed. Our eagerness for acquaintance is not because we are keen to know people. We are only eager to place the stranger in one of the manifold categories we have created -- to find out whether he is a Sikh or a Muslim or a Jaina -- and be relieved of our anxiety. The mind asks, 'Who is this man?' This is only a trick of the mind in order to keep us insensible. Our religion, our scriptures, our so-called saints -- they all help us and pacify us so that we can remain asleep.

Says Lao Tzu: "Undecided, irresolute they are, and extremely alert." Nothing about them is predetermined, so they have to be absolutely alert. The whole universe is unknown, a stranger. No one is acquainted with the other. All acquaintanceships are false, so one has to be alert. Every inch we walk, we walk on unknown paths. All routes are uncharted, like a sailor at sea who has no compass to guide

him. He has to be alert. The more irresolute a person, the more alert he will be; the more resolute a person, the more secure and insensible he is.

Here again Lao Tzu talks of things within: irresoluteness, alertness. To be alert means to be on guard, as if you are surrounded by danger on all sides. Have you ever had a chance to observe a deer in the forest? The slightest sound, the rustle of a leaf and he is at once on the alert. His whole being becomes fully awakened, and he listens keenly with all his senses geared to this slight sound. Observe a rabbit: how alert he becomes at the faintest sound. Or the cat in your house, sleeping on the doormat. A slight sound and she jumps to attention. Her whole being takes an immediate jump from sleep into a wakefulness for danger is everywhere.

Man is the most protected animal. He has made such arrangements for his security that he has lost the quality of alertness which comes so naturally to other animals. He lives in a house which he can secure with a lock, he has money which he can secure in a bank, everything is secure. Even if he dies there is no worry for his successors because his life insurance will take care of them. He has no anxiety and fear; everything is taken care of. All this security destroys the sense of alertness. In this respect, animals are better off than human beings.

Lao Tzu says: a saint is as alert as a wild animal. He makes no provisions for his security. He lives, keenly alive to the dangers that surround him every moment. And danger there is, always. No matter how many precautions we take, the danger remains. Death is present every moment, everywhere, and can descend on us at any moment. But we try to overlook it, to avoid this unavoidable fact.

We believe that death is for others, not for us. We see others die, and not ourselves. Hence the feeling that it is always someone else who dies. But those who die were under the same illusion. Death is all around us. Any moment, life's drama can come to an end. If a man points a dagger at you and says, "You have one moment to live. Think whatever you want to think," what will you think? All thinking will stop, for all your defence barriers will crumble before your eyes. That one moment is all you have, death is standing before you. You become alert.

Buddha always sent his bhikshus to the cremation ground because he used to say that unless and until a person realises the proximity of death, he cannot go into meditation. He ordered them to go and live there and see the bodies burning and the bones scattered about. When he gets up in the morning, he will see a body burning; in the afternoon yet another corpse burning; and he will fall to sleep at night seeing another corpse burning. Wherever he goes he confronts evidence of death; bones, ashes, flames. He experiences death all around him.

When Moggalayan first went to Buddha, he first told him to go and meditate in a cremation ground. Moggalayan was surprised and said, "When you are with me, why should I go elsewhere? I will meditate here with you. What is special about a burning ground?"

Buddha said, "You will not be able to meditate as yet, for I also am a protection for you. You will always feel, 'What is there to fear when Buddha himself is with me?' Go and see death standing by your side; feel its presence near you and around you each moment. The day you find death by your side, you will

find me also with you, and not before this." Moggalayan said he was afraid of the burning ground, and implored Buddha not to send him away. When we go to a saint, it is only to seek protection. When we go to a temple or a mosque or a gurudwara, it is for the same reason. We are always trying to fortify our defences; we make long-term plans to be sure of our safety.

People come to me and say, "That the soul is eternal is an absolute certainty!" They lay stress on this certainty, feeling most uncertain within themselves. They are scared even when saying this.

A woman once came to me. She was doing some research on the immortality of the soul, and life after death. I was a little puzzled when I noticed that while she talked about the immortality of the soul and life after death, her hands were trembling. I told her to put her hands up so that I could see them. She was surprised and asked the reason. I gave her a piece of paper and told her to hold it in her hands as she talked. I also told her I wanted to see the trembling of her hands. She admitted that her hands trembled, they even sweated profusely, whenever she discussed this topic. She also felt very nervous. All the same, she maintained very forcefully that the soul was immortal: it is the body that dies.

I asked her how she was inspired to carry out this research. Had she studied this subject, meditated on it, experienced it a little? She said, "No. But my mother died when I was a child. My father, and death, became a heavy burden on me." Then, in the same breath, she continued. "But death is only of the body; the soul never dies."

Her fear is of death, but she clings to the immortality of the soul. This is a defence measure against death. She wants someone to assure her. So she has involved herself in this research, not to prove that the soul is immortal because only if it can be proven can she be rid of the fear of death that plagues her.

Buddha said to Maudgalyan, "First experience death. Then only will you develop the quality of vigilance. And when you are vigilant, then alone can you go into meditation, never otherwise."

Meditation means an alertness, a freshness, a constant wakefulness, not a single moment of insensibility -- like a person surrounded by danger on all sides. These saints are as irresolute as alert.

"GRAVE, LIKE ONE ACTING AS A GUEST...." When a guest whom you have not known at all arrives at your house, he has to be on his best behaviour. Even you, the host, put your best front forward. You will give him the best room in your house, make arrangements for his meals and attend to his smallest requirement. As days pass by, the guest becomes familiar and gradually your hospitality wanes. When the guest becomes too familiar, you even employ ways and means to be rid of him.

There is play-acting when two strangers meet. And when they meet, it is not their real selves who meet but the masks that each has put on. After a short time, when they become familiar with each other, the false masks fall off and the real face is seen. Then we feel cheated. No one has cheated you. When there is a sense of unfamiliarity people put up a grave front in their dealings with each other so that only that is visible which is disciplined, refined and orderly. Then, as familiarity develops, all controls are gone. When two people become great friends, it only means that they can freely abuse each other and not take it amiss. All propriety is gone.

Says Lao Tzu: "They live throughout their lives as if they were guests." Saints never acknowledge this world as their own. They are never at home in it. Throughout their lives they remain an outsider, a visitor. Colin Wilson has written a wonderful book called THE OUTSIDER. He took great pains in this book to show that all the people who have mattered in this world, be it Socrates or Buddha or Lao Tzu, were all outsiders. They lived in the world like a guest would stay in the house of people he did not know. This feeling of being a guest remained with them, for the feeling of the unknown never left them.

It is an interesting fact that the less we know of ourselves, the more we feel we know others. When we begin to get familiar with our own self, we stop knowing others. Look at it in this way. One who says, "I know so many people" is invariably a person who does not know himself. He who has known himself knows at once that he knows nobody. Such a man lives, throughout life, like a stranger, a guest.

Lao Tzu says, "Their life is a profound performance. They are but guests in this world, so their conduct is only play-acting, not real." Let us try to understand this by an example.

After twelve long years, Buddha returned home. His brother, Ananda, had taken a promise from him that he would always be where Buddha was. Buddha had given the promise. At the border of his father's kingdom, people were gathered to welcome him. Only Yashodhara, his wife, was not in the crowd. Buddha said to Ananda. "See, Ananda, Yashodhara did not come." Ananda was worried: after attaining Buddhahood, Buddha was still concerned about his wife! It had been twelve years since he attained supreme knowledge, and yet his wife remained in his thoughts! He held his patience, and decided to question Buddha at the right moment.

Buddha reached the palace. No sign of Yashodhara. He went inside. There was still no sign of her. Buddha then said to Ananda, "I have promised to keep you with me wherever I go. I do not wish to break my pledge, but I have to make a request today. I left Yashodhara and ran away, for there was no other way. If after this long period of separation, I go to meet her with a crowd around me, she will be displeased. Let me give her a chance to work out the anger that she has harboured all these long years. Please, allow me to be with her alone."

Ananda was terrified by his request. Where was the need now for Buddha to meet his wife alone? But Buddha was right. His meeting with Yashodhara in private was fruitful. Yashodhara vented all her anger on him. She accused him of having deserted her, of not having so much as told her before he left. Buddha stood calm and serene and listened to her patiently. When her anger was spent, she broke into tears; and in the flow of those tears, she released the pain and suffering she had undergone. Then the tears stopped. She looked up at the serene face. "You came alone to see me," she said, "and that has changed me completely. Had you come with the crowd, I would have known that there was no place for me in your heart."

Buddha still stood quiet and serene. Yashodhara fell at his feet. All complaints had vanished; all pain had fled. She asked his forgiveness. Buddha said to her, "There was only one desire in me: that you accept what I have brought along with me." This was all play-acting on the part of Buddha, but it brought about the initiation of his wife. She became a bhikshuni.

After seven years, she went into deep meditation. Then one day she told him: "A fine act you put up that day! My joy knew no bounds when I heard that you had inquired after me when you entered the kingdom. The long suffering of loneliness left me that very moment. Then how happy I was when you left Ananda outside and came along to see me! All my complaints, all my anger towards you, melted away. But now I know it was just an act you put up and it was this that brought about the change in me."

Says Lao Tzu: "Such people can never become an intrinsic part of this world, but they always act as if they were." Such people establish no relationships, but always pretend to deep relationships. This acting on their part is very serious and impressive. If it were not so, it could not last.

This is an inner characteristic of a Saint that being all outsider, he lives as if he is very much within life. He lives like a guest, enacting a profound role in life. He is no longer the doer. Now, whatever is, is outside of him. He is only enacting the role of Rama in the RAMA LEELA. He is not the real Rama.

If we investigate onto the life of the authentic Rama, we shall be surprised to know that even he was a mere actor in the whole saga of the RAMAYANA. This is his greatness! It is because of this that he could leave Sita in the jungle, on the basis of the words of an ignorant washerman, this same Sita whom he had wagered his life to find. And it is because of this that he could hand over to another the kingdom he won with such great difficulties -- just like that! If all this was real to Rama, he would have found it difficult -- nay impossible, to act in this manner. But this was all part of a big play.

Rama is absolutely serious. There was no need for him to discard Sita on the mere words of a dhobi! But he is serious, in his act; he enacts his role seriously. When Sita is lost, he cries for her; he is beside himself with grief. He asks the trees and the insects whether they have seen his Sita!

Also, he runs after a golden deer! Even we know there are no golden deer; Rama must also be knowing. Yet he runs after a golden deer. And later? he calls out to Lakshman for help!

Sita also played her part well. Lakshman refuses to leave Sita and go to Rama's aid, because Rama had ordered him not to leave her when he was gone. But Rama's cry for help goads her to say hard words to Lakshman, to whom Rama's word was law. She says "I know you wish your brother to die so that you can have me!" These are words that Sita could only have spoken if she was enacting the role of Sita; otherwise they have no meaning.

Poor Lakshman is caught between the two. He is filled with anger! In refusing to go, he was obeying Rama's orders, yet here was Sita accusing him of ulterior motives! In his terrible anger, he forgot Rama, he forgot Sita. His ego was hurt; he was filled with rage. He left Sita and went away. This was a part of a very great act.

Such harsh words from such a one as Sita seem most unbecoming but only to those who have not understood the whole arrangement of this play and who have taken it to be an authentic happening. They will find her words hard and cruel, such as they sounded to Lakshman for whom this was not acting. To him, everything was real.

In the whole saga of the Ramayana, we have acknowledged Rama to be the main character and have called it the RAMA LEELA. There is a reason to this. In the whole epic, Bharata, his brother, has played an equally important part. For that matter even Ravana could have been considered the main character, for there would have been no RAMA LEELA without him. And Sita, of course, was the centre of the whole drama; all events are woven round her. But Rama has been considered the hero of the Ramayana for the simple reason that he was only person who knew this all to be nothing more than a drama, a mere play.

"SELF-EFFACING, LIKE ICE BEGINNING TO MELT..." Just like snow melts in the sun, the saint's feeling of 'I am' is forever melting. This needs to be understood, for this is a profound difference.

A saint is called a saint because he becomes the universal spirit (Paramatman). This ego, this feeling of the self can be taken in two ways. Within us is the ego.: 'I am'. This is an absolutely false 'I'. If this melts, we attain sainthood. In the saint, the stress is not on the 'I' but on the 'am'. When we say 'I am', our stress is on the ego; the 'am' is merely a tail that trails along with the 'I' a shadow. The 'I' of the saint's 'I am' drops and only the 'am' remains. This is asmita the sense of being. 'I' is the ego; am-ness is the sense of just being. But this am-ness of the saint is melting continuously. The day he loses his am-ness, he himself is lost. The saint is gone. Only ishwara remains -- existence.

Lao Tzu says, "Their am-ness melts each moment, like ice melts with the rays of the sun." This is an internal happening. If we examine Buddha, Mahavira, Krishna or Christ minutely, we shall not find this am-ness in them anywhere.

Mahavira was going along a road when people stopped him and said, "Do not go this way; it is a deserted road. A fearful snake lives there whose very hiss can kill a man."

Mahavira said, "If no one goes that way, what about the snake's food? How does he subsist? Now if we were thus warned, even if it was a rat and not a snake, the first thought that would come to us would be about ourselves: whether we should go or should not go. The very fact that Mahavira's first concern was for the snake -- that perhaps he is hungry -- shows that his am-ness had melted. The thought of his own self does not come to him. The thought of the snake, catches hold of him. Mahavira said, "You did well to tell me. Now I shall have to go. Who will go if even I do not go?"

Mahavira set out in search of the snake, so goes this touching tale. The snake bites his toe. But instead of blood, milk flowed! This is poetry. It is symbolic of love, the symbol of 'the mother.' Only in a mother resides the rare capacity of blood turning into milk.

Psychologists say if a mother is bereft of love, her blood does not change into milk. The intense love of a mother for her child changes her blood into milk (food) for him.

This story is symbolic: Mahavira's blood turns into milk. This symbolism can be only understood when we understand Mahavira's concern for the snake. "The snake is hungry. I must go. Who would go if I didn't?" This is the anxiety, the deep concern of a mother towards the child.

Buddha was passing by a place. People warned him not to go any further. "A ruthless killer, Angulimal, lives there," they told him. He had sworn to wear a garland of a thousand fingers. He had nine hundred and ninety-nine. He was now restless. If no man came his way tonight, he would kill his mother to complete his garland. No one dared to go that way, for this man was completely mad. When Buddha heard this, he set out to meet him. His followers tried to stop him. "Please do not go this way! If he is ready to kill his mother, he will not spare you either."

Buddha replied, "Let him kill me so his mother can be spared." This is a proof of the am-ness dissolving. The idea of being was dropping off within Buddha.

When the 'I' is not, a saint comes into being. When the 'am' is lost, he becomes God himself. The saint's am-ness begins to dissolve gradually and his being disperses into the universal being.

"UNPRETENTIOUS, LIKE WOOD THAT HAS NOT BEEN CARVED...." The saint makes no claim for himself. He is like a piece of wood that has not been given any form. There is a chair made of wood, a table, an idol -- all these pieces of wood can claim to be the form they are shaped into. Lao Tzu says: "The saint is like uncarved wood." He makes no assumptions about who he is. He looks upon himself as a freshly cut piece of wood from the jungle which can become anything but as yet is nothing.

Says Lao Tzu, "A saint is always undetermined about himself." He never states that he is such. Remember, as soon as he makes any claim about himself, he draws a boundary. The unclaimed is always infinite; and the infinite has got to remain unclaimed.

Generally, people make it a point to say who they are. One says he is a doctor; another says he is a judge or a politician or this or that. Ask a saint. He claims nothing for himself.

When Bodhidharma was asked by the king of China, "Who are you?" he replied, "I do not know." The king was shocked. "I came to you for self-knowledge, but you do not even know who you are!" It is difficult to understand Bodhidharma. That is why Lao Tzu says, "Saints are beyond our understanding." The king took Bodhidharma's statement as he would take the statement of any ordinary person.

Bodhidharma laughed and said to the king, "Stay awhile with people who talk a different language so that you can understand me." Bodhidharma was trying to convey that he had no proclamations to make. What could he say to the question about who he was?

Saints remain unproclaimed. It is he who is not a saint who is always eager to proclaim who he is because he is afraid that otherwise there will be no other way to recognise him. The saint is assured within himself. Whatever he is is silent, unproclaimed.

"VACANT LIKE A VALLEY...." Saints are not like the peaks of the mountains. They do not tower high above in the sky; they do not make themselves prominent. They are like a valley -- deep, hidden in darkness.

Then, the last part of the sutra: "AND DULL LIKE MUDDY WATER." Can you imagine a saint this way? "VACANT LIKE A VALLEY AND DULL LIKE MUDDY WATER"? Imagine the muddy rain water. There is no claim to cleanliness or purity, leave aside saintliness. The saint is not likened to the pure waters of the Ganges. He is likened to the muddy rain water that can flow with equal ease in a gutter or in the Ganges; it makes no difference. A saint can live with the lowliest and most insignificant with as much ease as with the most excellent, the most pure. He does not differentiate between heaven and hell.

One last point. A king of Japan was in search of a saint. After reading Lao Tzu, he set out to find a saint who was as vacant as a valley and dull like muddy water. He went to temples that had golden pinnacles. The saints he met there were all like the peaks of mountains. He returned to his kingdom, disappointed. As he was entering the gates of his city, a beggar stopped him and said, "I have seen you coming and going from here many times. What is it you seek?"

The king said, "I am in search of a saint who is deep and empty like a valley and dull like muddy water, as Lao Tzu has described."

The fakir laughed and said, "Go on your way." The king said, "It was you who asked. And now you say, "Go away!"

The fakir laughed and said again, "Go on your way."

The king was puzzled. He looked deep into the man's eyes and was shocked to see deep emptiness within them. He said, "You are but a beggar. How come your eyes are vacant like a valley? I never cared to look at you for you are only a beggar and might ask for alms. Oh God, I have searched every where!"

The fakir said, "You searched where there were mountain peaks. You never cared to look here, in the valley. But please tell no one. I have taken the form of a beggar to hide myself."

The king ran to his palace and spread the news around. The next day he came with his full retinue, but the fakir was gone. Other beggars told him that before leaving he said, "My guru ordered me not to proclaim myself. I have erred. I talked to the king and he saw in my eyes. My guru told me to keep my eyes cast down, lest someone sees the valley. And he told me to don the garb of a beggar so as to live like muddy water." This is a very personal hint given by Lao Tzu.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #13

Chapter title: From repose to equality. to attain liberation through the golden mean

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WHO CAN REPOSE IN A MUDDY WORLD?

BY LYING STILL IT BECOMES CLEAR.

WHO CAN MAINTAIN HIS CALM FOR LONG?

BY ACTIVITY, REST COMES BACK TO LIFE.

HE WHO EMBRACES THIS TAO

GUARDS AGAINST BEING OVERFULL.

BECAUSE HE GUARDS AGAINST BEING OVERFULL,

HE IS BEYOND WEARING OUT AND RENEWAL.

The last lines of yesterday's sutra were left half-explained. We shall begin with them today. With regard to a saint's characteristics, Lao Tzu has said in the end that they are empty like a valley and humble like muddy waters. The way we live, our manner of living, is not of being empty but, rather, of being full. Whether we fill ourselves with wealth or honour or position or knowledge, or whether we fill ourselves with renunciation, we are all eager to fill ourselves. It seems that deep within there is so much emptiness that it is eating into our vital parts. We strive to fill ourselves so as to be rid of this emptiness.

One thing is that we try to fill ourselves all our lives and another thing is that, finally, we find ourselves as empty as before. No one has been able to fill himself. Whatever the object, whatever the direction, be it of this world or the next, we remain empty, vacant. Sikandar died empty-handed, so did Einstein; so did all the great men of the world; they all left empty-handed. From childhood, we start this race to fill ourselves. All our life is spent in this pursuit and yet we die as empty as we were born. Those who are failures in life die empty-handed, but those who count themselves successful, they too die empty-handed.

Those who were failures at least had some hope of being filled if they were successful. One who has failed consoles himself that luck was against him or situations were not conducive to him and hence he failed. But those who succeed have no excuses left. They cannot say they had no opportunity. Sikandar could not give any excuse for his emptiness. Throughout his life he tirelessly filled himself, and yet he

remained empty within. The nature of that which we strive to fill is to be empty, and hence it cannot be filled. The last and basic definition Lao Tzu gives of a saint is that he is empty like a valley. He who accepts his emptiness and makes no bid to fill himself -- not out of despair or dejection, or a sense of defeat -- is a saint.

The well known Hindi poet Dinkar has written a book entitled FOR THE DEFEATED, THE NAME OF THE LORD. Those who lose have nothing but the Lord's name, the Lord's name is left with them. He who loses is unable to take the name of God. But since he is helpless, he has nothing else to go by, he is forced to do so.

It is easy for us to understand that a loser's hand is an empty hand, but a gainer's hand also proves to be empty. This is because our inner nature, is to be empty. We cannot fill the emptiness within us just as it is impossible to darken the sun because it is its nature to be filled with light.

Nothing can be done against our nature. All efforts to do so become unsuccessful in the end. Those who attempt to go against nature are defeated ultimately. They are filled with sorrow and pain; their ego is wounded, their life becomes one long tale of distress and disappointment.

According to Lao Tzu, a saint is not one who has resorted to the name of God because he is defeated in life and hence, has resigned himself to accept his lot as it is. Lao Tzu says, "A saint knows that it is our very nature to be empty. It is a factual experience that he accepts." He also knows that it is a vain attempt to go against nature. It is foolishness to do so. This is not defeatism; it is knowledge. The saint discovers through his wisdom, through his developed maturity. He understands -- because he has experienced life -- that it is the nature of the atman, the existence within a person, to be empty. Emptiness is its quality.

Remember, emptiness alone can be infinite. Nothing that is full can be infinite. Whenever a thing begins to fill, the boundary to form. Also, emptiness alone can be established within its own self. Fullness is always attained through something else. Take an empty pot. An empty pot means it is only a pot. Once it is full, it is because of something that is added to it, be it water or pebbles or soil or gold. It can only be filled with things that are alien to it. If we want to be only ourselves, we shall have to be empty. If we fill ourselves, it will always be filled with that which is foreign to us.

The purest form of self is always empty; because except for the self, there is nothing there. Whenever we fill ourselves, the other becomes present. This is our trouble. We fill ourselves with others: friends, lovers, dear ones, wife or husband, wealth, status etcetera. But the other can never penetrate into the self; it always remains without. All of life passes by in this mad race to fill the within; all our energy is spent in this pursuit. Ultimately we find that the inside is as empty as ever.

Lao Tzu says, "The saint lives in his emptiness." He does not fill himself with the other, no matter what the other is. Lao Tzu says: "The saint does not fill himself with Ishwara (God) either. Nor does he fill himself with religion or good deeds." It is the saint's religion to be empty, his very God is emptiness; because to be empty is to be Tao, the universal law.

This emptiness frightens us. We are frightened even to be alone by ourselves. If there is no one with us, we feel bored; we feel life to be useless. The other is very necessary. It is an interesting fact that none of us are prepared to live by ourselves, alone. We can live with others, not with our own selves. Also, we, who cannot bear to be by ourselves, alone, feel that others will be happy in our company. The other also is of the same opinion. He too cannot bear to be alone with himself. And we hope to be happy in his company! We are thus dependent on each other. This dependence is so foolish that the one whom we depend on is equally as dependent on us. We live by his strength; he lives by ours.

We are all weak and, because we are all weak, we cannot notice the delusion of inter-dependence. Sainthood is an attempt to see the reality. It is an effort to see reality as it is. He who is ready to see reality soon begins to experience the joy of it. Those who have realised that to fill oneself is to be in hell have stopped filling themselves and chosen to be empty. They are aware of the fact that "I am empty".

It is interesting to note that within the last two hundred years, the western world has created the maximum amount of things that a man could wish to possess. Houses are filled with every thing for comfort; technology has filled the earth. A common man possesses things that even an emperor of old could not dream of. The West is filled with all that man needs -- and much more. And yet, one feeling that has become most prominent among the people of the West during the course of these two hundred years, is the feeling of emptiness.

The most important word in the West today is emptiness. Camus, Sartre, Heidegger, all talk of emptiness. They say, "Life is absolutely empty." They are restless that this emptiness cannot be filled. No poor society can ever feel the emptiness of the West because when the stomach is empty the emptiness of the soul cannot be felt. Then all the time is utilised in filling the empty stomach. Today, the West has succeeded in filling the stomach, filling the body. And yet they experience that all is empty; there is nothing within.

Says Lao Tzu: "A man knows only two ways to deal with this emptiness: he either tries to fill it, or to forget it." First he tries to fill it, as Sikandar did. When he finds this to be impossible, he tries to forget it by taking drugs, by indulging in wine, woman and song. But, says Lao Tzu, it cannot get filled and it cannot be forgotten.

Life's rules are very strange. The more you try to forget a thing, the more you remember it. You cannot forget a thing by wishing to forget it, for in your effort to forget you have to remember that which you wish to forget. When a man takes alcohol to drown the memory of this emptiness, he is actually remembering it in a very deep manner. When he comes to his senses, the remembrance will be equally profound -- and more so, at the realisation that it could not be shaken off and he has harmed his body in the bargain. The feeling of emptiness remains as it was. It is now felt more deeply; it becomes more evident. This emptiness can never be filled or forgotten.

Lao Tzu says saints are those who neither fill nor forget. They accept the emptiness within them. And then, a wonderful happening, a miracle, takes place. He who accepts his emptiness finds that he is empty no more.

This will seem rather difficult to understand. Actually, the emptiness within is accentuated by our eagerness to fill it. The more eager we are, the more we feel the emptiness within. Once we have accepted the fact that we are empty and given up all hankering to fill ourselves -- when we make no effort to forget the emptiness and we accept it fully -- not that there is emptiness within me but rather, that 'I am emptiness' -- then only does the emptiness disappear.

For the emptiness to be vivid, it requires a background of expectation of fulfilment, just as white chalk is necessary in order to write on a blackboard. The white of the chalk stands out against the blackness of the blackboard. The black sets off the white. To experience anything, the opposite is required. Emptiness hence becomes vivid because of our eagerness to be full. When this eagerness to be full no longer is there, the feeling of emptiness is also lost.

We experience pain because we have expectations of joy. When there is no desire for happiness, there is no experience of unhappiness. Death frightens us because we hold on to life. If we do not hold on to life, death will have no meaning. Insult pricks us like a thorn because we are eager for the flowers of honour and acclaim. If we do not hanker for the flowers, the thorns will disappear on their own. The opposite is always necessary in order to experience.

Your emptiness is a proof of your ambition to be full; your sorrow is evidence of your yearning for joy. If insult pains you, it is a proof of your madness for honour. If you understand this well, you will understand Lao Tzu when he says it is the saint's intrinsic quality to be empty.

Lao Tzu then goes on to say that the saint is humble, like muddy waters. Humility, humbleness, is of two kinds. There is one humility which is only an ornament of the ego. If we wish to symbolise it we may say, "As pure as the waters of the Ganges." Purity has a sense of arrogance, and so has humility.

Such a humble man declares his humility everywhere. He goes on falling at the feet of others and declares himself to be less than the dust under their feet. But look into his eyes, observe his demeanour, and you will find him the opposite of his claim to being nothing. If you tell him a more humble person than him, he shall feel more hurt than an arrogant man at the thought of being second place. Can humility be graded thus? If humility can be graded higher or lower, then where is humility?

The ego seeks the peaks. Therefore he who is conscious of his ego, is not humble; he is an egoist. Humility cannot be felt without the feeling of arrogance within. Hence, he who proclaims his humility is an egotist. Otherwise he would never get the feeling of humility. There is no way to feel humility. But ego can put on the disguise of humility. It does. We initiate our children into it.

I visited a university once. The vice-chancellor's room bore a small plaque on which was written: "Humility alone is worthy of honour." This must have been for the benefit of the students. But the first half of this sentence is in complete contradiction to the latter half. Those who are humble are revered, so he who desires to be respected must strive to be humble. In our ego-ridden society, he who wishes for honour must practice humility otherwise he will not be respected. We respect only those who seem full of humility. It never occurs to us that this humility is put on in order to gain recognition and honour.

Can such acts of humility -- folding one's hands, or bowing low -- ever make one humble? If so, we have politicians who always fold their hands and bow low, but their humility is nothing but a race to gratify their profound egos. There is this one type of humility that is very conscious of the purity and excellence of humbleness.

Lao Tzu talks of the other kind of humility. This humility is such that it is not even aware of its goodness, its purity, its excellence. That is why Lao Tzu has likened it to muddy waters. Muddy water flows anywhere, wherever the earth makes way for it. It is so full of mud that it is not conscious of its purity, its excellence as being the water of the Ganges.

If a saint is conscious of the fact that he is a saint, he is no saint. You go to a saint, touch his feet and say, "You are a great saint." He will reply, "No, no! I am like dust under your feet!" Both know the rules of the game. If he were to say that he was a saint, you would be disappointed. What kind of a saint blows his own trumpet? The saint knows that if he were to accept your flattery, you would not come to him again. So he says, "There is no greater sinner than myself. This I know, when I look within myself." So you touch his feet and return fully satisfied that you have met a real saint. This is no more than a two-sided play.

The saint that Lao Tzu speaks of will never say he is a very good person, nor will he say he is a very bad person because these are both proclamations of the ego. The Lao-Tzu saint doesn't proclaim anything. He says nothing about himself. You may return from him disappointed, for he does not give you a chance to make any decision regarding him, and this leaves you unsatisfied. Had he confirmed his sainthood, you could have determined who he was; had he denied his sainthood, it would have given you a chance to decide about him. Lao Tzu's saint says nothing about himself for, Lao Tzu says, "any kind of knowledge of one's self is brought about by the opposite. Therefore, the saint has no knowledge of himself."

One man came and said to Lao Tzu, "We have heard that you are the wisest man in the world; there is no one to equal you in knowledge." Lao Tzu listened in silence to all that he had to say. "Won't you say something?" the man asked. Lao Tzu was still silent.

Then another man came who said, "We are very much disturbed by the wrong knowledge you are spreading. Your talk will disturb the minds of the people and lead them astray." Lao Tzu gave him a patient hearing also, and held his peace. "Will you say nothing to defend yourself?" the man asked.

Then Lao Tzu said, "Both of you decide among yourselves. One of you thinks I am the wisest man and one of you thinks I am steeped in ignorance. For myself, I know nothing of what I am. You are learned people. Decide among yourselves. But, pray, keep me out of it."

This unproclaimed, undetermined personality is sainthood.

Now we shall try to understand the new sutras.

"WHO CAN FIND REPOSE IN A MUDDY WORLD? BY LYING STILL IT BECOMES CLEAR."

There is a story of Buddha, in this context, which is very dear to me. This sutra could well be the title of this story. Buddha was passing by a mountain. The heat of the day was intense for it was summer. He felt thirsty. He told Ananda, "Go get some water from the stream we crossed just now." Ananda took the begging bowl and began to walk back to the stream that was about two furlongs away. When they had crossed it, the sun's rays shone like diamonds in the clear water. It was a shallow brook that gurgled its way over stones and rocks and the water it carried was pure and clear for it came from the mountains. But when Ananda reached the brook, he saw two carts crossing the stream and the water became dirty. The mud beneath was churned up by the cart's wheels; the dry leaves around, that lay buried on the ground, became loose and spread over the water's surface. The water was no longer fit to drink. Ananda went back. He wondered how such an enlightened person as Buddha could not foresee that by the time he reached the brook the carts would be crossing it and the water would be dirty!

When he returned he told Buddha about the dirty water and offered to walk three miles to a river and bring fresh water for him. Buddha said, "No. I wish to drink the water from the brook. Go again."

Ananda could not understand. The first time, perhaps, Buddha did not know the water had become dirty; but now, knowingly, he wanted to send him back! When he saw Ananda hesitating, Buddha ordered him to go. Ananda went. The water was still muddy and undrinkable. He did not know what to do. How could he take the dirty water for Buddha? He came back again and said, "Forgive me, but the water is not fit to drink."

Buddha said, "Listen to me, and go once again." Ananda was exasperated, he wanted to refuse, but Buddha's voice was so insistent that he went back. Buddha called out as he left, "Be sure not to return without the water."

Ananda went. He sat on the bank of the stream and kept watching the muddy water. After some time he saw that the dry leaves had been carried away by the running brook and the mud was slowly settling down. The water was now clear and sparkling, with sunbeams dancing on it. Ananda was filled with joy. He filled the bowl and walked back as fast as he could. Falling at Buddha's feet he exclaimed, "Your compassion is infinite Lord! What a lesson you taught me through the small stream. And here was I, an ignorant fool. What all I thought about you! Sitting by the brook and watching the water clear, it came to me that our mind is similarly filled with dirt and filth. Is it not then possible to sit on its banks and allow the filth to flow away?"

Buddha said, "That is why I had to send you back three times."

Lao Tzu's sutra is an apt title to this story: "WHO CAN FIND REPOSE IN THE MUDDY WORLD? BY LYING STILL IT BECOMES CLEAR." There is no need to do anything. It is enough to sit in silence and tranquillity and with patient awaiting. Everything then becomes clear and pure of its own.

Buddha later asked Ananda, "Ananda, did you not feel like jumping into the stream and trying to clean it?"

Ananda said, "Not only did I feel like it. I actually jumped in the stream! But the water became more dirty!"

This is exactly what we do with the mind. We jump into it with the hope of cleaning it. Our violent and aggressive efforts are like stepping into the stream and making it more turbid and dirty. If it were possible to look within a so-called religious person who sits to worship and to meditate in a temple, you would find that he is sitting in a temple all right, but his mind has nothing to do with the temple. Instead, it is filled with the most rotten filth, such as is not there when he sits in his shop. The shop at least gives him something to concentrate on: wealth. In the temple there is nothing to hold his attention so there is no concentration.

Why is this so? All those who try to quiet the mind find that the more you try to silence the mind, the more restless it becomes; for who is trying to quiet the mind? You are restless many times more restless. If a person is adamant about disciplining his mind, he may even go mad.

Then what is the way? The path shown by Lao Tzu is worth emulating. It is the supreme path. Lao Tzu says: "Sit silently by the stream of thoughts; lie still. Let the stream of thoughts flow; let it be dirty, let it be turbid. Be silent, be patient. Wait, do nothing. Just wait. Make no effort to direct the mind." Who can attain tranquillity in this world? Only one who makes no effort to still the mind.

This seems strange. All restlessness is the outcome of our attempts and efforts. If we make an attempt to relax; be tranquil, we create a greater restlessness within ourselves.

Bokoju went to his guru and told him, "My mind is very restless. Show me the way to quiet it. Should I meditate, should I fast, should I do penance?"

The guru said, "Have you still not tired of doing all these things? All your life you have done these. That is the cause of your restlessness. If you are still eager to indulge in these things, please do not come to my door. This is a place for those who are non-doing. If you are prepared to do nothing, you are welcome; otherwise you may wander as much as you please."

Bokoju did not understand. He said again, "My restlessness is killing me. You shall have to do something about it. You have no idea how much I suffer, what agony I am passing through!"

The guru replied, "Your very desire to still the mind creates double the amount of restlessness within you. Do nothing. Stay here. Just sit by my side."

Bokoju stayed with the guru for one year -- just sitting beside him. Every few days he would ask, "Now please tell me to do something. Give me some work, I do not mind how lowly or foolish. It can be to count beads or some such thing. Just so that I can be occupied." The guru said that he had occupied himself enough. Now, for some time, he was to do nothing. Again, after a month or so, Bokoju became very restless. "Am I not worthy of your teachings?" he asked. "What is wrong with me that you tell me nothing?"

The guru still insisted: "Just keep sitting." In Japan, this just sitting is called zazen. Whenever Bokoju asked, in the course of one year, the guru's reply was the same: zazen. Bokoju finally tired of asking. What to ask of a man who always replied, "Zazen?" So he stopped asking.

Now, a strange thing happened to him. The nearness of the guru created such a cohesion that it was now not possible to leave him. Something within him united, which now made his leaving the place impossible. When the guru noticed this cohesion within him he said to him, "If you ever ask me to show you something, I shall definitely turn you out." The guru knew that he had now reached a stage from where he could not run away.

But Bokoju could not sit quiet. The mind within clamoured for occupation, some involvement, something to do. There is a saying, "An empty mind is the devil's workshop." This is not true. An empty mind does not become a devil's workshop; it is already a factory of the devil. This workshop has been working full time for so long that you have become used to the noise it creates. Only when it stops do you become aware of it.

Bokoju was in real difficulty now. He could not leave the guru; he could not do anything. He just sat and sat and sat. Then, exactly what happened to Ananda by the side of the brook happened to Bokoju. For a full year he sat doing nothing, thinking the same thoughts over and over again. How long could he think the same thoughts again and again? They too turned stale and he was bored of them. The thoughts began to flow away like the dry leaves in the stream. The mud settled down -- and the mind became still.

Then one day his guru offered to give him some work if he wished. Bokoju caught the guru's feet and said, "With great difficulty have I managed to rid myself of doing. Please, I beg of you, do not ever tell me to do anything."

"So you do not wish to be tranquil?" the guru asked.

"I pray to you," said Bokoju, "Now I have understood. Do not tease me any more."

The very act, the very attempt to do something is restlessness itself. To do something is to be restless. Therefore, you can never attempt to be tranquil. To be tranquil, to be serene, to be relaxed means only one thing: that all attempts to gain tranquillity have been abandoned. Then what remains is peace, tranquillity. Says Lao Tzu: "Who can find repose in this world of impurities and unrest? Only he who is fixed within himself, who halts within himself and allows the impurities to flow away, can become tranquil."

Do not fight with the impurities within. All religions, as we understand them, seem to exhort us to fight the impurities within. But I say to you, those who have known religion have never said this. No one can relax by fighting; and without being peaceful and serene, no one can become religious.

That is why we find certain statements of religious people so revolutionary that they are difficult to digest. Jesus had said, "Resist not evil." Christianity has not yet digested this tenet of Jesus, even though

two thousand years have passed. No Christian thinker has been able to explain what Jesus meant. What does Jesus say. Do not fight anger? Do not fight sex? Do not fight greed? These are our enemies!

People come to me and say, "Show us how to fight these four enemies within us: anger, sex, greed and attachment. How should we overcome them?" And Jesus says, "Fight not evil."

Lao Tzu says: Lie low and let the evil flow by. Fight and you shall lose. If you wish to win, give up all resistance, give up all fight. But the superficial and so-called religious thinker tells us, "Do not fight others. But fight yourself you must."

Leo Tolstoy has written in his diary: "Lord, give me the strength to forgive others and never to forgive myself." This is the understanding of an ordinary religious man: not to fight others but to fight with himself. But he who fights, invariably jumps into the flow of the stream and makes it doubly filthy and turbid. This is why we find filthy minds within so-called religious people; so filthy that the minds of criminals seem clean in comparison. These people who fight see nothing but filth on all sides. Wherever they look, their eyes discover some filth or the other. So much filth has gathered within that it has begun to be projected outside also.

A French painter came to visit Kajuraho. In those days, a friend I knew was a minister in Vindhya Pradesh. He was assigned the task of taking the visitor to see Kajuraho. He was very upset because he was a religious man. Every morning he performed his daily worship; he wore the sacred thread; he read the GITA and the RAMAYANA; he applied sandalwood to his forehead and went daily to the temple. He was totally religious. Now, how was he to manage the naked images depicting love and sex on the walls of this temple? And what opinion would this foreigner have of India when he saw this shameful art? Are such sculptures fit to be created first of all, and then, too, on the walls of a temple? He was in a terrible dilemma. The visitor was an important person and protocol demanded that he be taken around by no less a person than a minister.

Somehow he set out, with the name of Rama constantly on his lips. He told me, "I kept praying all the while, 'Oh God, please do not let him ask me why these sculptures were made!'"

He tried to hurry him up but the foreigner stood for hours in front of each image. All the time he gazed at the images, my friend kept his eyes fixed to the ground. At last the visit came to an end. The foreigner didn't ask a single question. But my friend could hold his silence no more. As they came down the steps he said, "Please do not take this art to be typical of Indian art. Do not let it bias your opinion about Indian tradition and culture. This is the work of a perverse and debauched king, and our culture has nothing to do with it. These pictures are indecent, we know. If we had our way, we would plaster them with mud."

The artist turned around and said, "I shall have to go and see them once more! I did not notice indecency anywhere! I must see them once again, because I saw nothing unseemly anywhere. I have never witnessed such beautiful, artistic, natural and innocent art anywhere!"

Which of these two men was religious? Here is one friend who prays every day, and here is a foreigner who perhaps has never prayed; but I would call him religious, for his mind is not filled with debris. He can see things straight and direct without imposing his beliefs. When you find an image indecent, look within yourself. You will find sexual desire knocking within you. This is what makes the image look indecent.

If a man is standing naked and you find him indecent, look within yourself. You will find that, the very desire to see a person naked is the cause of this attitude. Otherwise there is no reason for it. If a man is engaged in fighting the evil within him, he is bound to fall into all kinds of perversions.

There are three states of the mind. One is the state in which we undergo, enjoy and experience. This is the natural state. One who represses himself, arms himself against this natural state, falls far below the one who goes through it. This is the state of disease. And one who allows the experience to flow by, rises above the experience. This is the state of yoga. Bhoga, roga and yoga: these are the three states. Bhoga (experience) is a natural happening. He who mutilates the experience enters the realm of roga (disease). He who allows the experience to flow through him naturally and accepts it without any struggle, he who allows the mud and dry leaves of desire to settle down, leaving the pool of the mind crystal clear, reaches the state of profound meditation (yoga).

Lao Tzu hints at this yoga. "WHO CAN MAINTAIN HIS CALM FOR LONG? BY ACTIVITY, REST COMES BACK TO LIFE." This statement has to be understood properly.

WHO CAN MAINTAIN HIS CALM FOR LONG? He who has come to realise the secret of the rest that follows each activity. "BY ACTIVITY, REST COMES BACK TO LIFE." There are periods of tranquillity, periods of calmness, in everybody's life. But who can maintain this calm and peace constantly? There are two ways: one is that a man should become so dead to everything that he has no strength to even be restless. There are people who try this method. If they feel the sex urge within, they eat so little that no desire can form within them. When there is no strength in the body, no desires are created. But the absence of strength does not mean the end of desires. Desires lie in wait. No sooner is the body strong than they reveal themselves. If they are not allowed to manifest, they remain within, in seed form.

An experiment was conducted at a university in America. Thirty students were kept without food for a month. After a week or so their sexual desires began to wane. There were pictures of beautiful nudes, pictures of erotic art, but these were no longer interesting. After fifteen days, no amount of sex-talk had any effect on them. After a month it seemed that sexual desire had completely left them, for intense energy is required for sexual desire. After thirty days, they were given food. On the very first day it was found that their interest in sex returned. In three day's time the erotic pictures became as appealing as ever. Once again the jokes, the discussions about sex became the order of the day.

If energy is not allowed to go beyond a certain level, the illusion is created that sex is dead within. This is what many sadhus do. The desire is never extinct, it is the lack of the appropriate amount of energy that keeps it hidden. Lao Tzu contends that this kind of calmness is not calmness; it is death. It is not peace; it is the silence of the grave.

Tranquillity is an alive happening. Such desolate silence is a dead thing. If the stillness and silence of the grave is the goal, we shall have to destroy ourselves. But this does not bring joy to anyone. Rather, the person is immersed in such deep dejection and melancholy, that life folds up its wings and ceases its Journey.

We see many such sadhus, who are dried up, dead, with no essence of life flowing within them. There is only enough life within them to enable them to move about. And we are awed. We feel they have reached a very high state of consciousness. This is an illusion. A very high state of consciousness is possible; but it is a living state not a dead state. What is its secret?

Lao Tzu explains the secret. He says that activity is inevitable in life; it is necessary in life. The meaning of life is activity. But the man who knows that activity is the door to repose -- rather, that activity is the mother of repose; that it is not opposed to rest, it is the path to relaxation -- attains calmness forever.

Let us understand it in this way. I find that when I sit in my shop I get angry; I cannot help being greedy. Then there are two ways open to me. One is that I should give up the shop. There will be no shop and there will be no anger, no greed. I have a wife. If I live with her there are quarrels; there are jealousies. If I leave her, I bid good-bye to quarrels and jealousies. In this manner, I withdraw myself from all the situations that cause confusion within me. But then, I am the same -- whether I give up my shop and go to the mountains, or whether I leave my wife and stay in an ashram.

The man who tries to change his surroundings and situations is not changing himself. He has preserved his self as he was. It is quite possible that if the difficult situation had remained, he would one day have changed himself. Now, it is no longer necessary for him to change. If he was harassed by anger time and again, maybe he would have finally realised that anger is folly. But now, what he has done is to remove himself completely from the field of anger. If he had allowed himself to remain within the vortex of day-to-day bickerings, he would have become so fed up that one day he would have realised himself to be above it. But now he has removed himself from the midst of quarrels and strifes.

A man can withdraw himself from all sides, but this brings no transformation because the man remains the same. He has merely changed his surroundings. He will have no deep experiences. Lao Tzu says if you are plying a trade, do not give it up. Whether shop or market or house, do not run away from your surroundings. Do not stand aside from activity. Do not give up activity. Remember, activity is not opposed to repose. He who fully engages himself in activity finds that he can also rest as well. This is one of the basic sutras of Lao Tzu. Let us understand it further.

If I do not sleep well at night, I naturally think that I should rest in the day. This seems logical; that the more I rest in the day, the better will I sleep at night. I will have more practice. But a person who rests all day finds it impossible to sleep at night. Logic is one thing and life another. Life respects no logic; it has an arrangement of its own. The order of life is dialectical. A man who works hard the whole day, toils all day long, breaks stones, sleeps very soundly at night. His physical system makes provisions within for relaxation, according to the amount of his exertion. His activity generates inactivity. He who touches one end of a dichotomy invariably reaches the other, like the pendulum of a clock. When it

swings to the left, it is gathering momentum to swing back to the right. So he who labours all day sleeps soundly all night, and gets up in the morning refreshed and filled with fresh energy for the new day.

Let us take a few more examples. A man wants to become silent. He thinks he should stop speaking. This man does not know the rule of opposites. If he stops speaking altogether, he will keep on talking within, all twenty-four hours of the day. He will never be able to observe silence. He alone can attain silence who, when he speaks, speaks with such authenticity that his whole being pervades his speech -- so much so that his within becomes a void and it is his very soul that shapes the words. When such a man stops speaking, he enters perfect silence.

Life works on the rule of opposites. If you speak with all your being, with perfect authenticity, you will enter silence as soon as you stop speaking.

But we think otherwise. We say that in order to be silent one should not speak. If we had no sleep at night we feel we should stop all activity in the day. If we desire peace, we shun all places that cause restlessness. Actually, if we desire tranquillity, we should be fully present in places of restlessness. There is no need to run away. The more we are present in the fullness of our being, the quicker will be the journey towards repose. Therefore, Lao Tzu says, understand the secret.

A certain professor was studying this book, Lao Tzu's TAO-TEH-KING, with me. One day he came to me and said, "It seems there is a misprint. Instead of saying 'by inactivity,' it is printed 'by activity'. It should be, "By inactivity, rest comes back to life." It was only natural that he should reason in this way because if we go by words, the answer to the question, "WHO CAN MAINTAIN HIS CALM FOR LONG?" Would be that by his inactivity, a man can maintain his calm. Lao Tzu, however, says, "No. By his activity a man can maintain his calm for long."

But activity alone is not enough. We are all active. So there is one more condition: to know that all activities ultimately bring us back to rest. All activities become non-activities in the end. He who remains active, and is fully aware of this truth, attains perfect and eternal calm. If we want to stop completely, one should know the full art of running. If we want to enter supreme emptiness, to be established in it, we should have the complete experience of filling ourselves. He who exhausts himself completely will stop completely one day.

The trouble with us is that our whole life is lukewarm. We are not total either one way or the other. If we run after things, we do it lifelessly. Therefore, when we stop, we find our feet still running. When we are awake, we are half asleep. Therefore, when we sleep, we are awake in our dreams. When we eat, we eat disinterestedly; therefore even after meals, the thought of food lingers in the mind. Whatever we do, we do so half-heartedly that what is left undone lingers on.

Lao Tzu says: "Whatever you do, do it so intensely that the opposite begins to happen." When a person understands this secret, he stops running. Then he is not afraid of activity and the world of activity.

Sannyas means the same to Lao Tzu as it did to Krishna. He does not advocate renunciation of the world of activity. Like Krishna, Lao Tzu says: "One who attains non-action through action is a sannyasin." As he

performs his actions, with all sincerity and singleness of purpose, he is also aware of the fact that on the completion of his act he shall enter into a state of complete non-action.

Such a man maintains his calm always, throughout life. Nobody can break his calm. There is no way of doing it, for he does not run away from confusion and chaos. He lives right in the centre of it. It is very easy to enrage a man who has run away to the Himalayas. It is possible that he has had no occasion to use his anger for thirty years. He may feel no vestige of anger within him, but it is child's play to stir up his wrath. A man who has attained calm in the midst of the marketplace however, even for thirty days -- it is not possible to make him angry; for all the conditions to incite his anger are present, yet he lives in their midst. One who becomes calm by renouncing the conditions that give rise to anger -- his serenity is a deception. This is so ninety-nine times out of one hundred. Otherwise there is no reason to fear these conditions and run away from them.

"HE WHO EMBRACES THIS TAO GUARDS AGAINST BEING OVERFULL." This is yet another basic rule of Tao. "BECAUSE HE GUARDS AGAINST BEING OVERFULL, HE IS BEYOND WEARING OUT AND RENEWAL." These two sutras contradict each other, but they are not contradictory. In the first sutra Lao Tzu says one should involve oneself totally in whatever work he is engaged in.

Remember, we have to enter into the fullness of the activity we are involved in. Then the opposite of that activity automatically happens. He who is constantly aware of this, attains calm and collectedness in his life.

In the next sutra Lao Tzu says: "HE WHO ATTAINS TAO (OR RELIGION, OR NATURE, OR GOD) ALWAYS GUARDS HIMSELF FROM BEING OVERFULL." The action should be total, but the self should never be overfull. The second sutra is in regard to the self, while the first is in regard to the activities of the world.

Lao Tzu says: "The world is a play of opposites. Complete one part fully and you find yourself in the opposite." This happens with such ease that there is no difficulty. When the extremes are experienced, and the art of living fully in them is mastered, the balance is attained which leads to calmness.

In the second sutra, however, he says: "Do not indulge in the folly of being perfect yourself." If you strive to be overfull, to be perfect you will find yourself again chained to the cycle of life and death, of wearing out and renewal. This sounds strange because, generally, each one of us wishes to be a perfectionist. Everyone of us is constantly striving to be so. Lao Tzu says, "We do not have to be perfect. We have to be whole."

There are two words in the English language, that we must note: one is "perfect" and the other is "whole". To be perfect means to reach the peak in a certain direction. To be whole means to touch all the sides in a balanced manner.

Let us try to understand it in this way. If a man wants to be a perfectly honest man, his life will be far from peaceful. It will be filled with tensions, for he will have to fight with dishonesty for twenty-four hours of the day. He shall have to maintain his precarious position by pulling and tugging at the conditions around him. This can be very hard and very difficult. But this is the ego: the ego of his

honesty. Lao Tzu says whether you try to be perfect in honesty or dishonesty, you will find yourself in difficulty; for honesty and dishonesty are two sides of the same coin. You are trying to preserve one side of the coin and throw away the other side. Lao Tzu says do not aim at perfection at either extremity. Rather, be fixed in the centre of both. You are neither to be honest nor dishonest.

This seems difficult. It is easy to be honest and it is easy to be dishonest; but to be in between is very difficult. Why? Because we understand honesty; we understand dishonesty. These two are separate and opposite, and, hence, clear in our perception. But Lao Tzu tells us not to choose perfection in the opposites but to be fixed at the golden mean. Be in the centre between honesty and dishonesty, good and bad, light and darkness, saintliness and sin. He who maintains the golden mean is rid of all tensions. All tensions arise from the opposite. Be fully involved in your actions, and be fixed within your centre always.

Here we find a lot of similarity between Lao Tzu and Buddha. The reason why Buddha's teachings influenced the Chinese may have been because of this sutra of Lao Tzu's. Buddha has called this the middle way. He was the greatest advocate of the middle path. He always said: "Be at the centre; never go to the extreme."

Let me tell you an anecdote from Buddha's life and you will understand. A prince was initiated by Buddha. His name was Shrone. He had enjoyed all carnal pleasures to the extreme. Now, his renunciation was also extreme. He was habituated to extremes. This way or that, it made no difference. It is said that his feet had never touched the bare ground. Soft carpets of velvet were spread out for him everywhere. Now he became an ordinary bhikshu. Now, when other bhikshus walked on the foot-path, Shrone walked on the bare ground that was filled with thorns and stones. The others avoided thorns, he purposely walked on them. His feet were sorely wounded. The others sat under the shade of trees, but he made it a point to always sit in the sun. His comrades ate once a day, but he ate once in two days.

This is an interesting example of how the mind can renounce one extremity and switch to the other. From a life of complete comfort and ease, Shrone had no difficulty in adopting a life of complete discomfort. But his mind could not leave the extremities. The mind lives in extremities; the mind needs extremities. In six month's time, his beautiful body lost all its colour and was filled with boils and sores. The other bhikshus would go and tell Buddha what a great ascetic Shrone was and that they were nothing before him. Buddha would laugh and say, "You do not know. He who has experienced pleasure to the utmost finds it easy to renounce to the utmost."

For six months Buddha said nothing to him. He went on tormenting his body till he became a mere skeleton. Then one day Buddha went to him and said, "Shrone, I have come to ask you about something which you know and I don't." Shrone was surprised. How could it be? Buddha said, "When you were a prince, I hear you were an expert at playing the veena. I want to know: if the strings of the veena are too taut, do they produce any music?"

Shrone said, "If they are too taut, they will break. Then there can be no music."

"And if the strings are too loose, would they bring out any melody?" Buddha asked.

"No sir", replied Shrone. "How can the right pressure be applied if the strings are loose? There can be no music even then."

"Then when is music formed?" Buddha persisted.

Shrone replied, "There is a particular condition when we can say that the strings are neither tight nor loose. When the strings attain this balance, music is born."

"I too have come to tell you only this," said Buddha. "The same rule that applies to the veena applies to life also. If the strings of life are allowed to fall loose in worldly pleasures, they create no music. If they are strung too tight in the performance of penance, they create no melody either. In the strings of life, also, there is a state when they are not too tight nor too loose, when a man is neither at one extreme nor the other. Then only is the music of life born within him. That supreme melody is samadhi. Apply what you have learnt from the veena to life also. First you let your life strings be so loose that no music could be born. Now, like a mad person, you have pulled them so tight that there again can be no music."

Lao Tzu says: "He who attains the Tao always guards himself from too much perfection." He forever chooses the middle path: neither this way nor that, always in the middle.

In the case of the veena, music is created when the strings are exactly in the in between state. In fact, when they are in this state, the strings no longer exist as strings. The strings actually are a hindrance to music as long as they are mere strings. It is generally believed that the strings produce music. This is not so. It is the balanced state of the strings that gives birth to music. It is easy to play the veena but very difficult to tune it and bring it into a condition of perfect balance. To play an instrument is an easy job. It is the tuning that is an art which only an expert knows. When the strings are perfectly balanced, they no longer are. Then only there is music alone. When the strings are unequal, when they are dissonant, there is no music.

When the mind is at the extremity it exists. When the extremities are lost, there is no mind. Then the consciousness, the spirit, the soul, is what remains. Such a person, says Lao Tzu, is free from the cycle of birth and death. He who establishes himself in this golden mean establishes himself in heaven.

Both extremes lead to extinction. But there is no death at the centre. Both extremes are tensions and therefore tend to wear out. When the strings are taut, they can break. When they are loose and someone tries to pluck at them to create music, then too they can break. But if the strings are well-balanced, there is no possibility of their breaking. It is tension that breaks them. Where there is no tension, there is no way for the strings to break. So, says Lao Tzu, the wearing out and renewal ends. And where the wearing out ceases, death is impossible. Death is an accumulation of all the wearing out. Every day the process of wear and tear takes place and, ultimately, death is the sum total. He who experiences this balance within himself does not succumb to either disintegration or death.

The body is bound to die because the body lives in extremities. Birth is one extremity; death is the other. The mind also will go, for the mind also lives in extremities: pleasure and renunciation, friendship and

enmity, love and hate; the world and nirvana. But there is another condition within: the state of balance. Only when this state is achieved can we know about that for which there is no death.

And where there is no death, there is no rebirth. Without talking about life after death, Lao Tzu says in this sutra that this is the only way to get out from the cycle of birth and death.

Two things Lao Tzu has told us. One, complete involvement in our activities is necessary if we are to enter the opposite state; and two balance within the self is necessary so that no tensions are formed. Then, disintegration and death are impossible.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #14

Chapter title: The impartial awaiting, the death of pride and the one in the many

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Question 1

FOR THE LAST TWELVE YEARS I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR THE WATERS OF MY MIND TO CLEAR, BUT THE CARTS OF SITUATIONS AND SURROUNDINGS KEEP PASSING THROUGH THEM CONSTANTLY. THIS WILL GO ON THROUGHOUT LIFE. SHOULD I STILL KEEP WAITING?

Waiting is important, necessary, but not enough. Together with awaiting one should know how to sit at the bank of the stream of the mind. If we sit in the current of the river and wait, there will be no results. Our very being in the river will bring up the dirt. The art of standing aside from the river is meditation.

Awaiting is a necessary part of meditation but it, in itself, is not meditation. He who cannot wait cannot meditate; but he who thinks awaiting is meditation is also wrong. Meditation is the art of sitting on the bank.

The mind has its own stream of thoughts. No matter how hard you try to watch it with patient awaiting, you shall never be able to step out of the mind. Nor will the stream of the mind clear. Your very presence pollutes the mind. Step out of the mind. Sit on its bank and watch it from a distance, as you would watch the birds in the sky, as you would watch a river flow by. The further you step away from the mind, the clearer and purer will it become. It will become silent, tranquil. This is one thing.

The second thing. In the infinite story of existence, twelve years is nothing. In the boundless saga of existence, what are twelve years? Nothing. So do not think that if you have waited twelve years you have waited long. If you have waited twelve years, you have spent twelve lakh years in polluting the stream. Therefore, I say, eternal awaiting! When I say this, I do not mean you shall have to wait for countless years. What I mean is that you should be prepared to wait indefinitely. The happening can take place in a moment. The greater your preparedness the earlier will be the happening.

Why is it so? It is because impatience agitates the mind. The carts of surroundings and situations, do not stir up the dirt of the stream of our mind as much as our own impatience. Awaiting means: I have attained patience. Let the happening take place whenever it pleases -- now or after countless births -- I shall wait patiently. I am in no hurry. I am in no haste. The longer the mind is readily willing to wait, the earlier the happening takes place. So do not think it was a big thing to wait for twelve years. And do not take awaiting alone to be enough. Concentrate more, and give more importance to sitting on the bank, to being alert and being a witness.

Question 2

LAO TZU SAYS: THE EGO OF A SAINT ESTABLISHED IN TAO IS CONSTANTLY DISINTEGRATING, LIKE MELTING ICE. THEN SHALL WE TAKE IT THAT A PERSON CAN BE ESTABLISHED IN TRUTH IN SPITE OF THE EGO? IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A PERSON TO BE CALLED A SAINT OR A SAGE IN SPITE OF HIS EGO? IS THE STATE OF AM-NESS A MENTAL STATE OR A SPIRITUAL STATE? YOU ALSO SAY THAT ON THE COMPLETE ANNIHILATION OF THE EGO, THE SAINT BECOMES GOD HIMSELF. THEN IS THE SAINT SEPARATED FROM GOD AS LONG AS THE AM-NESS REMAINS?

There are three things. We have to understand the meaning of two words well. One word is "ego" (ahankara) and the other is the "am-ness" (asmita). Ahankara (the ego) means: I am one with the body. When consciousness feels itself joined to the body, identifies itself with the body, feels one with it, the ego is born. When the consciousness separates itself from the body and breaks its identification with it, the ego breaks. To know that I am apart from the body is necessary but not enough in order to know that I am one with God.

If a person is fixed in the feeling that I am not the body and yet does not feel one with God (Paramatman), that state of a person is called asmita, am-ness. I am one with the body: this is the state of the ego. I am apart from the body: this state is am-ness. To feel that I am one with God is a state that is beyond am-ness.

Says Lao Tzu: it is necessary for a saint that his ego should dissolve and he should know that he is not the body, not the mind. This realisation is the indication of a saint. A saint can, however, stop at this and go no further. Many saints have. Those saints who have said there is no Paramatman, there is only the atman, belong to this category. They have broken one link of bondage: they have snapped their relationships with the false. This is a big happening. They have broken all ties with the insignificant. This is a great transformation. But this is only half of the transformation. One more step has to be taken: that of establishing a relationship with the infinite. When the relationship with the infinite is established, the am-ness also is lost.

When I say, 'I am', there are two words: 'I' stands for the ego, and 'am' stands for asmita. The saint's 'I' drops and only the am-ness remains. Lao Tzu says, the definition of a saint is one whose 'I' has dropped but whose am-ness remains. If this am-ness keeps melting like snow in the sun, as Lao Tzu describes it, it will disappear one day. The 'I' was annihilated before. The 'am' is then lost also. What remains is pure existence. Then, says Lao Tzu, to call such a person a saint is meaningless. The wave has become one with the ocean.

To be a saint is also to be at a distance from God. A sinner is very far away from God; the saint is nearer to Him. But this nearness is also a distance; it is not oneness. The saint is near God, very near, but however near, the distance remains. The final goal, according to Lao Tzu, is that even this distance should not be. This being near should also end. Then oneness is achieved.

Ordinarily we think that when distance is overcome, oneness results. This is not so. In fact, the truth is that as we come nearer to a person, we feel the distance to be wider. A sinner is not irked by being away from God because the distance is so great that he is not even aware of it. He asks, "where is God?" The distance is so great that he sees God nowhere. The difficulty of a saint, however, increases. He puts out his hand and feels the touch of God; with every breath he experiences God; he moves and he bumps against God. There is so much nearness between God and him. This feeling of so much nearness, and yet not being one with God, brings about the sense of estrangement and separation that the saints speak of. Then this nearness, this feeling of being so close and yet so far, becomes unbearable. A thin curtain separates him from his beloved and the pain is excruciating.

The sinner is so far away from God that the question of separation is just not there. When there is wall in between, we cannot see on the other side. We cannot wish for things that we cannot see, much less hope for or desire.

Ego is the stone wall between man and God. Am-ness too, is a wall, but it is transparent, made of glass. The saint can see everything as if there was nothing in between, but no sooner does he go forward than the wall obstructs him. Then the pain is unbearable; the separation becomes too heavy to bear. Only saints know the pangs of separation.

So the saint is also away from God; a transparent wall separates him. When this wall also melts away, there is no nearness and no distance; there is only oneness. That day, the saint is lost and only God remains.

Whether this am-ness is a state of the mind or a spiritual state has been asked. It is the ultimate state of the mind; ego is the initial state. Ego is the gross state of the mind and am-ness is the more subtle state.

Let us take it in this way. The mind is in the middle: on one side is God and on the other side is the world. Where the mind is united with the world, the 'I' is born; and where the mind is united with God, there stands am-ness. There are two connections. The connection between the mind and the world creates the ego; where the mind joins God, am-ness remains.

A saint, according to Lao Tzu is one who has broken the first connection. His connections with the world are broken. But his second connection remains to be established. He is still not one with God. The most subtle form of the ego still remains. Ego and am-ness are both happenings of the mind. Remember, it is the mind that is the saint or the sinner. Beyond the mind, neither exist. The higher is within the mind; so also the lower. Beyond the mind there is neither high nor low.

Good is an attitude of the mind. So also bad. Beyond the mind, there is neither good nor bad; all opposites are lost. Where the opposites are not, the mind is not. The saint is also a part of the play of opposites. The saint and the sinner are two sides of the duality. If this is understood, the jump can be taken. The first jump is from the ego and the second is from am-ness.

Buddha talks of anatma (non-atman). Buddha uses this word in place of am-ness. He says: "First the ego, then the self, should go. Then only can you enter the ultimate truth."

What troubles our mind is whether such a person, for whom the mind still exists, can be looked upon as a saint. How can we say that he has attained the absolute truth? All things are relative as far as language is concerned. When we say that a saint has attained ultimate truth, it means that he is much nearer to truth than we are. Between us and reality there is a wall of stone; between the saint and reality there is a transparent wall which cannot be seen. Truth is now as clear to him as if the wall is not there, yet the wall still remains. But we cannot even see this wall.

Understand this well. He who is not a saint himself will not be able to see the wall. So we say: now there is no wall between the saint and God. But the saint who has reached the wall knows of its existence because he can feel it. It prevents him from reaching out to God. The wall of am-ness is so subtle that only the saint can sense it. The saint's devotees, who can see only a solid wall and not a transparent wall, feel the saint has become God. This is natural. But the saint experiences this wall that obstructs him every moment. He knows he has not yet become completely annihilated; he still is.

Lao Tzu talks from his own experience as a saint when he says: "Not until the am-ness melts away like snow in the sun can you attain the ultimate truth."

According to our experience, we say that the saint has attained Godhood. It is all relative. We too shall find, when we seek, that there is yet another wall to cross besides the ego. The am-ness is also an obstruction; it too should go. Till nothingness replaces the saint, the wall is still intact.

Question 3

WHILE RECOUNTING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERSON WHO IS ESTABLISHED IN THE TAO, LAO TZU SAYS THAT SUCH A PERSON MAKES NO DECLARATION ABOUT HIMSELF. BUT MANSOOR SAID, "ANALHAQ." THE RISHIS OF THE UPANISHAD SAID, "AHAM BRAHMASMI". JESUS SAID, "I AM THE SON OF GOD." MEHER BABA SAID, "I AM THE AVATAR." HOW ARE THESE DECLARATIONS CONNECTED WITH LAO TZU'S ABOVE MENTIONED WORDS?

We have to have two things clear if we are to understand this sutra. One is, here are two ways of understanding life, of manifesting it, of expressing it. One is the positive; the other is the negative. Whenever we have to say something, we can say it in two ways. If this room is dark, we can say the room is dark or that there is no light in the room. We can say that a man is alive or that he is not yet dead. So there are these two aspects of expression; positive and negative. It depends entirely on the individual which aspect he chooses to use. Lao Tzu and Buddha preferred the negative aspect. Whatever they said, they said in the negative. This had its reasons, many reasons. The most important reason was that Buddha found that, everywhere whatever, was said was said in the positive aspect and many who believed this were led astray. For instance, a man says, "I am God." Now there are two things. One is that this man may be telling the truth and the other is that he may be lying; he may be a hypocrite. Both are possible. Ninety-nine out of a hundred such people who declare "I am God" are liars. Man's ego takes pleasure in making this declaration. The ways of the ego are very subtle -- and what could please the ego more than to feel "I am God"? So Buddha, as well as Lao Tzu, felt that this sort of proclamation was very harmful.

It is not that this statement is necessarily false. When Mansoor said, "I am God" (ana'l haq), he was telling the truth. On his part, there was no mistake. When Mansoor says, "I am God" what he is saying is that God alone is; I am not. When the rishi of the Upanishad says, "aham brahmasmi," he also means, "Where am I? I am nowhere. Only God is." This can be correct if it is the truth, but even a madman can declare, "I am God!" He cannot be stopped from doing so. The danger lies in the fact that such people can also impress others and influence them and, consequently, mislead them.

So Buddha and Lao Tzu were against all declarations. They said, "A saint makes no claims." But to be silent is also a proclamation. Whatever a man does, proclamation is bound to be there. Now, if people believe that he who makes no claims for himself is a saint, it is easy for a person who wishes to be called a saint. He just has to make no claims.

Buddha and Lao Tzu made use of the negative term. But soon it was discovered, both in India and in China, that the ways of the ego are very strange and mysterious. The ego has no difficulty either way. If you come to me and say, "So and so says he is God" I can say, "Then he is no saint, for a saint does not proclaim himself. Now look at me. I make no proclamation." This also is a proclamation even if it is negative.

Meher Baba says he is the avatar. This is a positive declaration. Krishnamurti says he is not God. This is a negative declaration. Both are declarations all the same. It is difficult to escape from them. How will you escape them? Whether you do something or you do not, each act of yours is a statement. How can you escape from your statement? When I am silent, then too I am making a statement.

A friend took Bernard Shaw to see his play. Shaw did not want to go, but the friend insisted so he went. He slept throughout the play. The friend was very upset. With great difficulty he had persuaded him to come and now he was fast asleep. When the play finished Shaw said, "It was a fine play."

The friend replied, "You have no right to make any statement on the play. You were sleeping throughout."

Shaw said, "My sleeping is my statement. I say the play was good because I slept well."

Buddha and Lao Tzu made a very significant effort but it was not successful, because man can create tools of deception in any direction. Those who proclaimed themselves to be God mislead the people but, after Buddha, his bhikshus did the same, in spite of his making no proclamations. Deception is possible from any direction; there is no way to avoid it.

This means that it depends upon the natural inclination of each person how he puts forth his views. The propensity of Lao Tzu and Buddha is in the negative: not this, not this. If they have to say something, they will say, "Say only that which is not." If they could do it, they would prefer to speak through their silence.

So it depends upon each person. Meera could not keep quiet nor could Mansoor, and yet they were each different in their own way. Chaitanya could not keep silent. He had to sing and dance, and declare to the world. His declaration was not made; it happened.

We must understand this properly. One person can sit silent When knowledge dawned on Buddha, he was silent for eight days. There is a lovely story that is told about this. It is said that when the devas saw that Buddha had become silent, they went and prostrated themselves at his feet and implored him not to go into silence, for, they said, in a hundred aeons only a single individual attains this supreme state. For countless births there have been those who have been awaiting the advent of a Buddha. If he were to go into silence, who would quench their thirst?

Even then Buddha had no mind to speak for he said, "I do not know what I should say. Whatever I say is bound to be false. Words are false; silence is true. Those who can understand silence will understand." But if people could understand by silence alone.... The skies are silent, the sun, the moon, the stars, the

rivers and mountains, the trees and the flowers are all silent. All around is the realm of silence. But who understands by silence? So Buddha's silence would go unnoticed also.

The devas said, "Please speak. No matter if words do not convey, if people do not understand. If one in a hundred gets your message, it is enough."

Buddha said, "There are people who will understand my words correctly, but they will understand me even without my speaking. There are others who will interpret my words wrongly; for them there is no reason for me to speak. Let me remain silent."

But the devas also had a point to put forward. "You are right," they said, "but there is a third category of people in this world also. They are those who are in between the first two types. If you do not speak, they will never understand. If you speak, they will understand. They are standing on the brink. A slight push and they will be ready to jump. Please speak for their sake."

Now, it is only natural that the trend of speech of a person who advocates silence will be negative. If you ask what is God he will reply, "He is not this; He is not that." The predilection of one who advocates silence is the negative aspect.

The knowledge of people like Meera and Chaitanya became a manifestation; it became a dance. There was not a fraction of a distance between their knowledge and their manifestations. They were garrulous, not only with their mouths but with their whole bodies. Their entire personalities became full of expression. They never for a moment stopped to ponder that whatever is expressed becomes false, for they were not even aware of when or how the manifestation began.

So it depends entirely on the individual. The language of Meera and Chaitanya is positive. Meera will never say what God is not. She will say what God is. All devotees make use of positive language; what God is. Therefore, the God of the devotee remained a God with form. The devotee could not acknowledge the formless aspect of God. Positive means the attributive, the formative aspect.

All intellectual knowers make use of negation. Therefore their God will be the void -- formless, attributeless. They will say, "Not this; not this"; whereas bhaktas say, "He is this; He is this." Both are right and both are wrong, for both are incomplete.

Expression can never be perfect. All manifestations are bound to be incomplete. Words can express only half the experience. The other half is bound to be left out because contradicting words make no sense.

Efforts have been made in this direction also. The Upanishads have said, "He is further than the furthest, and nearer than the nearest." There is a new school of thought in the West, a new theological concept, called Positive Analysis. These people would call the above statement of the Upanishads as nonsense. They would argue that when you say further from the furthest, you cannot say nearer than the nearest in the same breath; for both statements nullify each other. These thinkers of the West would also consider Lao Tzu's teachings absurd.

Lao Tzu says, "Formless is His form." This makes no sense to them, for form means form to them, and formlessness is formlessness. It is, according to them, like saying, "To be dead is to be alive," or, "His ugliness is his beauty." or "His sight is his blindness." They would entreat Lao Tzu not to make use of such statements because blindness is blindness and to have sight is to see. If you use blindness to mean eyes, and eyes to mean blindness, there will be too much confusion. One of the outstanding members of this school of thought, Ludwig Wittgenstein has said, "That which cannot be said must not be said. Do not say that which disturbs and confuses language."

So there are three ways open to us. One is the use of the positive language. Positive language has its own shortcomings. It forms boundaries, definitions, and narrows down the vast existence. The second is the use of the language of negation. No boundaries are formed, no forms take shape and the vast existence remains boundless. But then, existence goes beyond understanding; it becomes a mystery. The third way is to make use of the positive and negative together. Then you can say, "He is and yet He is not. He is big and He is also small." Use them both together.

But then, language becomes a riddle. Nothing will be expressed. Then what is to be done? There is a fourth way. Remain silent. But this solves no problems. So language is a necessary evil; and we have to choose. Each one's choice is his personal preference. Jesus and Mansoor prefer positive language. Lao Tzu prefers negative language. No one can say who is right and who is wrong. For Jesus, his own trend of thinking is correct; for Lao Tzu his own opinions are correct. Their trend of thought depends on their own way of thinking.

Our trouble is that we are always trying to find similarities between their sayings before we are willing to accept them as correct. We cannot accept them all as being authentic at the same time. It is either Lao Tzu who is correct or Buddha or Jesus or Krishna. They all cannot be correct.

I say unto you, leave this debate as it is. Take whatever appeals to you from all these people and follow it. Do not worry about everybody. The day you reach the goal you will find that they are all correct. Till such time as you reach the goal, select whatever suits your personality from all, or any, and proceed.

At the same time, do not ever make the mistake of thinking that what is right for you is right for all. Do not try to convince your friend of your way of thinking, for it is quite possible that it may not suit his personality and you may become responsible for his death. We are all responsible for destroying each other. One man dances and sings; another says, "What foolishness you are indulging in! Use your common sense!" Actually what he means is that if he himself danced it would be nonsensical; it would seem foolish. But he is crossing his limitations and imposing his will on the other by denouncing him. He makes himself the criterion for others.

No man is a criterion for anyone else in this world. One who thinks he is commits a grave violence; he is a criminal. It is very possible that what seems foolishness to me may be giving immense joy to another, and what seems the ultimate knowledge to me may seem foolish to another. The other is of no consequence in this matter; my own self is what matters. I have to seek out the way that leads me to bliss, no matter how foolish it seems to the rest of the world. Therefore Krishna has said, "One's own nature is best. One should leave the other to his own."

But we are forever imposing our religion on others. Those who prefer the language of negation will find Lao Tzu interesting and will understand him. Those who prefer positive language will not understand Lao Tzu. There is no need to. Where you start from is not important. What is important is the fact that you finally reach the destination that both Jesus and Lao Tzu have talked about. The day you reach, you shall find that all roads converge on the same point. Until that time, you have to choose one path for yourself.

There is another danger. There are some people who are extra-wise. They say that both the positive and the negative are correct. But such people make no progress, for no one can walk on two roads at the same time. You must walk on one path only. In this age, the number of such wise people is increasing rapidly. They say that Christianity is all right, Hinduism is all right, so also Islam, etcetera. They say, "Allah and Ishwara are only His names." These people do not proceed to their goal. If all roads lead to the same destination, it is hard to choose one. The seeker sets out on one. No sooner does he go a little further, than he wishes to try another path. Then a third, then a fourth. The result is that he remains where he is. For one who wishes to begin his journey, one road is the answer. For one who is merely indulging in mental acrobatics, all roads are right.

For the seeker, there is always one path. For one who has already reached, all paths are right. But as long as you have not reached, do not speak the language of those who have reached. Standing at the gate, if you feel you are familiar with the inside of the palace you are an unfortunate person. You are still outside the palace; you still have to go within. Similarly, for one who is still at the periphery to say that all roads lead to the same goal is like cutting his own feet. He speaks a language borrowed from those who have already reached, whereas he himself has hardly begun his journey. He will be unable to make any progress.

For this very reason, each religion denounces other religions. All religions have done this. Their claim is very precious, and very dangerous. All valuable things are dangerous. It is only cheap things that involve no danger. The more significant a truth, the more dangerous it is. The slightest mistake and it becomes dangerous. Each religion has said, "This alone is the true religion." This is a dangerous statement; at the same time, a very powerful one. It is dangerous if you take it to mean that 'no one is true except me.' This is dangerous. The meaning is quite different. It means that for the seeker one path is enough, for only then can he progress. None of the religions have worried about proclaiming the ultimate truth for they knew that when a person reaches, he will come to know himself.

But we all have abortive minds. We hardly begin a thing before the mind is filled with a thousand statements regarding it. We hardly take a step and we begin to talk of the destination.

Lao Tzu is right. So is Mansoor. But this you shall only know when you also reach the same place. So do not be hasty. Whatever path suits, take that to be the path. What seem wrong, take those ways to be absolutely worthless. This does not mean that you make your choice and then just sit, doing nothing. That has no meaning. To choose a path that seems to be the right path to you is only meaningful if you intend to begin on it.

People think that the misunderstandings between the Hindus, the Sikhs, the Christians, the Muslims, the Buddhist and the Jainas are getting less; the world is improving. This is not the case. The fact is, no one is now eager to follow any religion. Then what is the need to quarrel? It is not that people have become bigger hearted and believe in live and let live. Rather, religion has lost its importance in the lives of people and thus it can be conveniently disregarded. If a person says, today, "There is no God," no one will challenge him. No one bothers. Not because people are so tolerant but because of the general apathy and lack of interest. If it is declared that the Gita and the Koran convey the same message, we accept it: perhaps it is so. This is not because we have studied the Gita or the Koran but because we do not wish to waste time in idle discussions.

A friend has sent me a book he has written to prove that the Bible and the Gita give the same message. He has taken great pains over both these books. I went through his whole book and found that his efforts have been in vain. There is no similarity anywhere. Not a single statement from one can be found in the other. And yet, from Radhakrishnan to Vinoba, all have approved and extolled his work. This has given me the feeling that none of them has read the book. Perhaps they thought it was a laudable effort which should be encouraged. Both the positive and negative statements are correct -- but only for those who have reached, not for you. I talk on Krishna. If you like positive language, you can follow Krishna. I talk on Lao Tzu, because no one else has given such a beautiful rendering of negation. Lao Tzu is superlative on the path of negation. Those who are drawn towards the path of negation may follow Lao Tzu.

Do not worry about what is right. What is important is what you feel to be right for you. That is the basic, most valuable question.

Question 4

IN THE LAST SUTRA YESTERDAY IT WAS SAID THAT HE WHO HAS COME TO KNOW THE SECRET OF THE REST THAT FOLLOWS NATURALLY AFTER EVERY ACTIVITY MAINTAINS HIS CALM FOR ALL TIME. YOU HAVE ALSO SAID THAT INTENSE ACTIVITY IS FOLLOWED BY DEEP RELAXATION. BUT OUR EXPERIENCE IS THAT THE CALM ATTAINED BY INTENSE ACTIVITY IS ALSO UNSTABLE SINCE IT TOO SOON DISPERSES. PLEASE TELL US HOW A PERMANENT CALM CAN BE ATTAINED.

There are two conditions of the mind: one is of restlessness; the other of tranquillity. Whenever we are active, the mind is restless. Activity begins and tensions are formed and thoughts awakened. As much work begins within as without. That is the restlessness. Then, work ceases. If we enter into our activities with one pointedness, then, says Lao Tzu, the activity within ceases. Then peace ensues.

Our condition is such that we are neither completely restless nor completely at rest. To be completely relaxed we would have to be completely motivated in our work. Otherwise it is not possible. Therefore,

the tension and restlessness that still remain even after the work is over, begin to move within and remain, there.

For instance, say that I am angry with you. But, what happens naturally is that I do not become completely angry with you. I suppress part of my anger. Then, when you have gone away and the matter has ended, the anger that still remains within me will begin to work. Had I been totally angry, the anger within would have ended along with the ending of the incident.

Gurdjieff used to teach his disciples how to be angry. He was the only sensible teacher of this century. There is no dearth of senseless teachers in the world who tell us we should not be angry, we should not be greedy. They merely repeat the time-worn adages of their forefathers, which they themselves do not understand.

Gurdjieff would tell his disciples to bring out their anger. The poor pupil would be nonplussed. "But anger is what I want to be rid of. It is consuming me," the disciple would say.

"Had you vented your anger completely," Gurdjieff would tell him, "You would have found it impossible to bear. You would have jumped out of it."

When a house catches on fire, men run out of it as quickly as they can. No one waits to inquire where the door is, much less to sit and ponder whether he is being rightly guided or not. When a house is in flames, people within simply jump out of it. A man tries to escape in whatever manner possible. He has to find a way out somehow. That becomes the most important thing. Which way, whether it is suitable or not, does not matter. Remember, as long as the way appears more significant, it shows that you are still unaware of the fire raging within. Once you are aware of the flames within, you cannot dilly-dally, asking about what is the way and how best you can go. Then all that matters is how to jump out of the fire.

Gurdjieff would say, "Be thoroughly angry." He would teach his pupils how to be so completely angry that no anger remained within. He told them not to suppress their anger in the slightest way. A wonderful thing happened to the student who followed this order. He found that a strange, beautiful calm and restfulness pervaded his entire being. Everything became silent and peaceful, like after a storm.

So we must first understand this rule of nature that Lao Tzu speaks of. That is that rest is inevitable after each activity, if the activity is complete. But this is not enough in order to remain calm. Maintaining one's calm is a deeper happening that is directly dependent on a particular experience. When a man realises that anger is followed by tranquillity, that day follows night and again night is followed by day, that light follows darkness, which is again followed by light, and so on, he comes to realise the play of opposites that goes on all around him. Then he suddenly comes to understand that "I am apart from this play of the opposites."

If I can see anger descending on me and then leaving me; then, again, if I can witness the coming and going of anger and the resultant peace, it is as if I am sitting in a room and watching the rising of the sun

in the morning and the setting of the sun in the evening. Then, do I say in the morning, "I am light?" Or do I say in the evening, "I am darkness"? No. I experienced both light and darkness; I know both. I am the witness. I watch the morning arrive and depart. So also the evening.

Calmness does not mean tranquillity. Calmness is to know the mid-point between restlessness and tranquillity. He who says he seeks tranquillity can never attain calmness. If you desire peace, what happens to restlessness? It is as good as saying, "I want light, I do not want darkness. I want the sunrise and not the sunset." If you desire one, you have to pass through the other. He who desires peace must pass through turmoil. He who desires birth must go through death.

But this is what we do. We want birth but no death; we want the morning but not the evening; we want youth but not old age. We want only half. That cannot be, for that is not the rule of existence. And hence, we can never attain calm!

Everyone desires peace and tranquillity; but the harder one strives, the greater becomes his restlessness. He who desires the morn and not the eventide begins to worry about the evening as soon as morning comes. In so doing, he loses the pleasure of the morning by in thinking of ways and means to escape the evening. Then, when evening comes, as it is bound to, he is unhappy once again. He never enjoys the pleasure of the morning because the evening appears along with the morn.

The man who strives for tranquillity finds himself fearful and afraid even in its midst because he is afraid he may lose it at any moment. Then, when restlessness takes hold of him, he again desires tranquillity. And when tranquillity comes he is fearful of losing it and hence does not enjoy it. So, calmness becomes impossible.

Calmness, equality of temperament, is a priceless thing. It means that when restlessness is there, one knows it is there; when tranquillity is there, one knows it is there. A man who has known this faces restlessness calmly and faces tranquillity calmly. He knows the law of life: that day and night follow each other. Such a man calmly accepts his periods of restlessness and tranquillity.

This state is called the state of calmness, of equilibrium. It means that now neither restlessness nor peace affects him. He neither looks forward to them, nor denies them. Now he desires nothing. He just watches. He is a witness who only observes. Calmness happens in a witnessing state. This is a stable calmness which cannot be destroyed by restlessness or increased by tranquillity. It is fixed mid-way between the two. Restlessness and peace are not stable states because they are two sides of a big happening. Calmness is fixed. It is stable; it is eternal, it is forever.

Question 5

YOU HAVE SAID THAT THOSE WHO ATTAIN THE TAO LOOK UPON LIFE AS A CONSTANT DANGER AND BECOME GRAVE. ON THE OTHER HAND, WHEN YOU TALK OF KRISHNA, YOU SAY THAT LIFE WAS A MERE PLAY TO HIM. HE LAUGHED HIS WAY THROUGH LIFE. WHATEVER HE DID WAS A DANCE, A FROLIC. YOU SAY THAT THE BEHAVIOUR OF SAINTS IS BOUND TO BE DIFFERENT. THIS DIFFERENCE IN BEHAVIOUR WE

CAN UNDERSTAND BUT THE DIFFERENCE IN THE VERY NATURE OF KRISHNA AND LAO TZU IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND. KINDLY EXPLAIN.

You will never be able to understand the nature of Krishna and you will never understand the nature of Lao Tzu. Only Krishna can understand Krishna's nature; only Lao Tzu can understand Lao Tzu's nature -- just as you alone can understand your nature. All we can understand of another is his behaviour, his actions. We can only see what Krishna does. How can we see what he is? We can see what Buddha does, what he says, but how can we know what he is? Nature means that which is unmanifest, hidden within. And that, you cannot see. You can only see the actions.

Buddha sits serenely and Krishna plays the flute. You infer that Krishna is happy because he plays the flute and Buddha cannot be happy for he plays no flute; but just sits with his eyes closed. You cannot see their nature, which is one. But Buddha has his own way of manifesting his nature and Krishna has his own way. This depends upon their individual personality.

For example, suppose there are ten bulbs of different colours in this room. The current passing through them is one, but each bulb gives a different light according to its own colour. The bodies of Krishna and Buddha are the different bulbs, but the current within is the same. The bulbs can be likened to the personalities, and the electric current to the energy within. Personalities are different (like the bulbs), but the energy within (like the electric current) is one.

Krishna's body is his bulb; Lao Tzu's body is his bulb. These are personalities. The nature within both of them is one, but you cannot see it. Only when you yourself go within will you discover that this nature is colourless -- neither blue nor red nor yellow. That which appeared to be Buddha was the personality of Buddha; that which appeared to be Krishna was the personality of Krishna. Personalities can be seen, behaviours can be observed, but that which happens within is invisible.

If we interchange the bulbs we shall find that it makes no difference to the current if, where there was a blue light, now there is a red light. If it were possible to change personalities, we would find Buddha playing the flute with the same gay abandon as Krishna, and Krishna sitting silent and serene under a tree. But this is not in our hands, fortunately. It is within our hands, though, to enter within our own bulbs and observe our own nature. Then we shall find that, within that nature, everything is quiet, serene; there is no form, no shape. But to manifest this formless, we have to make use of the body, the mind.

Buddha spoke the Pali language because that was the language he knew. Krishna spoke in Sanskrit because that was the language prevalent in his time. Jesus spoke in Hebrew for that was his language. But truth is neither in Pali nor Sanskrit nor Hebrew. If you think truth is in Sanskrit only, then when it is spoken in Hebrew it will become untruth. But when Jesus experienced the truth, was it in terms of Hebrew -- or, in the case of Krishna, in Sanskrit, and, in the case of Buddha, in Pali? No. When truth is experienced, there is neither Pali nor Sanskrit nor Hebrew within. All words are lost, all languages vanish and the infinite existence is experienced as a great silence an emptiness within.

When a person realises truth, all language is lost within. But when this truth needs to be expressed, some language has to be made use of. Buddha could not express in Sanskrit, nor Krishna in Pali. Each could express only in his own language. Language is a part of the individuality.

The negative or positive aspects are part of the individuality of a person. Whether to dance or sing or to be silent are all part of the individuality of a person. But the experience within is beyond all these. This, however, we cannot see, and therefore are unable to understand. We shall only understand this when we delve within our own nature, not before that.

We are bound to observe the difference because, from where we stand, there is no way to see the non-difference. To experience the non-difference you shall have to be established within yourself at the centre, where all the causes that create difference and non-difference vanish.

Suppose I have one hundred pieces of blank paper. There will be no difference between them. Now if I were to give one hundred people one paper each and ask each of them to draw a picture of a man, these hundred pieces of paper will become a hundred pictures and no two will be alike. Each paper becomes different from the rest. The picture painted by Picasso will fetch thousands of rupees but the painting you have made will not be acceptable even as waste paper; and yet the paper in both cases will be the same. They were equal to each other in value as long as they were blank. As soon as we stamp our individuality on it, its value changes: Picasso's paper becomes more valuable, and ours gain or lose in value according to our individual personality.

Buddha, Jesus and Lao Tzu are blank sheets of paper within, but as soon as we see them from outside they form a picture, the picture of their individuality. This picture does not portray the existence; it is their particular individuality.

The word "individuality" is a very meaningful word. It does not mean that which is hidden within. Rather, it is the characteristic of that which is expressed through the medium. A flame burns through a lantern. The light is dim because the chimney is covered with soot. There is another lantern with clean, clear glass. Its light is brighter. The name within is the same; the difference is in the glass of the chimney. The individuality can dim or brighten that which comes from within.

When Kabir speaks, he can speak only in the language of a weaver. All his symbolisms and similes pertain to weaving, because all his life he was a weaver. Therefore he could sing, "I have woven the sheet so fine, so fine!" Buddha could never say such a thing for he had no idea of weaving, nor did his forefathers ever have anything to do with weaving. Kabir alone could talk in this language because all his life he was a weaver. Kabir's language is harsh and crude; there is a rough sharpness in it. When Buddha speaks, even if he rebukes a person it seems as if he is throwing a flower at him. There is a majestic beauty in his speech.

The immediacy we experience in the speech of Jesus and Mohammed is completely absent in others. There is a reason for this. Both Jesus and Mohammed were uneducated village people. Village people have very few words at their disposal, and these too are not refined. They are like rough, unhewn stones. The language that is at the command of Buddha or Mahavira is like a stone that is carved into a

beautiful image. It is no wonder that Jesus and Mohammed penetrated deep within the masses and Mahavira and Buddha lagged behind. The words of Jesus and Mohammed appeal to the masses because their language is easily understood; their teachings are simple enough for the common man.

It is difficult to follow the teachings of Buddha and Mahavira. They appear so far away to the common man, as if they are talking from a mountain peak. There is a gulf between them and the common man. These are because of differences in personalities.

Also, if Mahavira or Buddha spoke the language of Jesus or Mohammed in India, no one would have listened to them because this country was at that time, at the zenith of its culture.

Also had Mohammed made the mistake of speaking to his people in the same strain as Buddha, no one would have heeded him. Those amongst whom he spoke were barbaric desert people who believed in the rule of the sword. They could only understand things pertaining to the sword and nothing else.

Personality, and the time and the situation, we can see and understand. Not so the existence within. But do not worry too much on this account. If you begin to have an idea of the difference between individuality and existence, you will gradually begin to search within. And the day you discover your individuality to be apart from your existence, the doors within shall open and you shall be able to look within. Buddha is just the outer clothing. So is Lao Tzu. So is Jesus and Mohammed. That which is hidden within the clothing is completely apart from them.

Do not think of existence in terms of outer clothing. But, alas, what can we do? We think only in terms of the outer; we have no notion of what is within. Go beyond the clothes and see what lies hidden beneath. Then you shall be able to go beyond all clothing, all covering, and see the one existence.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #15

Chapter title: Inaction, destiny and going back to the eternal law

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ATTAIN THE UTMOST IN PASSIVITY.

HOLD FIRM TO THE BASIS OF QUIETUDE.

MYRIAD THINGS TAKE SHAPE AND RISE TO ACTIVITY, BUT I WATCH THEM FALL BACK TO THEIR REPOSE LIKE VEGETATION THAT LUXURIOUSLY GROWS BUT RETURNS TO THE ROOT (SOIL) FROM WHICH IT SPRINGS.

TO RETURN TO THE ROOT IS REPOSE.

IT IS CALLED GOING BACK TO ONE'S DESTINY.

GOING BACK TO ONE'S DESTINY IS TO FIND THE ETERNAL LAW.

TO KNOW THE ETERNAL LAW IS ENLIGHTENMENT.

AND NOT TO KNOW THE ETERNAL LAW IS TO COURT DISASTER.

The sky is clear now. Soon it will be filled with clouds. The clouds will come, they will shower rain, and will be no more. The sky will remain the same however. The sky is an actionless passivity. The clouds are an activity. Clouds form and disperse. The sky is never formed and never unformed. The clouds are there sometimes and they are not there at other times. The sky forever is. The existence of the clouds lies in between birth and death. For the existence of the sky there is no birth and no death. The sky is beyond time, it is eternal. The clouds form and disperse within time.

The name of this sutra is: KNOWING THE ETERNAL LAW. Wherever activity is, eternity cannot be; for each activity has to revert to repose and hence cannot be eternal. Activity has to tire out and return to repose. Only inactivity can be eternal.

It is very necessary to understand this sutra. The religious have said that God is the Creator. Lao Tzu does not accept this. He says that creation is an activity. If God is the Creator, someday He is bound to be tired of this activity. Every activity leads to repose. The result of each and every activity is inactivity. If God is the creator, and if creativity is His form, He cannot be eternal. Only intrinsic inactivity can be eternal.

If the sky was also active, it too would have faded like the clouds. The clouds are always engaged in activity. They get filled with moisture. Then there is loud thundering and clapping and flashes of lightning. Then it rains and the clouds are empty; they are lost. They are bound to be, for all activities have a beginning and an end.

That which has no beginning has no end. Lao Tzu's God is inactive. Therefore, Lao Tzu does not refer to Him as God. He calls him the eternal law: Tao. If we see this from different angles in life, it will be easier

to see within oneself. Then we shall understand Lao Tzu's sadhana. Then we shall understand what he says, what type of a person can attain this eternal absolute.

We saw a seed: a tree is born. Its branches spread on all sides and then the flowers come. Then one day this tree falls and becomes once again one with the soil. A person is born; he lives his life. Then one day we put him in a coffin and return him to the soil. You wake up in the morning, you are tired by evening and sleep claims you at night. Birth is also an awakening and death an eventide. We fall back to where we started. But is there something with us like the sky is with the clouds?

The tree is born out of the soil. The soil rises towards the sky and becomes the leaves and branches. Then, in this soil -- in the form of the tree -- the flowers bloom. Then the flowers wither, so do the leaves and branches, and eventually the tree. Dust returns to dust. Was there something besides the leaves and branches, something like the sky within the tree? The whole of the tree's being was like that of the clouds: the small seed bursting into a sapling and becoming a huge tree, and then its consequent end. This was activity. Was there anything besides that in the tree -- something like the sky, that was there when the tree was in seed form and which still remained when the tree was no more?

A child is born. It is like the birth of a cloud. There will be a great commotion as the child passes through life. He becomes a youth. Desires hold him. He is filled with ambitions and life becomes a mad frenzy of activity. There will be anxieties and tensions, defeats and failures. It will become a long story. And then, everything ends, becomes nothing. Dust into dust as Omar Khayyaam says. Were there only clouds in this man and nothing like the sky?

Desires are like clouds. Sometimes they are over-laden, like rain clouds. Look at a young man, he is like a rain-filled cloud. Look at an old man. He is like a spent cloud. Everything within him has drained away. An old man is like a rainless cloud. But is there something like the sky behind a man's desires, his ambitions, his achievements, or is there not? If there is no sky behind him, then there is no atman either. If there is some sky behind him, then only the atman is.

Those who do not believe in the atman, admit that clouds form but they do not acknowledge the existence of the sky. There can be no clouds without the sky. The sky can exist without anything. If there are clouds, the sky is there. If there are not clouds, the sky is still there. It makes no difference to its being. The clouds are an accident or a happening that is dependent on many factors.

Understand this. Clouds form in the sky because of many factors. The sun comes out, water evaporates and rises towards the sky and clouds are formed. If the sun does not shine and no heat is produced, no clouds can form. If the sun gives heat and there is no water, no clouds can form. The sky is noncausal. Whether the sun shines or does not shine, whether clouds form or do not form, whether water is or is not, whether the moon or the stars or the earth or man exist or not, the sky forever is. Its existence is unconditional and is not affected by anything. This means that all things that are conditioned by some cause are like the clouds and all things that are not caused by anything are like the sky.

You are born. There are two factors that play an important part in your birth. One part is like the clouds. Without your parents, you could not have acquired your body. There are a thousand reasons that went

into giving you a body, but if these reasons alone were enough, then there would be no sky within you. If you could still be, without your parents, without your body, then alone can there be the atman within you. Otherwise there is no meaning in the term atman.

Lao Tzu says that within each of us there is the cloud and there is the sky. Just like clouds cannot be without the sky, desires cannot be without the atman. Just like clouds need the sky in order to sail along, so desires need the atman to swim in. The atman can be without desires but desires cannot be without the atman. And just as we cannot see the sky when the sky is over-laden with clouds, so also when the atman is overladen with desires, only desires can be seen and not the atman.

Each desire leads to activity. This is why the sages of old said that unless a man reaches the state of desirelessness he cannot attain the atman. Until he reaches desirelessness, he cannot attain the state of non-activity. Each desire gives birth to an activity. The rise of a desire within means that you have started on an activity. When a desire is born, activity begins, and the clouds begin to form. The greater the number of clouds the less of the sky is visible. The sky is visible only when there are no clouds.

Or between two clouds we can see the sky. Between the gap of two desires, we sometimes get a glimpse of the atman. But ordinarily this does not happen, for no sooner is one desire fulfilled than we create a hundred others. One desire dies and a thousand are born. Our sky is always filled with clouds. Therefore, when a man tries to understand himself, he finds he is merely a collection of activities.

This is exactly how we see ourselves. If someone asks you who you are, what is your answer? You will at once recount your accomplishments: how much wealth you have, how many houses you own, how many titles and degrees you possess. You are a collection of all your actions. You look upon yourself as the cloud; you have no notion of the sky. The sky has nothing to do with your activities. The sky is, and you do not have to do anything about it. Its existence is not dependent on anything.

In each happening that occurs these two sutras are present simultaneously. There is the world of activity and the atman of inactivity. To know this passivity, this inactivity, is to know the eternal law.

Let us understand this sutra. Lao Tzu says that we should attain the supreme state of passivity and hold fast to it with the help of calmness and tranquillity. What is meant by attaining the supreme state of passivity within one's self? This does not mean you are to do nothing. As long as there is life there is bound to be activity. If you do nothing and just sit, that sitting will also be an act. If you lie like a corpse, that too becomes an action. If you leave everything and run away to the forest, that too is an activity.

A youth came to the Zen fakir Hiutti. He told him to remember this sutra of Lao Tzu: "ATTAIN THE UTMOST IN PASSIVITY." The youth tried to follow his advice. The next morning he went to Hiutti and sat like an image of Buddha: silent, unmoving. Hiutti shook him and said, "We have enough images of Buddha in the temple. We need no more. This will not do. Attain the utmost in passivity. It is only you who is sitting and you have to put in a lot of effort in order to sit like this. When a man sits in his normal manner, it involves less effort; but when he sits like the Buddha, he has to strain more."

The youth tried every method but he kept on failing because no method led to passivity. The very word "method" means action. How can action help one to attain non-action? If a man wants to stop, how can he stop by running? If a man wants to die, he cannot do so by living. How can one attain non-action by action?

The youth was distraught with grief. He did not know what to do. He went to the elder disciples who had been there long before him and who must have gone through this same initial training at the guru's hands, and asked for their advice. They said, "Passivity can only be attained in death. As long as you are alive how can there be no action? To live means to be in action. Life is activity."

The next day the youth went to Hiutti. On being questioned about his progress, he dropped dead at the guru's feet. The guru said, "Open one eye." He opened an eye and looked at the guru. "What is this?" The guru asked, "Who taught you this? Truth can never be taught. Don't you know that?"

The youth burst into tears and said, "I have tried everything. This was my last effort. I know nothing more. How can I attain passivity?"

The guru said that as long as he kept asking how? he would never attain. What does how mean? It means: in what manner, by what method, by what attempt and what action? He said, "You are only asking about action and not inaction. Passivity cannot be attained, for it is already there. The only thing to be done is to shift your attention from action towards non-action, from the clouds to the sky. It is just a matter of shifting your focus."

The sky is not to be attained; the sky is. We have never lost it. At the most, we have forgotten it. The sky does not have to be created so we cannot create it by our efforts. Anything created by our efforts can never be the sky.

Therefore, there is no method to attain the atman. There is no sadhana to attain the atman. All efforts, all sadhanas, are meant only to shift our attention from the realm of clouds within us so that we can see the sky behind.

This sutra of Lao Tzu says: "ATTAIN THE UTMOST IN PASSIVITY." Because of the words, it creates a misunderstanding. "Attain" means to achieve something. These are the shortcomings of language, Lao Tzu told us in the very beginning that what he wishes to say can never be said, and whatever he says will inevitably become false.

Our language depends entirely on action. Even when a person is dead, we say he has died -- as if it is an act he performed. One does not have to do anything in order to die. But our language is the language of action. It is bound to be so because we know life according to the clouds. There is nothing but movement, action, in it.

We say to a person, "I love you" -- as if love is an act. No one has as yet made love in this world. Love is not an act that you can perform. Love either is or is not; there is no question of doing it. If it is, well and good. If not, so be it. You cannot attempt to love. Love has no connection with activity. But in language,

love becomes an action. We say that a mother loves her son. There is no method of doing love, but language converts everything into action.

In exactly the same way, we look upon meditation as a form of action. A person says, "I meditate." This is the burden of language, and its helplessness to express what is. It changes everything into an act.

That is why this sutra seems very contradictory: "ATTAIN THE UTMOST STATE OF PASSIVITY." Attainment means action. But if the state of inactivity is to be attained, it cannot become an achievement. All achievements are actions. You can attain wealth, you can attain honor, you can attain a status. These are all actions. But how can passivity be attained?

Lao Tzu explains: "There are two layers within us. One is the layer of activity: of clouds, of waves and ripples. Exactly below this, in the lower depths, there is the sky." It is in this sky that all the clouds glide. This sky, this space, is boundless, whereas the clouds are limited. The ability to see beyond these clouds becomes the attainment of passivity.

Lao Tzu goes on to say, in the very next part of the same sutra, "ATTAIN THE UTMOST IN PASSIVITY. HOLD FIRM TO THE BASIS OF QUIETUDE." When you know of the sky within, don't wander anymore in the clouds. No matter how much you wander in the clouds, always be united with the sky within. If you can always be aware of the sky within that you have experienced, you may safely indulge in all activities. Let your journey be in any direction, so long as you are constantly aware of the fixed and stable factor within you that never moves.

Always keep this fixed, passive sky in your mind. If the clouds of anger spread over your mind, or the smoke of sex fills the mind, or the poison of greed spreads within, remain aware and conscious of the clear, passive sky that is, deep down, within. The clouds sometimes are and sometimes are not. They come for a moment and go in a moment. So one does not have to be agitated by them. One only gets agitated if he forgets the profound basis of quietude within himself.

There is Sufi story. An emperor was growing older. He called his ministers and said, "I am getting old and I see death coming closer and closer. I have not been worried about knowledge before, but now that death is approaching, I have to worry about knowledge. If there was no death, perhaps there would have been no need for religious scriptures. My mind is restless and I am afraid. I need something now to hold on to so that I may not be afraid. I find that all the measures I took to protect myself are useless before my approaching death, I made huge fortresses. I have a huge army, well-equipped with guns but what is the use? They cannot save me from death! Find me something to give strength to my trembling mind. I hear old age knock and I tremble like a leaf:"

The ministers said, "We can advise you about your palaces and fortresses but in this connection we know nothing."

A country-wide search was made in order to find someone who could relieve the king of his fear. Ultimately an old fakir offered to help him. He gave him a sutra enclosed in a taveez (charm). He

exhorted him to open it only as a last resort, when all his efforts failed and he felt he could do nothing more.

The king tied the amulet on his arm. Many times he felt it was time to open the charm but then a new course of action would be opened to him. Years passed by. Then one day he was defeated by an enemy. As he fled for his life, with the enemy close on his heels, he suddenly remembered the amulet. But then he thought that he had a strong, fleet-footed horse and he could cross over into another country. So he did not waste any time and sped along. After some time, as fate would have it, he reached the top of a mountain. Before him was a deep abyss. Behind him he could hear the hoofs of the enemy horses coming closer and closer. There was nothing he could do. He opened the amulet, hoping it contained a magic mantra. To his dismay he found the fakir had written: "This too will pass." He was angry with the fakir for having fooled him like this, but he could do nothing. There was no escape. He waited for the worst, with the amulet in his hand. Then, to his surprise, the sound of the horse hoofs began to get fainter and fainter. The enemy had taken the wrong path. He put the amulet back on his arm and turned back. This time, his army defeated the enemy.

From then onwards, he began to open the amulet and read it again and again. If someone insulted or abused him, he took out the charm and read it. Then he would smile and fold it back in its case. From then onwards, no one ever found him unhappy or anxious or even angry. Nor did the thought of life or death trouble him anymore. His ministers were eager to know the contents of the magic charm that had brought such a change in their king. It was a small sutra: "This too will pass."

If you understand this well, you will know that that which passes away is the cloud and that which neither comes nor goes is you. That which comes and goes is not you. If this remembrance gets deeply rooted within, you shall be well-rooted to the basis of quietude within. The emperor had found his roots well within the ocean of tranquillity within him.

That which is within me and is not manifest without -- that is me. All my actions come and go; whatever I do passes away. Therefore, there is no connection between my actions and the eternal law. Rather, my very state of non-action is joined to the eternal law.

All things that assume form become active. The cloud takes a form and becomes active. The tree takes a form and becomes active. Desires take form within us and become active. But then we see them reverting back to repose again.

Lao Tzu says: "MYRIAD THINGS TAKE SHAPE AND RISE IN ACTIVITY, BUT I WATCH THEM FALL BACK TO REPOSE." If we begin to understand that all forms -- whether beautiful or ugly, whether pleasing or repulsive -- form and disintegrate, that disintegration is the inevitable rule of creation; that what is born today must die tomorrow, (the flower that blooms today must wither tomorrow) -- if we understand that this withering is only the other part of blooming; if we can see beyond it, then we shall have developed a religious attitude. Buddha referred to this as the eye of religion. He used to say, "Everything is undecided and prone to decay and destruction. Nothing persists; nothing remains. That which has a beginning has an end. He who sees this attains a religious-eye."

By learning the Koran or the Bible or the Gita by heart, we cannot acquire this religious-eye. It only comes with experience.

But we see only the form. We see the cloud in the sky and the sky is wiped out from our vision altogether -- the sky that always was and always is and always shall be. The clouds become everything. We forget that soon the clouds will roll away; they will be no more. We forget that they are nothing but a mass of vapor, condensed smoke. A person who can still see the clear sky behind the clouds attains a religious eye.

All forms take shape and disintegrate. But forms attract the mind very easily. Forget about actual forms. People even hold pictures of beautiful bodies against their hearts. A few lines on a piece of paper are enough to sway the mind. It is no wonder that people are affected by actual forms.

If we look a little closely however, we shall be able to see the blank paper behind the pencil lines. If we observe more closely, we shall be able to see the vast sky behind the framework of bone and flesh. All people and all things are nothing more than lines etched out on the canvas of nature.

Buddha says, "Everything is an accumulation, and all accumulations fall apart."

Buddha was on his deathbed. His bhikshus were standing beside him weeping. One asked: "Now what will happen to you? Where will you go?"

Buddha replied, "I will go nowhere. That which you took to be me was a mere accumulation of lines and forms. It will disintegrate and become one with the dust before your very eyes. You yourselves will cremate it. What you consider to be me will become one with the dust for it is created out of dust. But what is actually me has nowhere to go. But you do not know that part of me."

Behind each form is the formless. Without the formless, form cannot be, just as without the sky the clouds cannot be. The formless is inevitable in order for the form to be. But we can see the form only, not the formless.

Lao Tzu says that all things become activated as soon as they assume form, but then they return to repose once again. To observe this is religion.

"LIKE VEGETATION THAT LUXURIOUSLY GROWS, BUT RETURNS TO THE ROOT (SOIL) FROM WHICH IT SPRINGS."

A plant is born. It grows and blooms, spreading its fragrance all around. Its branches seem to want to reach up to the sun as they swing and sway with the wind. So much colour, so much form! And then, after six months or a year, it is no more. Dust returns to dust -- like a wave that rises high, as if it would touch the sky, and then falls quickly into the sea and is no more. But when the plant was in full bloom, with its abundance of foliage and flowers, we did not notice the sky behind it.

Lao Tzu says: "All things go back to where they came from." Only one who can see things reverting back is able to touch the ultimate point of passivity. This person alone can become one with the basis of quietude.

"TO RETURN TO THE ROOT IS REPOSE." This is a question of perception. One should develop the eye to perceive this.

We can see a plant. We know that in due time it will disintegrate. We can see a cloud. We know that in due time it shall be no more. But when a person applies this introspection to his own self and knows that whatever of him is visible -- his body, his mind, his thoughts, his ego, his am-ness, his intellect.... All of him that can be perceived will one day revert back to the soil just as all forms do. Then, says Lao Tzu, "TO RETURN TO THE ROOTS IS REPOSE." He who is filled with this experience returns to his roots this very moment.

These words are very precious: "TO RETURN TO THE ROOT IS REPOSE." This knowledge of returning back to the fundamental root is the actual going back. To re-attain one's roots is the supreme repose.

The serenity on the face of Buddha was not the reflection of meditation or of the repetition of a mantra. When a man repeats a mantra, his face assumes a serenity which is a cultivated serenity. There is another type of peacefulness that can be induced by drugs, but it will be the peace of death. The serenity on Buddha's face comes from this returning to the roots. It is a living serenity, born out of repose. Look at the image of Buddha. Observe his face well and you will notice that it feels as though there is a centre within to which his whole image is bound. It seems as if a central focus point controls the whole form.

Look at yourself as you walk, as you sit, as you move about, and you will find that there is no central focus point within. Or, rather, there are many centres. There is a crowd within, a market-place, with all kinds of people. Your interior is filled with contrasting notes. Those who identify themselves with the clouds find themselves in this plight. The sky is one; the clouds are many. The cloud that is just a speck now becomes large and ominous and then, after a while, it disperses. You cannot depend on the cloud's form. One moment it is beautiful and another moment it is ugly because clouds are gaseous matter that change form every moment. The person who joins himself to his actions and his achievements, the person who is the sum-total of the clouds of ego that are within him -- such a person oscillates in a cloud within himself.

It is very difficult to think along these lines. By pure thinking alone, one cannot understand this. It is easy to think about a tree -- that today it is and tomorrow it shall not be -- but it is very difficult to admit that "tomorrow, I too will not be." We all know that everyone must die -- "but not me". Everyone knows we are all images of clay -- "except for me." We include our own self. It never occurs to us that in this world of changing forms, I too am a form. It is painful to face this fact and to admit to oneself that "I am but a bundle of flesh and bones. I am but a figure drawn on a blank paper. I am but a vaporous cloud." To bear the pain of this knowledge is penance, because if this thought persists in the mind, where will the ego stand? Then how will I protect my image? How will I know who I am?

Khalil Gibran has said, "As long as I did not know myself, I thought I was a solid image. But when I recognised myself, I found myself sitting with my hands tightly clenched, hands that held nothing but thin air!"

We all are clenching our fists tightly and there is nothing but air in them. We understand this intellectually but the knowledge does not penetrate deep within us. Why is that so? It is because this knowledge will shatter the pattern of life that we have made around ourselves. If someone tells me, "You are beautiful and I love you," then if I become aware that I am nothing but a handful of air, what will happen to this love? If I tell someone that my love is eternal and it shall always be -- and then, unlike the love-story we find in books if it dawns on me that I have professed my love to a handful of skin and bones -- what will happen to my love?

All the investments I have around me will stop me from thinking in this way and will assure me that I am solid, I have a personality that will endure. People sing, "When the stars and the moon are no more, even then my love shall be." If we realise that we are nothing but endings, what will happen to the infinite dreams we have created? What does it all mean? If I am no more than a puff of air, of what value is my love?

If I am nothing but smoke, of what value are my words? And if I am to exist no more, on what scale shall you weigh my words and my actions?

There is no answer. That is the difficulty. There are times when the thought comes to one's mind that I am no more than a line drawn on water. And we understand it too. But then, fear grips the heart. What of the mesh we have woven around ourselves? So we fall back and let life continue as it is.

All patterns depend on our perception. If our perception changes, the whole pattern has to change -- the whole pattern of life.

Lin Yutang has written in his recollections that a Chinese man sent a small wooden box as a present to his friend in Germany. It was a beautiful antique. But whoever had fashioned the box had engraved a condition on it -- that the front of the box should always face the sun. For thousands of years, whoever owned the box respected the wish of its maker. The Chinese man requested his friend in Germany not to break this tradition which was an inheritance of a thousand years. The German replied that there was no difficulty in observing the rule.

When the German put the chest in his sitting room, the whole place began to look incongruous. He had the whole room changed to suit the wooden chest. He changed the furniture and even the doors and windows, and repainted the room. But then, the rest of the house looked drab in comparison to this gorgeous room. So he changed the whole house in order to match the sitting room. But then, he found that the locality of his house did not go at all with the new interior. He gave up. He said that it was beyond him now to make any further changes.

A small change brings a revolution all around. A change in perception is not a small change; it is very profound. In fact, it is the most profound change possible. As soon as your perception changes you are

not the same person any more. Everything around you changes. This fear of change is what holds a person back. If the courage to change is lacking, a man cannot become religious, even if he hears about religion all his life.

Lao Tzu says: "TO RETURN TO THE ROOT IS REPOSE." This basic space, this nothingness within.... And space (AKASH) means nothingness; it means existence. It is not solid; it is not an object, it has no form. It is empty space. Everything appears and disappears within it, and it remains untouched, unaffected by everything. "THIS IS WHAT IS CALLED GOING BACK TO ONE'S DESTINY."

Lao Tzu says: to fall back to the roots, to revert back to the fundamental source and experience oneness with it, is to go back to one's destiny, back to one's nature, back into creation. This is our destiny. As long as a person does not become one with his destiny, he keeps wandering, for he lives on end. This long journey for millions of lives, is all because of our identification with form.

"GOING BACK TO ONE'S DESTINY IS TO FIND THE ETERNAL LAW." There are two laws in this world. One is the law of this world. Here, change is the law. Everything flows like the river. Nothing is repeated and nothing is stable. Science is the research of this changing world. That is why science has to change its laws every day.

There is a joke prevalent among scientists. Just like it is said in the Bible, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light," so scientists say, "And God said, 'Let Newton be born', and Newton was born -- and the world has never been the same again." Newton was an important person in the world of science. Now, the same joke is repeated about Einstein.

With Newton, law and rules come into being. He laid down three rules and the whole world, which was nothing but chaos and confusion, became organised. Then the joke goes on to say that God became so bored with the orderly world that He said, "Let Einstein be!" and Einstein was born. And he brought all the chaos back. The orderly world that Newton created with such labour -- where $2 + 2$ always made 4 -- was completely destroyed by Einstein, who proved that $2 + 2$ can never be 4.

Now, what Einstein said needs to be changed everyday. Science will have to keep on changing its theories everyday, because that which it tries to discover is always changing. What fact today becomes a fallacy tomorrow? We cannot draw a permanent picture of this ever-changing world.

It is like this. The railway station is a stationary place but there are many roads to reach it. If we take one of these roads we are sure to reach the station. But if the station was not a stationary place, we could never be sure of reaching it. Then a person who took the wrong road might reach, whereas a person going by the right road might not reach at all. Because the station is immobile, the roads to it can be determined.

If the world itself is unstable and ever-changing, it cannot have fixed rules. Therefore, science has to change its course once every four, five years.

Three hundred years ago, scientists used to say that their search was the search for truth. A few years ago, Bertrand Russell said, "Do not talk of absolute truth. Approximate truth is enough." But what is

near-truth, approximate truth? What is the meaning of approximate love or approximate theft or approximate truth? It only means a truth which holds good for the time being. As soon as it does not serve our purpose, we shall have to look for some other non-truth to replace it. Approximate truth means that truth which has yet not been proven false.

This is only natural. It is very natural because the very subject that science deals in is ever-changing.

Lao Tzu says that there is also an eternal law. This law never changes. This is the second law. But to discover this law, we shall have to set aside every thing that changes. So the laws of religion do not change.

Many Western philosophers are baffled because of this. Buddha said something, Krishna said something else and Christ said something altogether different. Also, nowadays, many people in our country find Western thought to be more significant. It has been 2500 years since Buddha died. How can the truth he preached still hold good? When, what was accepted as a fact by science a hundred years ago is no longer a fact, and even what was accepted by science as truth ten years ago is no longer considered true, then how can the words of Buddha, Mahavira, and Krishna still hold good? These people are right, because what they know as truth is forever changing. They have no knowledge of the truth that Krishna taught; they have no knowledge of the truth that Lao Tzu taught.

Lao Tzu talks of that truth where changing truths are dropped completely. That is the first condition that is fulfilled. The stream of constant change has been set aside. Religion has nothing to do with it. But it has everything to do with religion for it flows within it. It has nothing to do with the clouds. Its search is for the sky in which clouds form and die. One may argue that since the clouds seen in the afternoon are not the same as those in the morning, and those of the evening are quite different from the clouds of noon, then which is this sky I am talking about? If the clouds change, the sky must be changing too. The sky is eternal. Whatever changes, changes within the sky; but the sky never changes.

This search for the sky, this search for inner space, is what Lao Tzu is talking about. Whenever a person attains this inner space, he attains his destiny. He attains that which after attaining, there is nothing more to be attained. He has reached home. He has found his house. Now there is no need to go anywhere because he has found what he was looking for.

Each person is in search of his home, whether he knows it or not. It is possible that he does not know what he is looking for. The fact is, he is ignorant of what he is seeking. If someone asks, "What are you seeking?" you will be very uncomfortable. So no one asks such impolite questions.

If someone insists on asking, you will be confused. When you get up in the morning, the question will stare you in the face. Why have you gotten up? What do you want? What are you searching for? We are absolutely ignorant about what we are seeking. And yet, the search is there. Some unknown shores keep calling, and do not let us rest.

It is not that we do not get rewarded for our worldly efforts. We achieve a great deal, but nothing satisfies us. The best thing in this world is for us to attain whatever we strive for. If not immediately,

then a little later. But when it is attained we find it was not worth striving for. All our efforts were in vain for that which we attained did not fulfil us. He whose every desire is satisfied is the most miserable man in the world.

Just think, if God were to appear this very moment and say that all your desires are fulfilled, what would you do? Where would you go? What would you have to look forward to except death? And yet we are empty, unfulfilled within -- because we have not yet begun to search for our destiny. Destiny means: the attainment of which brings satisfaction, fulfilment.

Understand the difference. That which you wish to attain may not necessarily be your destiny. It may be; it may not be. It can only be gauged after you attain it. If it gives you the sense of fulfilment, then you have attained your destiny. If not, you have not attained your destiny. Destiny means you have reached the supreme point where desires no longer are, where all search ends and there is absolute fulfilment.

A man seeks fame and gets it. Then he realizes that he has gained nothing except for the fact that people around him think well of him. That's all. A man attains a lot of wealth. Then it occurs to him that he has spent his whole life collecting these bits of gold. Now there is nothing he can do with it except make a garland of it and tie it around his neck; and, thus, make a noose for himself. There is nothing else he can do with it.

Bernard Shaw has said that those who have said that you shall be tortured in hell must have been very imaginative people. He says that if it were left to him, he would describe hell as a place where whatsoever you wish for you attain immediately. Really there can be no hell bigger than this. One moment you desire something, and the next moment the desire is fulfilled. And yet, there is no sense of fulfilment within, because our desires are not the desires of our destiny.

Whatever we desire may perhaps not be our desire at all. Your neighbour buys a car and you too wish to possess a car. Your neighbour builds a house and you also wish to do the same. All our desires are borrowed; they are not our own. Destiny means the desire that is in your nature, that you have not borrowed from someone.

People live on borrowed desires. They run after them their whole life. Then, when the desire is attained, they find themselves as empty as ever. But they have no time to think about it because, by then, other people have passed on other desires to them.

Every man realises at death that he spent his whole life running after the fulfillment of other people's desires. Then he asks himself, "Did I have no destiny for myself? Did I not come to this earth to attain something? Was there no order in my being? The time has been spent in amassing wealth and gaining fame. But what was my destiny? What did I come here to attain?"

Lao Tzu says that destiny is attained the day a person attains the eternal law, the inner space within himself. "TO ATTAIN ONE'S DESTINY IS TO ATTAIN THE ETERNAL LAW. TO KNOW THE ETERNAL LAW IS ENLIGHTENMENT. AND NOT TO KNOW THE ETERNAL LAW IS TO COURT DISASTER."

All troubles are born by running after clouds. All the pains a man takes in order to attain a happiness that turns out to be no happiness on attainment, all the pains one takes to reach destinations that are only resting places from where one has to set out again, are all due to the fact that he does not know the eternal law.

Would that we only knew that there is an element within us that is changeless, eternal, and that we could establish our identity with it, be one with it. Then, no matter how many clouds fill the sky or how the storm thunders, there will be no shadow of a tremor within. There will be intense peace.

To attain this intense peace, I shall tell you three things. One, always use your discrimination in order to note the changes that take place within or without you; and also note that which does not change. Remember always, that what is significant is that which is changeless. All that changes is of no relevance, even if it is within you. Only that which does not change is valuable.

At all times, as you go about your work or as you walk on the road, concentrate on that within you which does not walk. The part of you that walks is all right, but there is something beyond that. When eating, keep your mind on that within you that does not eat, that does not feel hungry. While going to bed at night, know that the body is tired and needs rest; but that there is that within you which never sleeps. In every act, remember the witness who is always observing all your acts.

When we are hungry we say, "I am hungry." From outside you may utter these words. But always remember within that the body is hungry; the stomach is demanding food. Consider yourself to be only an observer and never the doer. No sooner you become the doer you then are tied to the act. Then, when you are hungry, you will have to eat. When you stand apart from the body as an observer, and eat, you will feel that it is the body that has eaten, not you. Then, a mere spectator, an onlooker, is born who looks within. And then, life becomes one long play. The world of action becomes a drama, a stage. Passivity becomes your existence.

Attain passivity. Always keep passivity in mind. Let your mind always wander in the field of passivity.

We begin to see whatever it is that the mind is concentrating on. Scientists have spoken of a gestalt of awareness. For instance, sitting in this room, our mind concentrates on the walls of the room. Then only the walls become significant, even though the eyes can see the doors and windows also. But they don't count. Then, if we shift our attention to the emptiness of the room, the emptiness now becomes prominent. So in the same room, you can have two kinds of experiences.

This may be a little difficult to understand. Let us try another experiment. Hold three fingers of your hand before you and concentrate on the middle finger. Let the middle finger be the centre of your attention. The other two fingers will fade away from you, even though you can see them. Then shift your gaze to the two fingers. Make them the centre of your attention. You will find that now the middle finger has become insignificant. Then you will know that such a little change on the outside changes everything within you. When your attention is on the middle finger, the other two fingers are as if they are not there. They seem far away. When you concentrate on the two fingers, the middle finger fades away and becomes secondary.

Or, keep one hand over the other and move the hand that is on top. Feel yourself inside the hand that is moving. You will feel that the lower hand does not belong to you. Then shift your attention to the lower hand and feel yourself in it. Now move the top hand as before. You will find that it does not seem to belong to you. All this is to show you that a change in attention is a change of focus.

Both hands are mine. You cannot tell with which hand I am identifying myself at this moment. If I have identified myself with the upper hand that is moving, then the lower hand will be alien to me; I will not be the lower hand. The same becomes true of the lower hand if I shift my focus to that. For all purposes, nothing has changed on the outside but the inner focus has changed. I am wherever the flow of my attention is.

In the same way, when you eat; if you think that you are eating, it is one state. If you experience the body eating and you are merely watching it then the focus within will have changed. While walking on the road, if you feel that you are walking, that is one state of your mind. But if you think that you are watching the body walk, the focus changes immediately, the gestalt changes immediately.

If you wish to experience the passivity that Lao Tzu speaks of, you shall have to keep a constant eye on the inner space and not on the clouds. Let the clouds form. Let them glide by. Keep your focus on the sky within.

What is this sky within you? You feel hungry. That is a cloud. It comes, it goes. You feel angry. That is a cloud. It comes and goes. Love comes. It is a cloud. It comes and goes. In the same way, joy and sorrow, honour and dishonour etcetera, come and go like the clouds. What is that which sees all? Concentrate on that. Let all channels of your thought be linked to this.

Be one with the observer. Break all connections with the doer. Be one with the observer and you will at once feel one with the inner space within, the passive sky. When this happens, all sorrows fade. Death and change become as unreal as dreams. Lao Tzu says: "This alone is the eternal rule."

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #16

Chapter title: The door of Tao -- forbearance and non-prejudice

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HE WHO KNOWS THE ETERNAL LAW IS TOLERANT.

BEING TOLERANT, HE IS IMPARTIAL.

BEING IMPARTIAL, HE IS KINGLY.

BEING KINGLY, HE IS IN ACCORD WITH NATURE.

BEING IN ACCORD WITH NATURE, HE IS IN ACCORD WITH TAO.

BEING IN ACCORD WITH TAO, HE IS ETERNAL AND HIS WHOLE LIFE IS PRESERVED FROM HARM.

In 1959, the Nobel Prize given to two American scientists was a unique event. The scientists were Dr. Emilio Segre and Dr. Owen Chamberlain. It was unique in the sense that their findings in the field of science were entirely contrary to all scientific theories of today. They have destroyed the fundamentals of science. What they have proved is very near Lao Tzu; but nowhere near Newton. What they have discovered can tally with the Gita and not with Marx.

Their discovery is that if there is matter in the world, there is anti-matter too, because nothing exists in this world without its counterpart. If there is light, there is darkness; if there is birth, there is death. So if there is matter, there is bound to be anti-matter. They have not only propounded this theory, they have also proved it. They have proved that within the atom of matter, where the proton works, right there there is an energy which is anti-proton. This energy cannot be seen nor experienced. In this world, the opposite is inevitable. The world is a conjunction of the opposites. Segre and Chamberlain have named this energy "anti-matter."

Lao Tzu, Krishna, Buddha and Christ have given it different names: atman, eternal law, beatitude, deliverance, God. In all these names, one fact is common: they all stand for anti-world, anti-matter. The findings of all religions agree on one point: that the world cannot be if there is no anti-world against it.

It is interesting that Segre and Chamberlain have stumbled across this. But as yet, it is only a guess. The theory they have constructed will prove correct some day because it is based on the same principle. The argument they put forward is that just as in this world the power of gravitation pulls down, water flows downwards, fire goes upwards and protons revolve in a particular manner -- in the same way in order to keep the balance, there must be a world that is just the opposite of this world. This is, as yet, only a theory; but it is a powerful theory because those who have propound it are not mystics, not poets; but hard core scientists. They maintain that nothing works in this world without its opposite.

It is quite possible that there is a world which is quite the opposite of the world we know. Then only can the universe be balanced like a pair of scales. It cannot be said when scientists will be able to prove this, but religion has always believed in the possibility of liberation to a world that is opposite to the mundane world, to a world whose laws work exactly the opposite of worldly laws.

Jesus says: "He who is first here will be last there. He who is last here will be first there. He who amasses wealth here will find it taken away from him, and he who distributes his wealth shall receive it there." This is the law of opposites depicted in poetry.

The language of Jesus is the language of a poet. All religions have been expressed in the language of poetry. Perhaps that is how it should be. In scientific language, the living element is lost and, with it, the fragrance and harmony. The poetry ends and only dead figures remain.

If we keep in mind a brief concept of Lao Tzu's eternal law, we shall be able to move into this sutra. Lao Tzu says: there is a world of change, where everything is constantly changing. But this world is not enough. Rather, there must be a world without change, in order to balance this world. There must be an opposite world of eternity, where nothing changes, nothing moves; where there is just emptiness and all is tranquil.

Here, in this world, everything vibrates. If we ask a scientist he will say, "Here, there are only vibrations. Nothing is fixed, nothing is stable, not even for a moment." We hardly utter a word and the thing has changed: This world is an intense process of change. We can call it a process of change, a flux.

And Lao Tzu says: "Right within this world, hidden from it, and exactly the opposite of it, is a principle which is ever fixed, ever stable; where nothing changes; where there are no vibrations, no ripples. This he refers to as the eternal law. Change in this world is only possible because of the balance of the eternal law. If there were no eternal law, no change would be possible.

Each thing is possible because of its opposite. Within you is the body. Also within you there is an anti-body: matter as well as anti-matter, proton as well as anti-proton. Within you is change and within you is the changeless, the eternal.

Lao Tzu says that he who takes his changing self to be his being is insane. He will be unhappy, restless and frustrated, because that with which he is identifying himself is not stable for a moment. He will be dragged along with it, and his hopes will be dashed to the ground. How can one pin his hopes on a changing thing? Change cannot be trusted. Change means that which cannot be relied on. To put faith in a changing phenomenon is to build castles in the sand. No sooner do we lay the foundation than the land beneath slides away. Before we lay the planks the foundation disappears.

Therefore pain and sorrow will be the destiny of one who joins himself to the world of change. Pain and sorrow means that all his hopes will be dashed to the ground and his dreams will be broken. The more rainbows he spreads of his hopes and expectations, the more empty his hands will be. Then, despair and frustration and sorrow will become a part of his life. Unhappiness means to identify oneself with change. Bliss means unite one's being with the eternal. Both are there. It depends on us which we

choose.

The eternal law means: the opposite of whatever we see. It means :the invisible that is hidden in the visible. When we touch, it is not what we touch but that which cannot be touched.

I speak a word or I strike a note on the veena and a sound is produced. Its vibrations reach far out. Your ear gets the impact and its waves reach your heart. Then, after some time, the note fades away; the impact is lost. Sound is a part of change. A while ago it was not there and a while after it again is not there. The string of the veena trembles at the touch of my hand. The note is produced, the waves of vibrations spread around. Then the string of the veena stops vibrating; the sound is lost in emptiness and all is silent once again.

Sound is change. The silence, the void that was before the sound, is eternity. The silence that ensues after the sound is also eternity. And the emptiness in which the sound vibrated, that too is eternity. Every happening takes place in the void. It appears in the void and it disappears in the void. To know this eternity is Tao, says Lao Tzu. To know this eternity is religion.

Now we shall proceed to understand the sutra.

"HE WHO KNOWS THE ETERNAL LAW IS TOLERANT."

It is not correct to say that he who knows the eternal law becomes tolerant, he is tolerant. He does not have to do anything to become tolerant.

Knowledge of the eternal law makes a man tolerant. Why? What is our intolerance, what is our impatience?

Our impatience is the fear that that which changes will change! That which changes should not change. That is what we desire. Therefore we try to bind everything around us and live like that.

The son grows up. The mother herself helps him grow up. But as he grows up, he goes further and further away from the mother. This is an invariable part of growing up. The mother herself is bringing him up, helping him to go further and further away from her. Then, when she realises this, she weeps and wails. The son has to be brought up, and her love is instrumental in it. But the son turns his back on this very love. The mother weaves beautiful dreams as she brings up her child. She imagines her son will bring down the stars for her. She is confident he will return her love a thousandfold. Alas, these dreams are shattered one day.

We cannot hinge our hopes on impermanent things, for they bring nothing but pain. Love also is a flow - the Ganges does not stop at one ghat only. Similarly, love does not wait at one shore either. Today the son loves his mother; tomorrow he will love someone else. Today, the mother tries to bind him and suffers because of this; tomorrow his wife will also suffer in the same manner. Whoever tries to bind someone else suffers. All efforts to bind the ephemeral end in disaster. Then we become intolerant; we become restless; we lose all power of forbearance.

We are all intolerant. We cannot tolerate anything. If I love someone and that someone looks appreciatingly at another, I go mad with jealousy; I cannot tolerate it.

Lao Tzu says: "HE WHO KNOWS THE ETERNAL LAW IS TOLERANT" -- because he knows that in this transient world, everything is prone to change. Nothing is fixed, not even love. We cannot pin our hopes on anything here. He who tries to do so suffers. If you walk against the rules of gravitation, you are bound to fall. You cannot blame the law of gravitation for this. You cannot blame anyone but yourself. Your ignorance of the law brings you to grief. Had you been careful, you would not have fallen. You would not have had a broken leg if you had obeyed the law of gravity because it is this very law that makes it possible for us to walk.

He who attains knowledge of the law does not build hopes in opposition to the law. He knows that the law of alteration says that nothing is permanent. Therefore, wherever he tries to stop change, he is bound to come up against difficulties and obstructions. These difficulties then turn him into knots. He who knows the eternal law understands the rule of change and becomes tolerant. He knows that if there is reverence today, there will be abuse tomorrow. He does not cling to reverence because he knows it can turn into insult any day. He welcomes irreverence as much as reverence and knows that both are impermanent. Where is the place for intolerance in such a person?

Yesterday you were respectful towards me. Today you hurl abuse. That is how intolerance is born. I expected that you would give me the same respect today. It is not your abuse that is painful; it is the shattering of my deluded expectation that brings the pain. I was under the impression that he who touched my feet yesterday would definitely touch them today. What business did I have to expect this? What led me to this expectation, in this transient world? Much water has flown down the Ganges since yesterday, and so have all the men of yesterday passed away in the flow of time. In a like manner, the respect and reverence of yesterday is a past story today. What has not changed in the last twenty-four hours? So many stars were born and so many have disintegrated; so many lives were formed and so many disintegrated. In this vast order of change in the universe, can such a puny thing as one man's change in attitude be called a change? It is so negligible a change that it is not worth mentioning.

Where so much changes every second, it would be strange if one man did not change. The change in him is strictly according to law. If my expectation for the same reverence I was given yesterday does not come, it is bound to give me pain and hence I become intolerant.

Tolerance means the acceptance of everything that takes place in this changing world. There is life today; there will be death tomorrow. It is morning now, soon it will be evening. There is light now, soon it will be dark. The morning found my heart filled with flowers, but by evening they shall have turned to dust. This is bound to be. Therefore, there is no need to cling to the morning flower or to weep over the faded petals in the evening.

He who understands the law of change does not identify himself with it. Rather, he establishes his identity with that which does not change. And there is only one thing within us that does not change: the witness within. The morning brought smiling flowers, fragrance in the air, music, the dance of nature. But by evening, everything had changed: the music, the dance and the fragrance are nowhere;

the doors of heaven are closed and I find myself standing in the midst of hell. There is nothing around to give me a hint of the morning. Only one thing is constant. In the morning it was I who looked at the morning and in the evening it was again I who was looking. In the morning it was I who saw the blooming of the flowers and in the evening it was I who saw everything turn to dust. Only the witness is eternal.

There was a day when I was young; there will be a day when I am old. There were days when I was filled with health and well-being; there were other days when I was ill and unwell. I have seen myself at the peak of fame and I have also seen myself in the abyss of disgrace. One element in all this was constant: the element of knowing. This knowing in itself is eternal, constant. Everything else is inconstant and transient. The witnessing consciousness within is eternal.

When Lao Tzu says that he who knows the eternal law becomes tolerant, he means that he who becomes a witness to everything around and within him becomes tolerant. A slight deviation from the witness-state and all ills and frustrations begin immediately. A moment's identification with even a fraction of the things that are transient and you fall from the witness-state.

"HE WHO KNOWS THE ETERNAL LAW IS TOLERANT. BEING TOLERANT, HE IS IMPARTIAL.... "

Tolerance means: Whatever happens, there is no room for discontentment. There is an unconditional state of contentment under all circumstances. The contentment is dependent on no reason, no cause.

One man says, "I am content. I have a big bank balance." Another says, "I am satisfied with life, I have a wife, children and a comfortable living." Yet another says, "I am happy, I have nothing more to ask of life. I have a good name, I have fame." But none of these people are really content because their contentment is not without cause. If, tomorrow, there is a slight lack in their situations, there will be nothing but discontentment. Their contentment is a fraud, a deception they allow themselves.

Contentment means unconditional contentment. For no apparent reason a man says, "I am content." He is content not for some reason. He has experienced the eternal as apart from the alternating world; he has now identified himself with the eternal and recognised the impermanence of the changing world. Tolerance and contentment are unconditional happenings.

Someone said to Buddha, "You are nothing. Yet you look so contented!" This question is very natural. If a person has something, we can understand his sense of satisfaction. But Buddha has nothing. He sits under a tree with nothing beside him. His look of satisfaction is puzzling. The man begged him to explain how he came to be so contented. He said, "Only a mad person can be happy without a reason. And you do not look mad. Who are you? You look as if you were the emperor of the whole world: Are you?"

Buddha said, "No."

"Are you a celestial being descended from heaven?"

Buddha said, "No."

The man kept on asking whether he was this or that, and to all questions Buddha replied in the negative. The man became restless. "You are something after all: What are you?" he asked again.

Buddha then replied, "I was an animal once. There was reason for this. My desires were such, that I had to be an animal. I was a human being also. My desires were such that I had to be. I was a celestial being also at one time my desires were such that I had to be. These were all causal existences. Now I am only 'Buddha'. I am neither an animal nor a deva nor a man. I am only Buddha."

The man asked, "What is the meaning of Buddha?"

Buddha said, "Now I am just an awakened being. I am now an awakened consciousness I am only a consciousness. I am not an individual any more because an individual is born by clinging to the changing forms. At times I have clung to animal forms; at times I have clung to vegetable forms and at times I have clung to human forms. These were my personalities. Now I have no personality, no individuality. I am just consciousness -- the flame of a lamp."

To attain the eternal law is to become a lamp of eternity. If I am not the impermanent, if I am the eternal, there can be no intolerance. If there is no connection with the transient, there is no fear of the loss of connection. Those who hope can be disappointed but one who does not hope has no way to be disappointed. Those who have possessions can become penniless any day, but those who have nothing, who have not clung to any possessions have no way of becoming penniless. How can you snatch away from me a thing I have never clung to? You can only snatch if I hold on to it.

This witness-state, this knowledge Or the eternal law, is the breaking away from the world of change. Then the Ganges flows and I sit on its bank. Then, when its stream carries away flowers on its breast, I look at them; or when a corpse is washed away in its stream, that too I see. When the rains bring down the soil in its stream, I watch the muddy waters; and when the waters are crystal-clear and reflect the blue sky above, I watch even then. But I am not one with the Ganges; am not the Ganges. I am merely sitting on its bank and observing the pattern of change in the world of alteration. When the witness-state becomes fixed on the shores of the changing stream, then I am not affected by what flows along with the river and what does not.

Looking at the flow of the river, I do not pin my hopes on it for I know that sometimes it brings flowers and sometimes corpses. I also know that its waters are so clear at times that I can see the reflection of the stars above; but there are times when the waters are turbid, muddy. I know its fury when it rises above its banks; and I know its meekness when it shrivels into a thin ribbon of water. But I have nothing to do with all this. I merely sit on its bank and watch. The knowledge of the eternal law is to sit at the shores of the changing world, fully established in the witness-state.

Lao Tzu says, "He who becomes tolerant becomes impartial." This needs to be explained. Actually, we can only take sides when there is a choice. I say a man is good because he behaves as I expect him to. I say a man is bad because he does not behave as I expect him to. But if I do not expect anything, there is no question of a person being good or bad.

I say a man is a sinner or a man is a saint. Whether the man is a sinner or not, I do not know; but since he destroys some expectation of mine, he is a sinner in my eyes. And one whom I call a saint is one who fulfils some expectations of mine. Whether he really is a saint or not, I do not know.

If you observe things around those whom you look upon as sadhus and also around those you call sinners, you will find that the person who gratifies your hopes and expectations is a sadhu and he who does not is a sinner. If you believe that a sadhu should go about with a mask on his face, then when you meet him you will fall at his feet. The same man, if he removes the mask, will find it hard to get even a menial job in the house of his former follower. Everything depends upon your way of thinking. A man is a great sadhu if he totally fulfils your expectations. If he falters, if he laxes, he becomes a lesser sadhu. But who is a saint and who is a sinner in the eyes of one who expects nothing?

Says Lao Tzu, "He who attains knowledge of the eternal becomes impartial." For him, there is no difference between Rama and Ravana, because the difference between Rama and Ravana is the difference between our expectations. It is our preconceptions, our divisions that are working. If I have no preconceptions, there is no difference. To be impartial means I have nothing to choose. I make no choice. To be impartial also means that I do not say you: "Be like this."

I have a friend, an aged person. His son died. His son was a minister in Parliament. In his heart of hearts the old man hoped he would become the Prime minister one day. All fathers expect their sons to become Prime ministers, no matter what they are worth. In this case the son was a minister already so it was only natural for the old man to hope that he would become the Prime minister. He cried bitterly when his son died. He also hinted at suicide. I asked him what caused such intense pain. He said, "My son has died."

"If your son was an ordinary thief, a dacoit, a murderer, would you have yet cried for him and thought of committing suicide?" I asked.

His tears stopped flowing, he looked at me with consternation. "What is this you say? Had my son been so, I would have wished him dead the moment he was born!"

"Then do not say you are crying for your son," I told him. "You are crying for the secret ambition you nurtured in your son. You were trying to fulfil your own ambition, through your son. If your son had become the Prime minister, you would have become the father of the Prime minister -- just as you would have still been his father if he were a thief, a criminal. Some hidden ambition has died with your son. That is the cause of your grief."

He was vexed that I should speak to him like this in his moment of sorrow. But I told him that I only said this to him because truth is easier to realise at a time of pain and sorrow. Truth stands out glaringly at such times. When you make a house of cards and are living happily within it, it is useless to convince you that it is bound to fall. But when it does fall with the first gust of wind and you bemoan the loss, perhaps you will understand what I mean. If you sail in a paper boat, you cannot go far. But if it does go a little distance, then it is impossible to know that it is made of paper. That it does go a little distance is a miracle. It is only when it sinks that we realise the fact. The advent of truth is easier in sorrow and pain.

What is good, what is bad? If the son was good or the son was bad is something that matters only if I am united to the world of change; not otherwise.

Says Lao Tzu, "He who becomes tolerant becomes impartial." Impartial means: when there is no expectation within, there is no choice without. If Lao Tzu were told, "This man is bad. Make him a good man," Lao Tzu would say, "I have no expectations. Even less do I know who is good and who is bad. Nor do I know the way to make a person good. And he who becomes good for me may not be good for others because others have their own expectations."

The worst of men can prove to be good for someone in this world. The best of men can turn out to be bad for some in this world. There is no way of being hundred per cent good or hundred per cent bad. Had you been the only person on this earth you could have been hundred per cent either way. But there are others in this world who have their own expectations. Therefore, except for a dozen people, Jesus was thought to be a bad person, fit to be crucified. He did not fulfil the conditions prevalent in those days for a good man; he did not fulfil their expectations.

Jesus stayed in the house of a prostitute -- what could be worse than this? So all those who longed to visit the brothels found a fit opportunity to vent their anger on him. What we take to be righteous indignation is ninety nine per cent born of jealousy. Those who chastised Jesus were the very people who longed to go to the prostitute but were afraid of what people might say. Now this was the limit -- a man who was supposed to be good visiting a prostitute's house! Either this man should be pronounced bad, or it should be decreed that good men can visit brothels.

The second decision cannot be taken. The reason why is rather intricate and involved, and has a long history behind it. The brothel is a by-product of the institution of marriage. As long as the tradition of marriage continues, brothels cannot be eradicated. So the only thing left was to pronounce Jesus a bad man. This suited everybody, because the father is afraid lest his son goes to the prostitute and the wife is fearful of her husband doing the same. The whole society is fearful of this issue. And yet it is this very society that has given birth to prostitution.

But most people visit the brothel under cover of darkness. The only mistake that Jesus made was that he went to the prostitute's house in bright daylight. This was his only fault. He could have saved himself from the cross if he had been a little clever. Everyone went to the brothels, even those who crucified him. But they knew how and when to go. Jesus could have asked forgiveness, promised to do penance, taken a vow in order to save himself.

But Jesus was adamant. He insisted that he had done no wrong. He said that she might be a prostitute for others, but not for him. Prostitution is a relationship; it has nothing to do with the person. Just as a wife is a relationship and not a person. One man's wife can be another man's prostitute. So Jesus insisted that she was not a prostitute for him and if the others thought she was then they were welcome not to visit her. But this was beyond their understanding. This man must be crucified.

Those who followed Jesus waited and hoped till the last moment for a miracle to save Jesus and prove him right. For they too could not help doubting; as they were products of the same society. It was

because they were impressed by Jesus, they loved him, that they followed him. There were scarcely a dozen people who followed him, and Jesus knew that they too would leave him and run away at the time of crisis. And they did!

When Jesus' body was taken down from the cross, only this prostitute was still with him. All the rest of the disciples had run away. Truly, she was no prostitute as far as Jesus was concerned. And for her, Jesus was no ordinary man. When his most intimate disciples ran away -- those very people who were acclaimed as the twelve apostles later -- this woman stood by him, till the very last. A prostitute brought Jesus down from the cross.

Who is to decide who is good and who is bad? And how are we to decide? There has always been this one criterion: what meets your expectations is good; what does not is bad. But if a man has no hopes, no ideals, he becomes impartial.

This is the difficulty for people like Jesus. A prostitute invited him to spend the night at her house and Jesus had no compunctions. He readily agreed. Had it been you, you would have thought of the scandal that would have spread in the town. What would your wife, your children, your friends say? Jesus simply accepted the invitation.

The same thing happened with Buddha. A prostitute came one morning and invited him to have his meal at her house. He accepted. Later in the day Prasenjita, the emperor, came to invite him to his palace. Buddha said, "I have already been invited by Amrapali."

The king argued with him, "Think of your reputation, What will people say when they hear you have eaten at the house of a prostitute?"

Buddha replied, "She has invited me first and I have accepted her invitation? If I still am afraid of the things that frighten you, I am not a Buddha. This scandal will only be restricted to this world; but if I do not go to her, for fear of slander and accept your invitation, then all the Buddhas that have ever been, will deride me. I would rather be defamed here than despised there."

Says Lao Tzu, "Such a person becomes impartial. He does not take sides one way or the other, but lives naturally. He passes no judgment about what is good and what is bad; what should be and what should not be.

This will be difficult to understand for those who are moralists, those who consider ethics to be the highest thing in religion. Ethics is the highest goal for those who are unethical, just as medicine is good only for those who are ill. Ethics are useful for the non-ethical; but for those who have attained religion, the ethical drops off as easily as the unethical. All sides drop off for such a person.

All ethical concepts are partial. Ethics lays down in no uncertain terms what is right and what is wrong. All its rules are strictly mathematical; every step it takes is calculated. Religion adheres to no such calculations.

He who is established in the eternal law leaves everything to the eternal. Then he does not care where it leads him -- to the East or to the West, to light or to darkness.

Let us understand the difference in this way. One boatman works his boat with the help of oars. He has to use all his energy to ply the oars. There is another boatman -- he puts up sails and lets the winds take him to his destination. He does not use oars, the winds themselves carry him along.

The ethical man uses oars all the time. He has to be mindful every moment of where he is going. He has to toil constantly. There is always a conflict between the boat and the river. It is a constant struggle.

The religious man is the man who sets his oars aside, puts up his sails and invites God, the eternal, to carry him wherever He wills. Now, wherever he is taken is his destination. If the boat capsizes in mid-stream, then that is his destination. The religious man has to do nothing except gather the courage to leave himself in the hands of the eternal. He marks out no shores for himself. Wherever he lands that is his home He just reaches.

A moralist always has a set goal to attain. Hence, he is bound to be partial; he can never be impartial. If he appears impartial, it is an act he puts on, a cultivated impartiality. He learns to be impartial step by step. The impartiality of a religious man is natural, spontaneous. This is difficult. It is very difficult for us even to be ethical.

Lao Tzu talks of far-off things. He says that ethicalness is a disease. He says that as long as the opposites, the dichotomy, remains, there is bound to be restlessness. As long as I feel this is good and this is bad, dichotomy is bound to remain. Hence, the so-called moralist is a restless man. He is always worried about things happening right or wrong in the world, as if it is entirely his responsibility. His worry causes him restless nights and his whole life is spent in correcting the world. Amidst all this he fails to see that it is his own self that needs correction.

It is somewhat difficult to understand Lao Tzu. That is why Lao Tzu has been misunderstood in the West. His thoughts are considered immoral. How can one remain impartial when there is a constant conflict between good and evil? There is a reason for this. If we view ourselves from the angle of transience and change, we cannot be impartial. If we see from the angle of the eternal law, only then can we be impartial.

The mundane world, viewed from the place of the eternal law appears like a dream. You sleep at night and see the whole RAMAYANA enacted in your dreams. You identify yourself with Rama if you are a moralist and with Ravana if you are an amoralist. But on waking up in the morning the dream ends; it is no more. Then will you be taking sides one way or the other? If you do, then know that you are still asleep. If you realise it was a dream, it makes no difference to you whether Ravana wins or Rama wins. Now you can be sure you are awake, because now you are impartial.

For Lao Tzu the world of change is a dream. He who is surrounded by dreams, who is tied to his dreams, will always be partial. Wherever there is partiality, there is intolerance, impatience and sorrow. If you wish to rise to the state of bliss, you shall have to be impartial and non-differentiating.

He who becomes impartial develops the majesty of a king. "BEING IMPARTIAL, HE IS KINGLY." But the majesty of a king is nothing compared to the majesty of a person who becomes impartial because the tranquillity in him defies all imagination. His eyes become transparent due to absence of bias. His movement is smooth without a tremble. We tremble throughout life because of our biases.

Now scientists have proved that there is partiality even in our body language. A great deal of research is being carried out on this. How you stand before a person shows whether you are in favour of that person or not. If you are against the person, you will try to stand away from him; you want to be as far away from him as possible. If you are in favour of the person, you tend to come closer, physically as well as mentally.

A woman betrays her feelings through her body action. Those who are conducting research in body language say that if a woman loves you, her way of sitting before you will be different. If she does not love you it will be different. Each part of her body gives signs of her feelings. Our body gives indications about our feelings in our everyday life. If you pass a brothel, you quicken your steps in case someone sees. If you pass a temple, your hands fold automatically in reverence. Our likes and dislikes vibrate through the body continuously.

"BEING IMPARTIAL, HE IS KINGLY," says Lao Tzu. Perhaps he could not find a better simile because kings are not generally impartial. Jesus once told his disciples, "Look at the lilies in full bloom. The majesty of king Solomon seems pale and faded before them." Man attains the same dignity, the same majesty, that a flower attains when it opens. That is the majesty of the non-vibrant, the unmoving, the stable. It is like a lamp that burns in a room. When there is no breeze, the flame burns steadily; there is no tremor. Similarly, when the consciousness of a person becomes steady within, it does not tremble. That is its majesty.

There are two ways of doing this. One is: we stick to our bias, but force the consciousness to become fixed -- as the so-called sadhus do it. Their bias remains: of good and bad, of the worthy and the unworthy, etcetera. Such forced fixation of consciousness is a false fixation. A slight relaxation and the consciousness begins to flow towards our likes and away from our dislikes.

There is another way, the way that Lao Tzu talks of. He says do not worry about the fixation of consciousness. Know the eternal law, recognise the world of change, and you find all bias has dropped off. When impartiality is attained, you become stable. Now there is no place left where you can tremble; no place to bow, no place to take yourself away from. This non-trembling state comes naturally. Without this, all saintliness is a cultivated saintliness; it is a suppression.

The difference is easily apparent. Whenever a person attains a natural saintliness, he attains an indefinable beauty. Whenever a person forces saintliness on himself, he attains an intense ugliness. This ugliness happens naturally because it takes a lot of tension to achieve his saintliness. A natural saint is very difficult to find, but only one who is natural can be a saint.

Once I was travelling with a sadhu. I went and sat in a car but the sadhu refused to step in. "I cannot sit on a cushioned seat," he said. So a bamboo mat was spread on the seat and he was satisfied: he was not

using a cushion seat. What else can you feel for such a person except pity? The car is the same, the seat is the same, but he believes he is sitting on his mat: He has safe-guarded his simplicity. He who lives by guarding his ideals makes everything around him ugly and crippled. His consciousness is constantly trembling.

Says Lao Tzu, "BEING IMPARTIAL, HE IS KINGLY." One more thing has to be remembered in this context. To be kingly means: that running after achievements, renouncing things, choosing this or that, -- all these become meaningless to him. Wherever he is, he is a king. Wherever he stands in a palace or in a bare street, his majesty remains unaffected. The palace cannot awe him, the trees cannot repel him. He sleeps peacefully in either place. Wherever he is, however he is, he lives like a king -- in the majesty of an emperor.

We see a person like Buddha. Outside his palace he is no less a king. Perhaps he looked more majestic. Clothes help to hide ugliness. Therefore the rule of clothes will remain as long as there is a dearth of beauty in this world. Clothes help an ugly person to lessen his ugliness. But when a person is extremely beautiful, his beauty is enhanced when his clothes fall off. When a miserable wretch is made to sit on a throne, his paltriness is hidden somewhat by the palace, but cannot attain majesty. And if a person has attained majesty and you take away his palace, his throne and crown, his majesty will reveal itself more sharply through his nakedness.

This majesty of a king is the result of an inner mastery. He who is tied to the changing world is always a slave. He will have to depend on someone or the other throughout his life. He has to submit to a thousand changes. He who breaks away from the world of change and identifies himself with the eternal becomes a master. He depends on no one. He passes through all changes as a master. His mastery is intrinsic.

"BEING KINGLY, HE IS IN ACCORD WITH NATURE. BEING IN ACCORD WITH NATURE, HE IS IN ACCORD WITH TAO."

Only those can enter the deep realm of religion who have attained the majesty of a king. No one can enter by begging and supplication.

Jesus has said, "Those who possess shall be given more and those who do not possess more shall be taken away from them." On the face of it this would be a mad thing to say. But this is the law of the world of anti-matter. It is a very contradictory law. Even an ordinary person knows that one who has nothing should be given and, if you must take away, take from those who have. But Jesus says the opposite: "If you have, you shall be given more, if you do not have, what little you have will be taken away from you."

No one can enter this realm like a beggar. Only a 'king' can make his entry there. In fact, the key to this world is mastery, lordliness. That is why we address a sannyasin as "swami". This does not mean that all sannyasins are swamis. We imply an inner mastery when we say "swami". That is the key to enter the palace: which Lao Tzu refers to as Tao; Buddha as dhamma, the Vedas as rit and Jesus as the Kingdom of God. The difference is only of words. "BEING IN ACCORD WITH NATURE, HE IS IN ACCORD WITH TAO".

"BEING IN ACCORD WITH TAO, HE IS ETERNAL." As long as we are affiliated with the transient world, we affiliate ourselves with destruction. We shall forever be in the cycle of birth and death. We shall keep on taking new bodies and discarding them. The more we identify with the transient, the more we are prone to destruction. We then die every day and are born every day. We identify ourselves with the body so we die after fifty, sixty or seventy years.

Is there an element within us which we do not have to change like we change clothes, an element which is stable and, when we are identified with it, there is death no longer? Death comes because we identify ourselves with the transient, the impermanent. The day we break our relations with the impermanent, death no longer is; and that with which you are united is deathless, immortal.

Lao Tzu says, "BEING IN ACCORD WITH TAO HE IS ETERNAL." Thus his eternal life goes beyond pain and sorrow.

What is unhappiness? It is the shadow of death: a long shadow of death. Wherever death is apparent, there is pain. Wherever we can forget death are our moments of happiness. But man finds himself in a vicious circle for nothing is forgotten by forgetting.

Mulla Nasruddin was found drinking one day. He sat under a tree before his door and drank one glass after another. He had a guest at home who asked, "Mulla, why do you drink so much?"

Mulla replied, "In order to forget."

The guest asked, "To forget what?"

"My shamelessness", the Mulla replied, "My sins, my crimes."

"What are your sins?" the guest inquired, "What are your crimes?"

Nasruddin said, "This very thing: the shame that I drink too much, the sin of drinking is so heavy on me, that I must forget it. Therefore, I drink."

If we inspect our actions we will find this very thing in our lives also. We are in a vicious circle. To forget one thing, we catch another and to be rid of that, we grab a third. Then we go back to the first to avoid thing, which in order we did all the rest.

We journey a lot in this vicious circle but reach nowhere. There is no way to reach. The sorrow is that we have no knowledge of joy, we only know sorrow. At times we manage to forget our woes and mistake it for happiness. But the things with which we try to forget our sorrows bring more pain in their wake; so we are caught in a vicious circle.

One fact we must understand deeply. As long as I am prone to death, I can never be happy, no matter how hard I try. Death stands before me; and its shadow is forever on me. It will soak every joy of mine with its poison. You are enjoying your meal, it is very delicious. Then someone tells you that you are to be executed this evening. All taste will vanish at once. Do what you will, the taste will not come back.

You feel yourself in heaven with your beloved beside you. Suddenly someone says that you are to be killed in a short time. You will at once forget there is someone sitting beside you. Everything will become meaningless.

Camus has written, "How can happiness exist as long as there is death?" Animals appear to be happy because they have no knowledge of death. Man is unhappy because he is aware of death.

Those human beings who are nearer to animals appear happy because they forget death. Death is, but it is always the other who dies. "I shall never die because it is always the other who has died up to now, some A or B or C, I am still alive. Then what proof is there that I shall die?" Straight and simple logic.

Animals have no knowledge of death, because they have no knowledge of time, they have no knowledge of the future. Therefore, in a way they are happy. Man has knowledge of death therefore he can be most unhappy or can make the most arrangements to forget the unhappiness. There are only these two ways open to him. He cannot be happy until he understands Lao Tzu, until he identifies himself with the eternal.

Animals can be happy for they have no feeling of death. Man cannot be as happy as animals are. Because man has gone further alone in his journey and has moved ahead of the animal. A young man no longer feels happiness in things that please children, even though he was a child once. An old man no longer derives pleasure from things that pleased him in his youth. No number of toys pleases a youth and no amount of sensual pleasures excite an old man. When the consciousness moves ahead, all pleasures at lower levels appear meaningless.

Man cannot derive joy in the same way as an animal, and yet that is what he strives for. He becomes unhappy in the process. The reason is that consciousness can only travel forwards; it can never fall back.

As long as the shadow of death persists, man cannot be happy. Then what is to be done? One way is to save the body from death as long as possible. But no matter how far we push back death, it is still there in front of us. We may put it off for a few days, a few months, a few years, but it still looms large in front of us. A man may live eighty years or one hundred or even a hundred and fifty years, but death claims him in the end.

The truth is, the more a man lives, the more he becomes aware of death. If a ten-year-old child dies, he dies without the knowledge of death. If a forty-year-old man dies, he is only slightly aware of death, but when an old man of eighty dies, he is very much steeped in the knowledge of death. When a man of one hundred and fifty years dies, his knowledge of death is even more profound. If we succeed in lengthening the human age to a thousand years, the knowledge of death will become unbearable. As age progresses from one stage to another, all the things that mean so much at one time become meaningless, they become no more than mere toys. Then a stage arrives when nothing holds any meaning except death; all other meanings are lost.

Therefore, the wise among mankind become acutely aware of death. When Buddha sees a corpse, he at once realises that life is futile. But we do not think this way, we pass hundreds of funerals but all that we

think is, "Some poor man is dead." We feel sorry for him and deep within us we are happy that we are alive. That is the only effect that the death of another has on us.

Seeing a dead man, Buddha feels his own death. The Irish poet Munro has said, "Whenever anyone dies, it is I who die. Therefore, do not try to find out whose funeral it is. It is my funeral." Buddha sees his own death when he sees a dead man. If death is certain, life is futile.

So the more sensitive the atman, the quicker it is to catch the shadow of death. It takes you eighty years to become old. Buddha was old by the time he was twenty.

This does not mean, as it is generally understood in India, that only an old person should take sannyas. Many people come and tell me that I should initiate only those into sannyas who are above seventy years. I tell them, we never know when a man gets old. Some people, many people, are not old even at seventy-five. It is easy to be old physically, but it is not so easy to be old mentally.

To be old is a physical process which comes naturally with age. But maturity comes through intellect, which is a different thing altogether. Some people become mature very early in life, like Buddha, who was mature at the age of twenty. What does not occur to a man of eighty, occurred to Buddha at twenty. He was mature enough to realise that death is certain. Now, when death will come is a secondary matter which he will leave for the foolish to haggle over. For him, it made no difference when death would come. What was of prime importance to him now was to find out whether there was something within him that was immortal, deathless. If there was not, then everything was meaningless. If there was then to seek the source of immortality was the most useful purpose in life.

Lao Tzu also says, "He who establishes himself in the Tao becomes immortal, deathless". Death no longer exists for him. He who is beyond death is beyond the whole gamut of sorrow and pain, because all pain is the pain of extinction. "That I will be no mote" is the cause of my sorrow. To become deathless is the beginning of bliss.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #17

Chapter title: Who is the best ruler? -- he who is like god

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OF THE BEST RULERS

THE PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW THAT THEY EXIST.

THE NEXT BEST THEY LOVE AND PRAISE.

THE NEXT THEY FEAR.

AND THE NEXT THEY REVILE.

WHEN THEY DO NOT COMMAND THE PEOPLE'S FAITH,

SOME WILL LOSE FAITH IN THEM,

AND THEN THEY RESORT TO OATHS.

BUT (OF THE BEST) WHEN THEIR TASK IS ACCOMPLISHED, THEIR WORK DONE,

THE PEOPLE ALL REMARK, 'WE HAVE DONE IT OURSELVES.'

SOMEONE HAS ASKED: WE OFTEN HEAR PEOPLE SAY, "WHATEVER HAPPENS, HAPPENS FOR THE BEST." WHAT IS THE MEANING BEHIND THIS? IS THIS MERELY A CONSOLATION FOR THE MIND? OR IS IT THAT WHATEVER HAPPENS IS FOR THE BEST? OR IS IT LIKE THE FOX IN AESOP'S FABLES WHO PRONOUNCES THE GRAPES SOUR BECAUSE HE COULD NOT REACH THEM?

The highest rule can be utilised for the lowest function. The most mysterious happenings of life can sometimes be the screen to hide the lowest acts. That is what this saying you have mentioned is about. Because it is connected with Lao Tzu, it is only proper that we consider it now.

Lao Tzu would say, "Whatever happens is the right thing to happen." This is in no way a consolation. Rather, this is Lao Tzu's point of view. He says, "How can that which is wrong ever happen? Whatever happens cannot help but be right." This statement is not related to the happening itself but, rather, to the witness of the happening. When Lao Tzu says, "Whatever happens is what should have happened"; he means that now there is nothing in the world that is evil for him. This statement speaks of the witness within Lao Tzu himself.

Lao Tzu says, "Now there is no evil in the world for me. I stand where evil cannot touch. Now, everything is good." Now everything is good because Lao Tzu has attained that bliss which cannot be destroyed. For us everything is not all right. For us, that which gives happiness is all right, and that, which brings sorrow and pain, is not all right. As long as you suffer, things cannot be right.

A child is born to you. It is a sweet child. If this child dies, how can you say it was the right thing to happen? You love someone; but you do not win him. How can you say it was the right thing to happen? All life long you do something you consider to be good and it turns out to be bad. How can you say this is as it should be? You cannot, because your happiness is cause-oriented. Therefore all causes that contribute to your happiness are taken to be correct and all causes that do not contribute to your happiness are supposed to be wrong. As long as happiness and unhappiness are two different things for you, some things will be right and some things will be wrong. How can you say illness is good or death is good? As long as there is desire and longing for life, death is bound to be evil. And as long as you crave for health, illness is bound to be your enemy. When we pronounce a thing good or bad we only betray our own expectations.

When a man says, "Everything is all right," he is merely uttering a consolation. There will be no joy in his pronouncement: only disillusionment and sadness echo through his words. There is no declaration of victory, but an acceptance of defeat. He cannot do anything, so he consoles himself that things are as they should be. Contentment becomes a help to the defeated. But this is false contentment.

Real contentment is experienced by those who have conquered life. They are conquerors in the sense that now there is no way of defeating them, now defeat is no longer defeat to them. Lao Tzu has said, "You cannot defeat me because I stand defeated from the beginning. You cannot displace me because where I sit is the last place. There is no way to go further down. You cannot give me sorrow for I have annihilated the very expectation of happiness." He who is a conqueror in this manner finds contentment illuminating his life from all sides.

This statement is not for defeated people like us. We are beaten from all sides because we never get what we desire. All our hopes and aspirations crumble before our very eyes. We are losers through and through. In this state we make use of the virtue of contentment and say, "Things are as they should be." But such contentment is false, it is put on. Then Aesop's fable applies to us.

We all know this fable. The fox tried to reach the bunch of grapes but he could not jump high enough. His ego could not accept the fact that he could not jump high enough so he turned around and said that the grapes were sour and not worth trying for.

But this fable is not complete. Before Aesop is reborn again and finishes the story, let me complete it for you. When the fox read Aesop's tale, he promptly joined a gymnasium to improve his jumping. He took vitamins and tonics to improve his strength. Then he went once again to the vineyard. In one jump he reached the grapes. But when he brought them down and tasted them, they were actually sour. But what was he to do now? He went back and told everyone that the grapes were sweet!

Ego will fill itself by any means. If it cannot reach the grapes, they are sour; if it can reach them and they turn out to be sour, it will still say they are sweet! One thing we must keep in mind. We must watch out whether our statements come out of our defeat, our failures, because such statements have no value.

Lao Tzu does not teach us to put on the mask of contentment. He says that the relationship of contentment with life is one of harmony, of friendliness, and not of disharmony, or enmity and defeat.

Lao Tzu says that whatever happens is a vast happening and numerous and varied are the reasons for its happening. So vast is its expansion and so mysterious is its being that it would be childish to decide whether it is right or wrong. You cannot be the judge.

The universe is an enormous happening. Whatever happens in it is only a fragment of it. To judge the universe by a single happening is just as if a man gets hold of a page from a novel and, reading it, decides whether the book is moral or immoral, good or bad. We would call a man who judges a book from a single page foolish. But this is what we do with regard to the world. Every day we give opinions about the world, but there is no way to be acquainted with the whole story.

If Hitler had died when he was a child, his mother would have grieved over the death of her child because as yet, he was only a fragment of what he later turned out to be. But had his mother been alive to witness what he did, she would have wished he had died when he was born. Yet this also is just a fragment, of the whole because the repercussions of what Hitler did are still being felt. Hitler is dead, but his actions are still alive. It is possible that there will be no further world wars just because of Hitler's atrocities. Then how are we to decide whether Hitler's existence was good for the world or bad?

It is possible that there will be no future world wars on account of Hitler. Then Hitler would have done what even Buddha and Mahavira could not do. His demonical atrocities reached such a peak that now, if man still indulges in war we shall have to say that man has lost his sense of humanity and become a beast. It is quite possible that there may not be further world wars in the future. Then the credit will go entirely to Hitler. Then how can we say whether Hitler's existence was good for the world or bad?

We make decisions from the fragments whereas life is an undivided stream -- eternal, infinite. It has no beginning and no end. So God alone can be the judge. And only on the day that the creation comes to an end, can we decide what was right and what was wrong.

When Lao Tzu says, "Everything is all right," he means that we are not the ones to decide. He is expressing his oneness with the vast universe. His will is one with the will of the universe. He has no separate will of his own.

Jesus was being put on the cross. In the last moment, doubt seized him. When the nails were being fixed in his hands, a sigh escaped from his mouth and he said, "Oh God, what is this you are making me undergo?" Deep within, and unknown to him, there was a seed of expectation that God would not allow him to be crucified. The thought that the cross is a bad thing, must have been in his mind. That it could also be good must have slipped his mind. Therefore, the complaint rose from his lips. But this means he doubted God and there was a lack of complete surrender. The cross became a bad thing and what was happening was not right.

But no sooner did he speak than he realised his mistake. He had considered himself wiser than God and disputed His will. This little sigh made an atheist of Jesus and destroyed his belief in God. His eyes filled with tears as he begged forgiveness from his Father. "Forgive me, Lord, forgive me!" he cried. "Thy will is my own. Thy will be done!"

When Lao Tzu says, "Everything is as it should be," he implies that our statements against the eternal law are foolish. The eternal law is so vast. It is bound to be; everything is born out of it. If I die tomorrow, I will say it is bad. But that which gave me birth gives me death also. The eternal law that made my entry into the world possible calls me back. If I was happy to be sent into the world. I should be happy to go back also. If the life it gave me was good, the death it gives me cannot help but be good. Everything takes birth from one source. The flower and the thorn arise from the same source. If the flowers are good, how can the thorns be bad?

Lao Tzu says, "Flowers are His, and thorns are His. Therefore everything is good." This statement tells us of the harmonious rapport that developed between the self of Lao Tzu and the eternal. It is no consolation, because consolation means that things are not all right, only we are trying to console ourselves that they are. But if there is true knowledge of this fact that things are as they should be, then it is not a consolation.

The lowest form of religion is consolation; and the highest form of religion is music: the music between the individual and the universe. The struggle between the individual and the universe -- the defeat of the individual and the consolation that man seeks for himself in this defeat -- is the lowest form of religion. It depends entirely on the individual whether he wants to create music with the eternal law or indulge in consolation; whether he prefers to cover the wounds of his defeat with a bandage or he prefers to encourage the possibility of creating eternal music. It depends entirely on the individual, entirely on you.

Mostly people live by consolation, Therefore man seeks religion when he is unhappy because it is in unhappiness that we seek consolation. An unhappy man's feet lead to the temple. So Marx is right when he says, "Religion is the sigh of the sufferer and the opium of the masses." This is religion in its lowest form. But this is the biggest type of religion because ninety-nine out of a hundred people are religious in this way. It is no wonder that Marx did not meet the hundredth man. It is not easy to find him.

But what is wrong in this? After all, a doctor also gives you a drug to make you forget your physical pain. With pain, we can do two things. One is that we try to remove the pain. This is the highest possibility of religion. The second is that we try to forget it. This is the lowest possibility of religion. When an unhappy person goes towards religion, he seeks consolation. When a happy person proceeds towards religion, he seeks the eternal music.

Therefore, I say, turn towards religion when you are filled with happiness. It is very difficult, very difficult. It is easy to turn towards God in sorrow. But a poor, needy, miserable society can never be religious. For them, religion is a drug. Only a prosperous, happy society can become religious. When all comforts and luxuries no longer appear meaningful, all concepts of good and bad fall. When happiness itself has no meaning, then what is right and what is wrong?

As long as unhappiness appears to be wrong, at the most we can seek consolation. It is entirely up to the individual whether he makes a drug out of his religion by seeking consolation. Nietzsche has said that the West has two intoxicants: alcohol and Christianity. And he is right.

Most people use religion like alcohol. Those who find consolation in alcohol do not worry about religion. Those who are afraid to take alcohol turn to religion. Therefore, the so-called religious man is against alcohol. It is a competition. The so-called moralist knows that if alcohol is more prevalent, his religion will not work.

A genuine religious person can have no objection to alcohol. It is on the contrary, better for a man to forget himself in alcohol rather than in religion because the latter is very dangerous. He who drinks religion in order to forget makes a misuse of religion. He who drinks alcohol in order to forget makes the right use of alcohol. The highest quality of alcohol is that it makes a person forget, but this is the lowest quality in religion. So one who uses religion to forget not only misuses religion but harms the religion also. It is better that such a person takes alcohol. At least then he is not deceiving himself. But most people use religion to forget themselves. It is because of this that the world cannot become religious.

Total acceptability is the highest theism. There is no sting in total acceptability. It is not that because of some hitch, some trouble we accept everything. Rather, now it has come to our understanding that if the wave does not accept the ocean, it will find itself in unnecessary trouble. The being of a wave is in the being of the ocean; it is the very existence of the ocean that lives in the waves. If the wave asserts its will, it will be unhappy; but if it gives itself up entirely to the ocean, it has nothing to worry about.

Our worry is that, being waves, we think ourselves to be oceans. Being waves, we stand up against the ocean. Then non-acceptance arises and we become the judges of what is right and what is wrong. Lao Tzu says only this: what decision can a wave take? Where is the wave? It has no separate existence; it is only a part of the ocean. It is born of the ocean and it dies in the ocean.

Death should be accepted with as much grace as birth, for both are the gift of the ocean. Unhappiness should be accepted as well as happiness. Both are granted to us by existence. This way, total acceptability is supreme transformation. No transformation is greater than this, for the drop of the individual is lost and only the ocean remains.

Now, let us take the sutra.

To Lao Tzu, inaction is the ultimate truth. But it is not inactivity that bears no results. Lao Tzu says, "Inaction gives ultimate results." Happenings take place because of inactivity.

If a serene person -- within whom there is not a single current, within whom there is no movement, who is like a silent lake -- if such a person passes you on the way, you will feel as if a soothing breeze has passed by you. He does nothing. He just stands beside you and you feel as if peace is raining on you. Perhaps you are not aware that it is because of this person, much less is the person himself aware of it. His non-action, his emptiness, is so fruitful. Lao Tzu says: the best results come from emptiness. In emptiness, there is no violence. If my tranquillity touches you and you become serene, it is not I who has changed you. You have changed.

If I have to make an effort to change you, to make you tranquil, then no matter how good my intentions I still shall be committing violence. When one person decides to change another, violence begins.

Therefore, sadhus and mahatmas are violent in a very subtle manner. They fail to accept you as you are. They try to change you, to make you good. They will sift the dross out of you and fill you with gold.

Their intentions are very good, but the idea of changing another is the idea of destroying him. To bring about even an iota of change in another person means we are not prepared to accept the independence of others. None of us can put up with the freedom of others. The father is busy trying to mould his sons, little thinking whether he has moulded his own self. Every father commits violence on his son. Then the son in turn is violent with his son, and so it goes on. It is difficult to find a wife who is not busy trying to change her husband or a husband who is not engaged in changing his wife. Even the wife of Socrates tried to improve her husband -- to make him good. The intentions are always pious.

The fact is that when you set out to improve someone, you can very safely and skilfully become violent. Since the wickedness is hidden behind goodness, it cannot be opposed. Only a foolish villain is openly bad. A cunning rogue is wicked in the name of goodness. That is why we feel uneasy in the company of the so-called good men.

I shall give you a maxim: Only a man in whose company you are relaxed is a good man. If you feel any anxiety or restlessness, be sure that some violence is flowing from him to you. Therefore it is easy to have the darshan of a mahatma, but very difficult to live with him. For twenty-four hours his eyes are on you: watching whether you have eaten the right food, drunk the right drink, sat in the right place and slept in the right manner. He stands guard over you day and night. You are not acceptable to him as you are.

Is it not strange that God accepts you as you are? God has up to now never complained about even the worst of men, never exhorted him to change even a little. But there is nothing but complaints about man from our mahatmas: It looks as if there is a fundamental enmity between God's business and that of the mahatmas. Everything is acceptable to God. This sutra of Lao Tzu's indicates this.

"Who is the best ruler?" asks Lao Tzu. "He whom the people do not know exists." Even to make your presence felt is violence. If the son is aware of the father's presence, some violence or the other still is coming from the father. If the husband is aware of the presence of his wife in the house, if he has to straighten his tie first and make an entry, know that there is violence. If the wife is not the same as she was before her husband came, know that there is violence.

Presence should not be felt at all. The supreme manifestation of love is that the lover is not obtrusive. His presence does not disrupt anything. Remember, you only become aware of a thing when it strikes you.

There is a very valuable word in Sanskrit: vedana. This word has two meanings: "hurt" and "knowledge". Ved means knowledge. From this evolved vid, which goes to form vidwan -- which means a knowledgeable person. And from this very word, "vid", vedana is formed, which means pain, suffering. The same word has two very strange and different meanings. If vedana means suffering and vedana means knowledge, what is the connection between suffering and knowledge? If there was joy in place of suffering we could have understood that there is some connection.

But there is a connection. We have knowledge only of pain. We have no knowledge of joy. Therefore, your moments of happiness are the moments you are not at all aware of. Pain can be felt. When a thorn pricks you, you become aware of your foot, not otherwise. When you have a headache, you become aware of your head and not otherwise. So a man who is conscious of his head is a man who has some illness of the head. If a man is conscious of his body, it is certain that he is suffering from some illness, some disease. There is only one definition of health -- the state when you are not aware of the body. A healthy man is so to speak, bodiless. Only a sick man has a body; a healthy man is not aware of his body. A sick man's body is as big as his illness. The greater the illness, the greater the consciousness of the body.

Pain and knowledge are one and the same thing. You are aware of the presence of only that which gives you pain. Only that whose presence you are unaware of gives you pleasure. Two lovers sitting in a room are not two different entities for there is no feeling of 'two' there. There is only one consciousness.

Lao Tzu says: the best ruler is he whose presence is not felt by his subjects. Perhaps there is no such ruler, except God. God is the one of whom we are least aware. Even when we set out to seek Him, we do not find Him anywhere. Think over this.

Wherever we go, we want people to know that we are there. And what trouble we take to make our presence felt! If you come here and no one knows you are here, you will be very unhappy.

When Ouspensky went to Gurdjieff for the first time, there were about twenty people already there. Ouspensky was a world-renowned figure; he was a great mathematician, a great intellectual and a scientific thinker. Gurdjieff was not even heard of in the outside world. Deep within his unconscious mind, Ouspensky felt that Gurdjieff would rise to receive him and people would be surprised and astonished that such a world-renowned figure had come to call on an unknown person like Gurdjieff. When Ouspensky was taken inside he was surprised to see the room so full. And not one of the twenty or so people so much as raised their eyes towards him. They all sat as if they were unaware of his entry - including Gurdjieff.

Ouspensky kept standing in the room. This was a strange way of getting acquainted! No one asked, "How have you gotten here?" Or "Who are you?" No one even told him to sit down. It was a cold night -- Ouspensky writes -- but he began to perspire, "Where have I come?" he thought to himself. No one asked him to sit down; no one even looked at him. A minute passed, then two, then three. For the first time, he says, he experienced time, and how heavy it can be. It seemed as if mountains were passing over his head and not minutes. What would be the outcome, he wondered. The man who showed him in had gone away and shut the door behind him. He wondered if he would have to pass the whole night like this. It was a veritable hell. And these people -- they were sitting so silently, like statues, that it would have been rude to break the silence. Ouspensky writes that for the first time he felt himself to be a nobody.

This state of affairs continued for fifteen minutes. Then Gurdjieff looked up and said, "Wipe the perspiration off. The night is cold. And sit down. We did this on purpose, just to know what sort of a person you were. You want people to feel your presence? This is violence. You could not bear to go

unnoticed for fifteen minutes: For fifteen minutes you could not stay as if you were not. Had you been able to do this, I would have had nothing more to teach you. But you could not. Hence, I have a lot to teach you. You are violent by nature."

We commit violence in a number of ways, in a number of forms. A person dresses in such a way that you have to look at him. Every man tries to draw attention towards himself by making noise, no matter how quietly he moves; or by pushing, no matter how much he takes care not to be pushed himself. Every man brings the tidings: I have arrived: Only Paramatman (God) gives no such tidings.

Atheists say, "If we can see Him, we shall believe." By this they mean that God should give an indication of His presence, like they do. They do not know that the very quality of the being of God, which is a profound quality of His existence, is this quality of not-being. He is found nowhere. The day He is found, He will no longer be God. The day He makes himself visible, He shall no longer be God.

The very meaning of the word "Paramatman" is one in whose presence or absence there is not an iota of difference. For Him, absence or presence are both synonymous, they have the same meaning. His mode of being present is being absent.

Lao Tzu says, "The best ruler is one whose existence is not known to his subjects." There is no such ruler except God. If a ruler reached anywhere near this state, then alone did he become a ruler. Therefore, in the days of Lao Tzu, and even two thousand years before him, the king was looked upon by his subjects as the incarnation of God. Nowadays it seems as if that was just a ruse, a subterfuge. Now, for the last two or three hundred years, We have been told that this was a conspiracy of the kings and their ministers. This is true to a great extent, but not entirely true.

There have been kings once in a while that people did not know of. Such kings Lao Tzu describes as godly. They were not known or hardly known. People just knew they existed, nothing beyond that. Lao Tzu says: if such a ruler becomes absent within himself, his presence becomes very auspicious for his kingdom.

This has become very difficult to understand because today, only a man who is restless to make his presence known seeks power. He wants people to know that he exists; he is someone. To reach this stage, he is ready to fall at the feet of anyone. People are shocked when a man who, only yesterday, was falling at their feet in order to get them to give him their vote, refuses even to recognise them when he comes into power. Then he does not consider their heads worthy enough for his feet. The public becomes restless, troubled.

They need not be, for the mathematics is simple. He puts his head on your feet today so that he can place his feet on your head tomorrow. This is straight and simple, and the result predetermined. Since you enjoyed his touching your feet, now let him enjoy the same pleasure. It is a matter of give and take. Today, each person knows that he can only make his presence felt from a seat of authority.

So it is difficult to understand a person like Lao Tzu. But there have been times when this was an authentic fact: that there were kings whose presence was hardly felt by his subjects. Lao Tzu maintains

that this quality pertains only to a king. One is a king who has eliminated the ego within him in such a way that he has become empty -- shunya. If emptiness is seated on the throne, the kingdom is bound to be proper. This is how Lao Tzu thinks.

But we find today that the ego, in its most condensed form, occupies the seat of authority. When such is the case, prosperity is impossible. Lao Tzu maintains that only he is worthy of wielding power whose 'I' is completely extinct, who no longer is. The bond between ego and power is poisonous. It is fatal. Power should rest only in the hands of an egoless person. Power should flow towards egolessness.

Therefore, in this country, a very precious method was evolved. The Brahmin was placed above the Kshatriya king. This was a unique experiment in the history of mankind. But the experiment failed. The greater the effort, the more possibilities there are of failure. The smaller the attempt the lesser are the chances of failure. Communism will succeed because it is the lowest effort in the history of mankind. The experiment we made failed because we put a Brahmin, who is a pauper by birth, over a king. We placed one who possessed nothing over a king who possessed everything!

Buddha was approaching a village. The King of that village called his ministers and asked whether it would be in keeping with his dignity to receive Buddha at the entrance of his kingdom. The Prime minister promptly handed him his resignation.

"What has happened?" the king asked in surprise.

The Prime minister said, "The very question is unbecoming of you. I can no longer work under you."

"But I have not refused to go and see him;" the king pleaded. "I only wanted your opinion as to whether it was befitting for a king to welcome a beggar."

The old minister replied, "That is the splendour of a king. And remember, Oh king, that he who enters your town now as a beggar was a king once upon a time. He left his kingdom to become a beggar; you still hold onto your kingdom. You are not of his caliber. He is a beggar who is worthy to be a king; you are a king who is worthy only to be a beggar."

He who becomes as nothing, nobody, is worthy of being the topmost. He who is nothing is everything. Therefore, Lao Tzu says, "OF THE BEST RULERS, THE PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW THAT THEY EXIST. OF LESS SUPERLATIVE RULERS, THEIR SUBJECTS LOVE AND PRAISE THEM." If we think over this we shall be perplexed. People should love and respect the superlative king, but Lao Tzu says it is the second category of kings who gets love and respect from his subjects. This is because he has to do something in order to earn the love and acknowledgment of the people. And the people love and respect him for this very reason. They are not even conscious of the king who is empty, who is void within himself, for he does nothing. A lot takes place through him, but that is not felt by the people.

In his last sutra Lao Tzu goes on to say more about the shunya person -- the egoless king. "BUT (OF THE BEST) WHEN THEIR TASK IS ACCOMPLISHED, THEIR WORK DONE, THE PEOPLE ALL REMARK;, "WE HAVE DONE IT OURSELVES'." The superlative man never claims credit for what he does. He does not even

declare that he is doing it. No one knows the doer behind the action. Then, when nothing is known of the doer, every man comes forward and declares he was the doer.

The less superior receives love, respect and praise. If you wish for all these, you have to make your presence known. And that also in a very nice manner -- in such a manner that people should praise you, love you. But a man who wants this has to climb down from the plane of inaction to the plane of action. He now has involved himself in action, even if it be love.

Generally we are not aware of love. How do you know that someone loves you? The person must declare his love verbally or make a present to his beloved. He has to perform some act to express his feelings. If a person loves you but shows no outward expression of any kind, you will never know of his love.

Love can only be known when it is aggressive. The more aggressive a person, the more love he can express. The quiet lover goes unnoticed because in order to experience serene love, your consciousness must also rise to that level to receive the message of love. We can only grasp violent love. Hence, the more aggressive a person, the more ardent the lover.

It is always the second category of kings who are acclaimed by the people, for then only can people be aware of them. Love is also a happening that is lower than emptiness. There is one love that is within the void also, but then it cannot be felt.

Have you ever experienced God's love? The fact is, but for His love, you cannot take a single breath. Without His love, no flower can bloom, without his love, nothing is possible. His love alone is the fountainhead of all possibilities. But He is not found anywhere. Therefore we cannot make a love out of God whereas we can make a lesser human being our lover because his love is aggressive.

One can even pretend to be in love. All you have to do is to let the other know. You call me a lover without being in love, if you can put on an act.

It is possible also that there is love but no sign of it -- if you do not allow it to show in your actions. Perhaps it is not possible to know a genuine lover for he does not commit even that much aggression of saying that he loves you. But then he is beyond our limitations. Such a ruler, such a lover, is always beyond the circumference of our understanding.

The ruler of the third category is one of whom the people are afraid. Generally we love the person we are afraid of. Tulsidas has said, "Love is not possible without fear." This is the third category to which we all belong.

When we fear, we love. Even our love for God is born out of fear. The more we are made to fear God -- that He will throw us into hell, burn us in its fire, etcetera, the more we are filled with love towards Him and lift our hands in prayer to Him. We understand fear. How can we understand the void when we fail to understand even love?

Therefore, he who frightens us the most appears to be the greatest ruler. If we go through our history, we shall find the names of those rulers who have tormented people most as the great rulers. Whether he is Alexander, Napoleon or Genghis Khan, they all belong to the same category. Our whole history is comprised of people who frightened others and people who could be frightened.

The greater the tyrant, the greater the ruler he appears to be. Why? We are not aware of love if it does not become aggressive. But real love never wishes to be aggressive. We are aware of fear, for fear is pure aggression. Fear means someone has made your very being tremble. Understand this a little.

The best ruler is he whose presence is not known. The lowest kind of ruler is one who puts your very being into jeopardy. The best ruler is he who does not even look towards you. The lowest ruler is he whose one glance sends a chill down your spine. Fear changes our very state of being. When Genghis Khan attacked a village he would have all the children's heads severed from their bodies and mounted on spears. He burnt villages in order to light the path of his army. Mankind will never forget him.

Tamerlane once attacked Mulla Nasruddin's village because he was told that a wise man lived there. The Mulla was captured and brought before him. Tamerlane said to him, "I have been told you are a mystic. I want proof of your mysticism, or else this sword is here. I want proof, no mere talk."

Nasruddin closed his eyes and appeared to be filled with joy. He opened his eyes, looked towards the skies and said, "Look, the gods are in the skies." Then he looked down and said, "This is the seventh hell. I can see everything."

Tamerlane asked, "What is the method by which you can see heaven and hell?"

Nasruddin replied, "There is no method. Only fear. Because of your sword, I see all this. I am no mystic; I am only afraid. What else can I do?"

Fear makes a man see everything. The angels in heaven, the fires of hell, the concept of God are all born out of fear. An old man is more religious for he is more afraid. It is more difficult to make a young man religious, and more difficult to prevent an old man from becoming religious. When a youth is told that it is not yet time for him to become religious, it only means he should let his fears grow enough and hell and heaven will become apparent to him. The closer a man is to death, the more religious he becomes -- in the same ratio. What is the reason? Fear develops: the fear of death. Hands begin to tremble and he feels restless, afraid. But that of which we are afraid is not God. It is an extension of our fear.

Lao Tzu says: "People are afraid of the third category of rulers." If we examine the governments of the whole world, we shall find rulers belonging to the third category, for all governments are based on fear, on law and law courts.

People criticise the lowest type of ruler. This is the fourth category, in which things come to such a pass that people speak ill of their rulers. But there is a very interesting fact. G. K. Chesterton has said, "If you cannot praise me, at least revile me, for then I shall be satisfied that at least you know I am somebody."

Remember, there is no disease greater than expectation in this world, not even slander. When people censure you, even then they admit you are somebody. If people do not slander you and do not praise you, if they simply disregard you, then your ego has no place to stand.

The fourth type of ruler lives by criticism. He puts you in a position where you have to criticise him constantly. But then, too, your attention is focused on him. It doesn't matter if you are scorned or abused. If your path is strewn with flowers, good. If your path is strewn with stones, that too will do. But if there is simply nothing awaiting you, no one looks at you, then it is unbearable. The ego wants attention. The ego wishes to attract people in any way.

Psychologists say that the motivation behind becoming a criminal is the same as the motivation is behind becoming a sadhu. He who can attain praise by being a good man becomes a sadhu; he who cannot do this becomes a criminal and attains censure. Both gain prominence in newspapers. We cannot eradicate bad men from this earth as long as we keep reviling them. This is a little difficult to understand. It is reverse mathematics.

Jesus has said, "Resist not evil." By resisting evil, we lend respect to it. By resisting evil, you show that you are attentive towards it. You thus give life to evil. Do not criticise the bad man for he gets pleasure out of your censure.

Do not think that hierarchy exists only in politics. It also exists in jails. There, you will find the number one jailbird, the number two and so on. When a man enters a jail he is questioned whether it is the first time. In other words, whether he is an amateur. There are gurus among criminals who are masters in their art. Here, each one is respected according to the crimes he has committed, according to the number of times he has been in jail. Just as a man is revered according to his donation to a temple, another is respected for the fear he creates among people. The ego fulfils itself in many subtle ways.

Says Lao Tzu, "The fourth type is the lowest category of ruler. People speak ill of him, but he thrives on their ill-will."

When people lose confidence in their ruler, he resorts to oaths and vows. There is a Christian order by the name of Quakers. They refuse to take an oath, even in a court of law, for they consider it a sin to take an oath. They had to undergo a lot of difficulty on this account. A court cannot proceed unless the witness swears by the Bible that he will say the truth. The Quaker says that if he is to tell a lie, of what use is his oath? And if he is relied upon to tell the truth, where is the need for an oath?

To take an oath is to admit that I can lie also. Therefore only that person takes an oath who is prone to lie. One should beware of such people who resort to oaths readily. They are dangerous people. They try to beguile you into thinking that they are good people.

When a king has no other means, he resorts to oaths and vows to gain the confidence of his people. If he can inspire confidence, where is the need of oaths and vows?

A person came to me and said, "I am in difficulty. I feel that what you say is right. I wish to come to you, but the trouble is that I have already been accepted by a guru and he has taken a vow from me that I should never accept another as my guru."

I told him that his guru must have been doubtful of his own gurudom. Therefore he made him take an oath. If he had confidence in his own ability, he would not have extracted a promise from his disciple. He knew that if not today, then tomorrow, you will seek another guru and desert him. I told him, "One should beat a hasty retreat when a guru insists on vows. For sooner or later, you are bound to run. And this guru knows it. He has no conviction that he can stop you."

Faith does not ask for oaths; it awakens possibilities. Oaths are born in the absence of faith. In courts as well as temples, we take vows. A husband and wife swear to be each other's. That very vow spoils everything. The vow shows that this will not be. It is like a divorce before the marriage.

What do marriage vows show? They show that you may want to separate sometime in the future. If there is love between two people, the thought of taking vows never arises. This is only an indication of the absence of love. People do not marry out of love; they marry out of fear. If there is love on this earth, marriage will become redundant. When love is not, marriage is a must. We make arrangements for that which we cannot do. We make rules for that which we are not sure of.

Says Lao Tzu, "WHEN THEY DO NOT COMMAND THE PEOPLE'S FAITH, SOME WILL LOSE FAITH IN THEM AND THEN THEY WILL RESORT TO OATHS!" Any ruler -- whether it is a king, a president or a guru... Whomsoever we get discipline from, whomsoever we get direction in life from, is a ruler. Whether it is our parents, our teachers, or our elders, if they cannot inculcate faith in us, they resort to oaths.

"BUT (OF THE BEST), WHEN THEIR TASK IS ACCOMPLISHED, THEIR WORK DONE, THE PEOPLE ALL REMARK, 'WE HAVE DONE IT OURSELVES'."

When the work of the best guru is over, the disciple thinks he has attained himself. When the best parents' work is over, the son considers it his own achievement.

The guru's joy lies in this only: that the disciple knows one day that whatever he has known, he alone has known. This means that the superlative guru does not cause even this much obstruction in the path of his disciple: that it may occur to him that the guru has done something for him. Guru is also of four types, just like a ruler.

Lao Tzu looks upon non-action as the best. As activity increases things begin to become more and more mediocre. Emptiness (SHUNYATA) is the best. The more we step out of the void and enter the whirlwind of activity, the more mediocre we become.

Chapter #18

Chapter title: The birth of doctrines from the decline of Tao

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ON THE DECLINE OF THE GREAT TAO,
THE DOCTRINES OF HUMANITY AND JUSTICE AROSE.
WHEN KNOWLEDGE AND CLEVERNESS APPEARED,
GREAT HYPOCRISY FOLLOWED IN ITS WAKE.
WHEN THE SIX RELATIONSHIPS NO LONGER LIVED AT PEACE,
THERE WAS (PRAISE OF) 'KIND PARENTS' AND 'FILIAL SONS'.
WHEN A COUNTRY FELL INTO CHAOS AND MISRULE,
THERE WAS PRAISE OF 'LOYAL MINISTERS'!

This sutra deals with the most difficult aspect of life. Lao Tzu is opposed to everything that we look upon as a great ethical doctrine. For his basic doctrine is that a profound balance is constantly being established each moment in life. If we concentrate on goodness, badness increases. If we stress morality, immorality develops in the same ratio. If we wish that people should be good, we shall only succeed in creating more bad people. If we try to understand life, we shall come to one conclusion: that life is impossible without a balance. And this balance is everywhere, in all directions.

Scientists have, of late, developed a unique conception. This conception can fill us with anxiety but not Lao Tzu. A hundred years ago a French scientist was the first to experiment with the measuring of human intelligence. Ever since then Many techniques have been developed. Now we can measure the intelligence quotient (I.Q.) of all individual.

This has led to many new kinds of experiments and yielded fantastic results. It is now a proven fact that if one person out of one hundred is a genius, one is bound to be an idiot. If ten in the hundred are found having a sharp mind, there are bound to be dullards also. If the hundred are divided 50-50, we shall find an equal number of counteracting qualities in each division. If you wish to produce ten people of the highest genius, you shall also create ten people who are mentally retarded.

This is a confounding fact. It means that the more we try to develop intelligence in some, the more we shall be snatching away the intelligence of others. Life is balanced on all fronts. This means that if there is a certain number of healthy people, there are bound to be an equal number of unhealthy people.

Lao Tzu says, "We cannot escape this balance in life." If we produce ten good people, we shall inevitably give rise to ten bad people. Just as a coin cannot have one side only, in the same way, in the mystery of existence, a personality cannot be one-sided only. So when a sadhu is born a non sadhu is invariably born. This is a little difficult to understand, because what is common between a sadhu and a non-sadhu?

Consciousness is an extensive field. When a mountain rises up, a valley is invariably formed beside it. We cannot have mountains without valleys. If we deny the valley we have to deny the mountain. If we seek the height of the mountain peak, we must be prepared to accept the dark depths of the valley. The mountain is one side of the coin and the valley is the other. The valley and the mountain are parts of one and the same thing. We can do without mountains and valleys only on level ground.

Just as this holds good for land, it also holds good for consciousness, says Lao Tzu. Consciousness is also like land. On the level of consciousness, when a person rises to the heights, at once another person falls to the depths and forms the valley -- in order to maintain the balance. When one person becomes Rama, another invariably has to become Ravana. You cannot have Rama only and do away with Ravana. If you want to escape from Ravana, you have to give up all your fascination for Rama.

We want to escape Ravana and preserve Rama. We want there to be Rama, and Rama alone; we have no idea of the balance in existence. We forget that if there is Rama and Rama alone, everything would become dull and boring. People like Rama make the earth a dull place, it is only the Ravana among us who prevent it from being so. They lend excitement and interest to Rama.

But Ravana cannot exist by themselves. For a good person to be, a bad person must be; and vice versa.

All good people are dependent on bad people; and all bad people are dependent on good people. They are interdependent no one is independent. This dependence is hard to understand because since time immemorial, man has desired that goodness should prevail and there should be no evil, that there should be intelligent people and not dullards; that people should be moral and not immoral. We have always desired that there be light and more light. and darkness be banished forever. We have always wanted life without death, and happiness without unhappiness.

All our efforts have been in vain says Lao Tzu, and they are bound to be. The more a man craves happiness, the more miserable he becomes. He who does not crave happiness finds unhappiness avoiding him. You can only escape unhappiness by not desiring happiness. If the craving for happiness is

very strong, unhappiness increases to the same extent. Life is made up of dualism; and between the opposites, there is a particular balance.

Before proceeding with the sutra, it will be better to understand this dualism and balance. There is an opposition and a unity between the two. There is open opposition between Ravana and Rama; but on the other side, there is a connection, a joint also. There is enmity between the Kauravas and the Pandavas; this is a fact. But this enmity is very superficial. Deep within, they are interdependent. We find that when some people become richer, some others invariably become poorer. Then we criticise and oppose the rich.

When we begin to understand the truths of life, we shall find this is not in the case with wealth alone. George Gurdjieff thought that knowledge also is limited. He was one of the wisest persons of this century. "Knowledge is also limited," he said. Therefore, when one person attains supreme consciousness, another suffers the utter poverty of consciousness. This is not because of the limitation of consciousness but because it is necessary to maintain a balance. Otherwise, all arrangements of life would go haywire.

This is why we notice a unique fact in the history of mankind. As the aspiration for goodness increases, evil also develops to the same extent.

Lao Tzu says that there is one state in nature, however, when we do not consider the opposites at all. That is the highest state. He calls it Tao. Tao is the state of one's nature when we are not aware of either good or bad. When we do not even know what it is to be good and what it is to be bad, that is the supreme tranquillity.

As soon as we know what righteousness is, it means we have knowledge of non-righteousness. Hence a very interesting fact comes to light: the righteous man has full knowledge of unrighteousness, which is not even known to the unrighteous man. A good man knows evil in its minutest detail. If a man becomes conscious of health it means he has become ill. The more knowledge a man has of health, the more ill he is. He who is constantly conscious of health cannot be a healthy person. This is a very profound illness.

Lao Tzu says that the decline of Tao began with the decline of nature. "ON THE DECLINE OF THE GREAT TAO, THE DOCTRINES OF HUMANITY AND JUSTICE AROSE."

Says Lao Tzu: when man was no longer man, the doctrines of humanity and justice arose. We think the reverse to be the actuality. We believe that if we obey the doctrines of humanity and justice, we shall become human. Lao Tzu says, these doctrines appeared only when man was man no longer. Then we began to exhort people to be human.

Human beings are human beings; there is no question of becoming. To become human implies that we have begun to fall from humanity. Lao Tzu says that the great doctrine of humanity and justice was born in the decline of humanity. Otherwise a man is human by nature. Talk of justice begins only when injustice begins. Let us understand this.

Knowledge comes with the opposite. When we say there should be no injustice, there should only be justice, the meaning is clear: that injustice has started. The more we cry for justice, the more injustice spreads. We say there should be knowledge, because ignorance is deep. The more we strive to increase knowledge, the deeper ignorance becomes.

Now the West has begun to understand Lao Tzu. There are many thoughtful people in the West now who feel that their sense of values should be reoriented along the lines of Lao Tzu; they should be reconstructed on the basis of Lao Tzu's teachings. All the laws that have been constructed so far for mankind are contrary to Lao Tzu's teachings. We have listened to those who said, "Good should prevail. There should be justice; there should be equality." He listened to those who preached that there should be humanity, freedom, equality." But what are the results?

If we look at the results, things will become clear to us. The amount of knowledge that prevails today never before existed in this world and yet man was never as ignorant before as he is today. This seems paradoxical. So much knowledge and so much ignorance at the same time! Lao Tzu would not have been surprised for he said, "The more you increase knowledge, the more ignorance will spread." This is bound to baffle us though, because we feel that the more knowledge we spread, the more ignorance will be eradicated. This is our logic: when knowledge increases, ignorance should decrease.

But history does not bear us out; it gives no proof to our theory. There is no doubt that the bulk of knowledge has increased. Five thousand new books are published each week. Five thousand new books circulate in our libraries. Our universities and our libraries keep expanding. The knowledge of each subject bears new shoots and off-shoots. Oxford University alone runs courses in 360 subjects!

All around we are increasing knowledge. Every day we have to break down a few branches from the tree of knowledge which are unable to bear the heavy burden. Today, if a person wants to know everything about a small thing like the eye, a life-time is not enough for it even if he studies every day.

So we have to divide things now. There was a time when one doctor could treat our whole body -- knowledge was so little. Then knowledge increased, and specialists took the place of the general practitioner. Now we have a different doctor for the different parts of the body. But now, the knowledge of each part is becoming so profuse that a single specialist is unable to cope with it. Therefore, in America now, they feel that it is not safe to rely on a human doctor. Computers alone can be of help. So in the future, the state of affairs will be such that a wise man will be one who can work a computer. Then it will not be necessary for a doctor to learn medicine. All he need do would be to feed the computer and get the answer.

Knowledge is increasing with such rapidity that a single human mind is unable to hold it. So many books are written that they can no longer be kept in libraries, because then the library will fill the whole world. It is said that there are so many books in the Moscow Library that if the cupboards are kept side by side, they would go around the world once. Who is going to reach all these books?

Now they are making micro-books, micro films of each book. A book of a thousand pages will be contained in one page. These pages can be stored. Whenever a person wants to read it, he can only read it with the help of a projector. The old way of reading will be outdated.

Books are increasing; knowledge is increasing. So now western scientists are worried about how all this knowledge can be transferred to the youth? The new trend of thought is, that education should not end at the age of twenty to twenty-five. If we cannot educate people till the age of fifty, education will have no meaning after the turn of this century. But if we are to educate a person till he is fifty, when will he begin to live? There is no way for him to live.

This leads to another idea: memory transplantation. When a man dies, his memory should be conserved and transplanted into the brain of a child so that the child does not have to learn those things that his father had to learn. If the child gets the father's memory, he can proceed ahead to acquire new knowledge. Knowledge is so much!

But if we look at man, on the other hand, we see abominable ignorance, ignorance that is frightening! We know all about the stars and the moon, but we know nothing about ourselves. We have found ways and means to reach Mars, but to reach our own self seems to be a very far away proposition that seems well nigh impossible. There is so much knowledge and man is so unassured! He has no assurance of ever knowing himself.

Our knowledge today is so much that we know how anger is formed, how the sex-impulse works and what is its bio-chemistry. Buddha did not have this knowledge to draw upon. But Buddha knew enough so that anger did not arise in him, sex did not arise in him. We know everything about angel, everything about sex, but we have no control over it whatsoever. We know so much about it but it still torments us. Never was man so tormented by sex!

Our knowledge has increased in quantity. So has our ignorance. Never has man been so fearful as he is today. He has no faith in himself; he feels so insecure. Life seems meaningless. Then it is certain that the fundamental principles on which we have based our life have been proven wrong.

Man has followed the logic of Aristotle. He has said that when knowledge increases ignorance will vanish. This is simple mathematics. Lao Tzu's calculations seem topsy-turvy. He says that if knowledge increases, ignorance also increases. No one paid heed to Lao Tzu. What he said seemed illogical, and hence not worthy of notice. It is only natural that our mind should understand such a simple thing that when knowledge increases, ignorance should decrease. Therefore, Aristotle became the centre for all humanity. The West has developed its science entirely on the basis of Aristotle.

But now, when things have developed more it seems that perhaps Lao Tzu was correct. In the last fifty years, the intellectual people of the West have been experiencing life to be meaningless. There seems to be no reason why we live, why we toil, why the worries and anxieties. Why do we live at all? There seems to be no reason. Sartre has said, "We have to live against our will. We are born against our will and one day we are taken away without our consent. Only one thing is in our hands: suicide. There is nowhere else that we can exercise our will. Life is a nightmare."

God knows how many intellectuals have committed suicide in the last fifty years. People have killed themselves before but they were non-intellectuals. This is a qualitative difference. Now things have reached such a pass in the West that if an intellectual does not commit suicide, his intelligence is doubted. If life is meaningless, suicide is the only way out. Then why should one take the trouble to live?

Nijinsky wrote a letter before committing suicide in which he said, "I am committing suicide but do not take me to be a coward. It is the other way about. You are cowards because you cannot take your life. Therefore you live. I am not a coward. Therefore I am freeing myself from the meaningless hustle and bustle of what you call life."

What Nijinsky says is not entirely wrong. If we ask ourselves the question why we live on, perhaps it is because of cowardice. We do not have the courage to die and therefore we drag on through life. This idea of dragging on through life has caught on only in the last fifty years. With the increase in knowledge of the outside world, self-ignorance has increased. The balance is complete.

Lao Tzu says, "Self knowledge cannot increase unless we rid ourselves of outside knowledge."

If we examine the course of human thinking in the last 300 years, we find a steep increase in doctrines of humanity and justice. But never, in all the history of the world, has mankind indulged in such terrible warfares or committed such heinous atrocities. On one hand we have evolved great doctrines on humanity, and on the other hand we have thrown atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On one side we clamour for justice and humanity and on the other side we involve a weaker country in endless wars. It is those who talk loudest about humanity who wage those wars. If we have become so conscious of humanity, wars should have stopped long ago. But this is not so.

We are so conscious of justice, and there is no end to injustice anywhere Whenever we make new changes in order to ensure greater justice, a new arrangement of injustice is created, -- with the result that there is no change for the better. Our whole revolution in the field of medicine does not destroy disease; it only help new diseases to be created. All the improvements we bring about merely increase our hopes, without bearing results.

Rather, we find the results to be the contrary of our expectations. We think that if we increase our laws and the number of courts, we shall be able to bring down the incidence of crime. But the figures of crime tell a different story: the number of criminals has increased equally. If we look at the history of crime over the last two thousand years, we shall find that crime has increased in the same ratio as the institutions of law. When crime increases, the government feels there are not enough laws. So they add more laws.

Man's mind revolves around some illusory logic. When crime increases we bring in more laws. This seems to prove a deep relationship between the judge and the criminal. The thief and the policeman seem to be two sides of the same coin. They are not two separate things; rather, they are interlocked somewhere within. When one increases, the other also increases. When the growth of one implies the growth of another, the root must be the same. Therefore the same sap that feeds one feeds the other, the same energy flows through one as the other.

Lao Tzu's viewpoint is entirely different. He says that it is the evil within you that is the root of all your moral codes and moral concepts. Humanity and justice emerged only on the decline of Tao.

"WHEN KNOWLEDGE AND CLEVERNESS CAME INTO BEING, GREAT HYPOCRISY FOLLOWED IN ITS WAKE."

Do you realise it is very difficult to save an educated man from being dishonest? We may think the fault lies in our type of education, if we have the right type of education, this would not be. But we err again. Says Lao Tzu: "It is impossible to save an educated person from dishonesty." This is because education makes a person clever, and cleverness leads to cunning.

Education gives the power to understand. It does not bring about a change of heart. The heart is the same, only the understanding changes. What the heart did when the person was uneducated it does now with double strength. Before, man was restricted to the sword. Today, man is the same but we have put the atom bomb at his disposal. Where before he could kill a few people, today he can wipe out a whole city. The wrath within him is just the same. If he has a stone in his hand, he will throw a stone. If he holds a bomb in his hand, he will throw that too.

On one side, knowledge is increasing; and on the other side, dishonesty.

The belief of Emerson, and other like thinkers, that there will be no evil once the entire world is educated, is basically wrong. More and more people are becoming educated nowadays. In America everyone is literate, but we find that all its ills are born out of its education. When good people believe wrong logic and follow it, it leads to disaster.

A friend came to see me. He has spent all his life educating the tribals. He is very satisfied with his achievement and very conscious of his renunciation. He basks in his self-acquired martyrdom. "I have given my whole life to this cause. I could have earned lakhs. I went to jail -- I could have taken my seat in the cabinet. But I gave up everything and dedicated my whole life to educate the backward tribals."

I said to him, "You are educating them, but have you also examined what it has given to the tribal children? You will die thinking you are doing a great thing, but give a thought to this also -- what has education done to these children?"

America is the most educated country in the world today. We look upon it as the custodian of man's future. If all countries are thus educated, they will become like America. But what has been the outcome of all this education? Crime has not decreased, it has increased. Dishonesty is rampant. All this has increased in the same ratio as education. What does this mean? This means we cannot wipe out the opposite. By increasing the one, we cannot decrease the other, much less destroy it. We can only increase it. Let us see this from different aspects.

Today we have innumerable cures for all kinds of illnesses -- but illnesses have not lessened. Rather, they have increased. The fact is that many new illnesses have come into being which were never there before. Not only have we invented new medicines; we have also invented new diseases. What is the reason behind this? If medicines have increased, diseases should be less -- this is simple logic. But cures have increased and so have illnesses! What is this! What law is working?

Actually, as cures increase; your ability to fall ill also increases. You no longer have faith in yourself; you have faith in the medicine. You do not have to fight the illness; that work is now taken over by the medicine. You are now out of it. When the medicine fights the disease, your resistance, your body's ability to fight the illness, goes down. As you depend more and more on medicines, your resistance gets less and less and you get weaker and weaker.

And as you get weaker and weaker, you need more and more medicines. This shows how weak your body has become. Then you find yourself confronted by a very major illness. And this goes on -- the fight between illnesses and medicines. You are not even a part of it. You are merely the battleground, the Kurukshetra where the Pandavas and the Kauravas fight. The germs of the medicines fight the germs of the disease. You get knocked around in the process. The medicines, however, keep you sufficiently alive so that the fight goes on. There is all interconnection between the cure and the illness somewhere.

If we question Lao Tzu on this, he will say that illness will end the day medicines are no more. This however, is beyond our understanding. His logic is this: when there is no medicine, you yourself will have to fight the illness. Your strength of resistance can only develop then. To rely on medicines is not to rely on oneself. We can see for ourselves how we have filled ourselves with medicines.

But there is no way out because our whole logic is based on this kind of thinking. It is like this: The more we try to protect ourselves, the more insecure we become. The more insecure we become, the more means for security we contrive. What is the meaning of this riddle? It means that the more we are protected the weaker we become.

You are sitting in an air-conditioned room. You watch a worker walking in the burning sun and you say to yourself. "Poor man, to walk in all this heat!" But you do not know that this man may be totally oblivious to the heat. This thought of the burning sun is yours. But it is true that if you were to step outside to walk with him, the heat would be overbearing for you.

The heat is not the same for every person on the road. Each person experiences it differently. The heat does not depend entirely on the sun; it also depends on you. When you walk on the road and sweat profusely, you think, "The poor worker!" but the worker is almost unaware of it, because in order to experience the heat of the sun, air-conditioning is absolutely necessary.

The more air-conditioning there is, the greater will be the heat. The more we try to cool the world, the hotter it will become. This seems contrary, but there is a deep-seated connection. The more you remain in an air-conditioned room, the less will become your power to fight the heat.

It is only natural that that energy which we do not put to use should get less and less. The air-conditioner does for you what normally your body should be doing -- fighting the heat. Therefore, when you suddenly stand in the sun, your body becomes totally unprotected. It will not be able to bear the heat and you will feel very very uncomfortable. This discomfort did not exist before air-conditioning was discovered.

Now Russia is thinking of air-conditioning the whole continent. But when people are born and die in air-conditioned places all mankind will have to go underground. There are stories about cultures reaching to the peak. But those that reached the ultimate height eventually had to go underground.

There is a lake named Titicaca in South America. It is a unique lake. It has puzzled scientists, because a river falls into this lake. Millions of gallons of water fall daily into this lake and there is no way for it to flow out of the lake. Yet not an inch of water rises in the lake. Scientists are confounded. Where does all this water go? The lake has been observed for hundreds of years. It is said that beneath the lake there are the ruins of the ancient civilisation of the Incas. This lake is supposed to have been its reservoir. The Incas are no more, but their arrangement for collecting water still remains. Scientists now think that this was the water supply of a people who lived beneath the lake. A lot of research is going on to discover this lost civilisation.

The more developed a society becomes, the more it goes underground. In Mohenjodaro and Harappa, there are seven tiers of townships. This cannot be because of earthquakes or any other calamity. The greater possibility is that the civilisation had moved underground. Scientists and archaeologists have maintained up to now that Mohenjodaro was built seven times and destroyed seven times by earthquakes. This does not seem plausible: that seven cultures could disappear in the same place, one after the other. It seems more plausible that the culture must have reached such a peak where it became absolutely necessary to go more and more underground. Man must have lost all his power to bear the conditions above the ground.

If air-conditioning is spread all over the world, man will have to go underground within the next two hundred years. Then, to step outside in the light of the sun may become fatal. A child born and brought up in an air-conditioned place will not be able to bear sunlight. Up till now the sun has been the source of life; tomorrow, it may be the cause of death.

The more we increase our means of protection, the more vulnerable we become. The more we arrange to protect ourselves, the more we expose ourselves to danger.

Lao Tzu says: When knowledge is born, hypocrisy is born. So also dishonesty and deceit. People become frauds and cheats. It is very difficult for a literate person to be honest.

In this context, the Biblical story of Adam and Eve is worthy of note. This is the most valuable story in the Bible.

God turned Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden because they ate the forbidden fruit. He had told them that they could enjoy the fruits of all trees except that of one, the tree of knowledge.

Perhaps it was this forbiddance that made Adam and Eve more eager to taste this fruit. Perhaps it was because of this that Satan succeeded in persuading Eve to taste it. He explained to her that this fruit was forbidden because whoever partook of it became like God. Knowledge makes a god out of man.

Therefore God has forbidden this fruit.

Eve was convinced of the authenticity of this story. Ignorance is death and knowledge the highest excellence. If God forbade this fruit, it was clear that he did not want them to become like Him.

If you want to convince a man the safest way is to convince his wife. If she is convinced, he is bound to agree. So Satan convinced Eve by awakening her jealousy -- it is easy to make a woman jealous. Adam tried his best to deter Eve, but in vain. She had made up her mind to taste the fruit. When it became a choice between God and his wife, poor Adam had to bow to Eve's will. The more he tried to dissuade her the more adamant she became because the attraction increased. Ultimately the fruit was tasted. No sooner had they tasted it than they were thrown out of the Garden.

Knowledge became the cause of man's fall -- according to the Bible. This is confounding, but it tallies with Lao Tzu's statement. He too says that ever since man has acquired knowledge he has gone astray. He cannot return to the Garden of Eden till he breaks himself away completely from knowledge. Then only will the doors of heaven open for him.

It is interesting to note that when knowledge disappears, ignorance disappears also. The fact is, ignorance is experienced only on account of knowledge. Therefore, as knowledge increases, we become more and more aware of ignorance.

If you are the only person on this earth, what would you be -- wise or ignorant? You will only be, there will be no comparison. How will you gauge whether you are moral, or immoral, whether you are good or bad? There will be no criterion to go by.

Lao Tzu says: the state of Tao is a simple state -- it is as if each man is the only man in the world. There is no way to measure. There is no good nor bad; no one is wise and no one is ignorant, there is no sadhu or non-sadhu. There is just being.

There is another interesting incident in this Biblical story. As soon as Eve tasted the fruit she broke some leaves to cover herself. Before that she was naked, but with knowledge came the awareness of sin. Knowledge disrupted the full acceptance of the body -- something in it became non-acceptable. Till then Adam and Eve were as innocent as children. With knowledge came sin.

Lao Tzu says: "Innocence cannot be achieved till all knowledge is eradicated." Therefore, only one who is capable of renouncing all knowledge attains Supreme knowledge. Then he becomes simple, innocent. Jesus has said, "Only those who become innocent like children can enter my kingdom." It is not known whether children are really innocent. According to Freud, they are not. He believes that all defects and shortcomings are already there; they only bide time until they become manifest. The child needs your help initially, he needs your care to educate him, to make him strong in body. As soon as he is fit to be on his own, all the ills within begin to manifest in him. But Jesus means otherwise. He says where there is not awareness but non-awareness -- that very ignorance is innocence.

So as soon as Adam and Eve became conscious of themselves, they covered their bodies; they were filled with shame towards themselves. To be ashamed of something is to be conscious of its blemishes, its flaws. The sense of shame is considered a virtue in women but neither shame nor shyness is a virtue

because both convey the meaning that the person has become aware of her defects. She feels something is wrong somewhere and how is this feeling possible without some prior experience? Somehow, the sense of wrong has entered within her.

In an innocent personality, there is no shyness, no shame. There is also no shamelessness, for this requires an initial knowledge of shame. Shamelessness is a by-product. When a person becomes conscious of shame and then throws shame to the winds, he becomes shameless.

Lao Tzu says that there is a state of existence in which the knowledge of the opposites (the duality) is absent; where there is no distinction between black and white, light and darkness. And it is this state that is the supreme religion. All that comes below this state is a decline of religion.

Confucius came to meet Lao Tzu. He was the very opposite of Lao Tzu. He was equal to Aristotle, he was like us. He constructed rules and regulations for everything in life. Every inch of life he tried to direct: how one should sit, how one should stand, how one should speak, how one should live and how one should die. There has not been a bigger lover of rules than he.

When Confucius lay dying, one of his disciples came to see him. He had not come for a long time, and what Confucius was eager to know from him was only this: whether he got off the bullock-cart when he entered the village! When the disciple assured him he had got off the cart and walked the distance, Confucius said, "Now I can die in peace." Such a disciplinarian was Confucius.

Lao Tzu was just his opposite. He laid down no rules, no regulations, for all discipline to him is the cause of downfall. When a law is introduced, it means the illness has set in: and now we have to bind ourselves to regulations to somehow save ourselves, somehow go on.

Confucius asked Lao Tzu. "I wish to make men good. Please advise me as to what I should do."

Lao Tzu replied, "Do not try to make men good. You will only succeed in making them bad. Your contribution to mankind should be only this: that you do not endeavour to make them good."

Confucius was confused because this was not his way of thinking. "How can this be?" He questioned. "Then there will be nothing but chaos and anarchy!"

Lao Tzu replied, "Disorder comes with the effort to bring in order."

Confucius said, "People will become irresponsible."

Lao Tzu replied, "When there are no regulations where is the lawlessness? People will be natural in their behaviour." Laws bring in lawlessness because all laws are opposed to the naturalness of man. Therefore they urge men to become lawless. Naturalness is a flow; laws are like a dam.

When I was small, a teacher in my school died. We children used to tease him and call him 'Bhole Shankar'. He was a very guileless person, and because of his simplicity and alertlessness everyone troubled him. All the children gathered to bid him a last farewell. We all loved him, more so because we could trouble him.

I stood nearest to his body, when suddenly his wife ran out of the house and fell on him crying, "Oh, my Bhole Shankar!" I burst into laughter for that is how we teased him. I did not expect his wife to address like this. The solemnity of the occasion was shattered. All the children began to laugh, for everyone knew the joke.

But this was the limit. We were badly scolded, not only by the teachers but also by our parents who told us they were ashamed of such disbehaviour. We had no sense of propriety. When we explained the reason for our mirth they understood, but even then we should have controlled ourselves, considering the occasion. But the actual reason of the outburst was the very effort to suppress the laughter. It became such an impossible task that the outburst was explosive. The poor wife also stopped crying and was greatly confused and worried.

Laws always give strength to the opposite. Here it was plain that laughter was out of the question, but life obeys no laws. The laughter welled up within and it was very natural; there was no malice. But propriety obstructed it. Decorum creates embankments. Propriety built an embankment on what was a natural flow. When the embankment breaks, anarchy ensues. When dams break terrible destruction follows.

But those who view life through the language of regulation -- like Confucius -- will maintain that without laws everything will be in chaos. Nobody will listen to anybody, the subjects will not listen to the king, the son will not listen to the father, wives will not listen to husbands, nor servants their masters.

Lao Tzu says: "the more you try to make sons listen to their fathers, the more they will go against their fathers". And Lao Tzu has proved correct. In the last five thousand years, man has tried to make the son obedient to the father and the result is an increasing abyss between the two. The same is the case between the servant and the master, and the king and his people. The servant does not consider the master his superior but his equal partner. The people have turned around on their kinds and the institution of monarchy is now extinct.

This is a shocking state of affairs. For five thousand years kings have tried to subdue their subjects. The result is that there are no more kings. If they still exist in a few cases, they are the servants of their people. Today, the status of the Queen of England is no more than a servant, for it is the Parliament that decides even her stipend. It is up to the Parliament to increase or decrease it or stop it altogether. What is the reason?

The reason is Confucius. Lao Tzu had told Confucius that very day when he came to see him, "You will ruin the world with your philosophy. You will clamp laws on, and lawlessness will prevail. If you try to give direction, society will go headlong towards directionlessness. Stop trying to do good to the world and the world will stop becoming bad."

This however, is very difficult, very hard. It is impossible to believe that a patient should not be given medicines and he will recover.

Many hospitals in the West, however, have started experimenting in this direction. Lao Tzu is proving right from very many angles. Give an allopathic treatment to one patient, a homeopathic treatment to another with the same illness, a naturopathic treatment to a third with the same complaints and to a fourth gives the ashes from a Baba (soothsayer). The results attained, percentage-wise, are the same. Seventy per cent of the people regain their health in all cases, whether it be through allopathy, homeopathy, chemotherapy, naturopathy or even the soothsayer's ashes.

Then it was assumed that perhaps all these branches of medicine have healing powers. So they carried out a new experiment. Out of ten patients, five were given treatment and five were given plain water. In both cases, recovery was equal. Water cured as much as any medicine. Now they say that if you catch a cold, take medicine for seven days and you shall be all right: do not take medicine for seven days and you will be all right. Nothing is clear about what really cures a man.

Lao Tzu says: Nature cures herself. Leave everything to nature. Do not interfere with nature, you are the cause of all confusion. Leave it to nature and she will find the remedy. That which gave you birth, which gave you life, because of which you breathe, due to which you are conscious, that energy is infinite, gigantic. It will wash your ills away. You be one with this flow of energy; do not go against it. Let this current take you anywhere, let it make you do anything. If illness comes welcome it, be prepared to live with it. Leave everything to nature; let her do what she pleases.

If we understand it in this way, Lao Tzu is the only naturopath. His is pure naturopathy. If you put a bandage on the stomach, apply mud on the stomach or take an enema -- that is not naturopathy. Leave it entirely to nature. Let nature take its course and be one with it.

Lao Tzu says, "Do not swim. Float." Leave it to the river to take you where it will. Ask not where your destination is. Wherever you reach is your goal. Says Lao Tzu: "In such an arrangement only, do the flowers of religion open."

"When knowledge and intelligence were born, hypocrisy became activated in its full form. When peace became impossible in relationships, the glorification of kind parents and obedient sons began to prevail."

When we say that so-and-so has an obedient son, we mean that he is an exception.

Lao Tzu says: "To be a son is to be obedient." An obedient son is a repetition. If we say a certain mother is very kind, it means kindness is a qualification, apart from the mother. A mother may be kind or may not be kind. Therefore, to say so-and-so's mother is kind goes to show that mothers are no longer kind. She is an exception if she is kind. Therefore we praise it. When we praise these things we imply that sons are no longer obedient, fathers are no longer kind and mothers are bereft of selfless affection.

Lao Tzu says: these are signs of decadence. When a mother has to be praised for her motherly love, when a father has to be extolled for his benevolent affection and when a son has to be praised for his obedience, then know that the illness has reached the last stage.

This Lao Tzu looks like a topsy-turvy man. But it is quite possible that we are topsy-turvy and only he is standing correct: What he says seems to be true. What is there to talk about in a mother's love? The very being of a mother means love. To call a mother loving is senseless. To be a mother means to be loving. Similarly to be a son means to be obedient. There cannot be an "obedient son." It is a useless repetition. To be a son is to be an extension of the father and the mother. He is their limbs, their future, so the question of obedience or non-obedience should not arise.

I do not say that my hand is obedient. But if some day, hands are praised or denounced for their obedience, know that people have started becoming paralysed. What would be the state of affairs if some day the newspapers carry the news of an obedient hand that lifts a glass of water when it is made to and obeys all orders from the brain? It will only mean that paralysis has become a part of life. Now even the hand does not do our bidding.

The world we live in is a paralysed world. No father is confident that his sons will obey him. If some do, they are usually blockheaded fools who give no satisfaction. They sit when they are told to and do not rise until bidden. Those sons who seem a little intelligent refuse to listen. They are, on the contrary, busy trying to make their fathers into obedient fathers.

Fifty years ago -- so say American psychologists -- sons and daughters tip-toed into their houses. Now it is the other way around. Now parents enter the house stealthily for fear of confronting the children. Fifty years ago the children were oppressed; now the parents are oppressed. The parents are now so afraid lest they create a complex in the children. They are afraid the psychologists might say they have damaged the child's psyche and harmed him.

The world is in the grip of paralysis today because it has not heeded Lao Tzu. It is Lao Tzu's contention that one should not try to chain the naturalness of life because then it is bound to break. Do not demand obedience lest it turns into contempt. Give no commands for the other has his ego too, which is bound to react.

When the father says he will make the son obey, the son says: let's see how he does it. The father's ego gives life to the son's ego. When the father has no inclination to demand obedience, the son has no reason to disobey because there is no opposition created within him.

Understand this a little. When the father is mindful of his demand, the son also becomes alert. If ever there is a battle between father and son, it is the son who is ultimately victorious. The father is the fading energy; the son is the rising energy. The son will win; the father will lose. It is happening all over the world that fathers are rapidly losing ground with their children.

It is very strange that there should be conflict between father and son. Turgenev has written a book, *FATHERS AND SONS*. It is a valuable book, a story of the strife between fathers and sons. Every father is fighting with his son, and every son is fighting with his father. Lao Tzu would say, "What greater state of madness and disease can there be than when fathers and sons fight?"

Then what is the remedy? We see this battle taking place in every house, in every family, and at each step both are eager to win. The father is the loser and the reason behind his defeat is the working of a profound law of which we are not aware. Lao Tzu reminds us of this very rule. He says that when the father insists that he should be obeyed, when the guru demands that he should be obeyed, the echo of these vibrations is disrespect. When the guru (or the father) is such that he is not even aware that he should be given respect, he gets respect.

I was attending a meeting of professors in the university. The topic under discussion was the lack of discipline of the students. Each person stated that the honour of the teachers was in danger. This is an old story now, respect has long been dead. Still, they were trying somehow to retrieve it from the grave. And the more they try to retrieve it, the more chaos follows. Every school, college and university is filled with indiscipline, but no one has bothered to find out who is responsible for it.

I told them that their concern over the lack of discipline of the students was very dangerous and there could be only one outcome of this: more disrespect from the students. Whoever said the guru must be respected? The definition of a guru, according to ancient culture is one who is given respect. This does not mean a guru must be respected. That is not the question at all. One who is respected is a guru; one who is not, is not a guru. If the students do not respect you, you are no gurus. Then why do you cling to this useless desire?

A father is one who is obeyed. If the son does not obey you are not what a father should be. To become a father, is a biological happening and is not of much importance. This task is fulfilled artificially these days. To be a father is a spiritual undertaking. It is a different matter altogether.

Children are produced by anyone but only once in a while does a man become a father. To reproduce is no qualification. Flies and mosquitoes are greater adepts at this. It is beyond my understanding when I hear that it is a duty to bear progeny. But to be a father is a great thing, even greater than being a mother because to be a mother is a natural happening. Fatherhood is an achievement. Therefore, when some person becomes a father in the true sense, the mother's status pales before it.

There is no arrangement by nature for the father's role. Animals are completely oblivious of fatherhood. If you are aware of the institution of fatherhood, do you realise how many precautions have to be taken to produce this effect? The institution of marriage has to be created, laws have to be promulgated and still the father cannot be totally sure that he is the father of his son -- he cannot be.

To be convinced of his fatherhood, man has created many precepts and moral codes like sati, and the one-husband vow of chastity. These are all measures he has taken to be assured of his parenthood. All these measures, this anxiety, this fear, institutionalize life -- all to ensure that the heir to your wealth and property is really and truly your son. How much strife, how many hardships and torments man undergoes for this!

Fatherhood is not a natural outcome. If the government makes arrangement to look after children, the institution of fatherhood will vanish. Besides, the concept of fatherhood is a recent concept. To be a

mother is natural, but to be a father is a spiritual achievement. To become a father means only this: that the son honours your bidding. There is no effort involved in this; it is because of the father's dignity.

There was an ancient code that when the son married, the father became a celibate. And that is how it should be. If a father keeps producing children while his son does he cannot expect respect. As most there can be a sort of friendliness. Where the father still indulges in the same foolishness in which the son indulges, he forfeits his right to reverence and respect.

We arranged our lives in the olden days so that sons returned from the ashram when they were twenty five, at which time when they would be married. By then, the parents would be fifty. The day the son returns home, the parents enter the stage of Van-Prastha (facing the jungle). Now, the body and its pleasure are no longer for them. They must go beyond them. After another twenty-five years, when their grandchildren return from the brahmacharya ashram, they would be seventy-five. Then they become sannyasins. The mundane world is no longer for them. Then, there was reverence towards the father.

Now, these seventy-five year old people, who are not aged because of their physical age alone but also bear the fruits of knowledge and experience that they gathered in their long journey through existence would go to ashrams, gurukuls, and act as teachers. Those who have successfully passed through the first three stages of life -- brahmacharya, through which they passed during the first twenty-five years of their lives; then for another twenty-five years they lived and experienced the householder's world; then for another twenty-five years they mastered the art of remaining within the world and yet out of it -- they were worthy of being gurus.

If such a guru receives spontaneous respect from his pupils, it is no wonder. When little children from the village come to sit at his feet, he will look like the high peak of the Himalayas to them. To touch him seems impossible. If they can only touch his feet they feel blessed. There is such a distance between the guru and the pupil that the pupil cannot imagine ever reaching up to those heights. Such gurus received reverence as a matter of course. They were gurus.

Before becoming a guru, one was a father; and before that, one was a celibate. This was a long process but a very natural one.

Lao Tzu says, "If life flows in its normal natural flow, the flowers of religion are bound to bloom in it." If we restrict the flow, obstruct it with decorum and propriety, then it will be a great feat if we succeed in placing even a few artificial flowers of morality. The flowers of religion are far away from people who do not allow life to flow in a natural way.

"WHEN A COUNTRY FELL INTO CHAOS AND MISRULE, THERE WAS PRAISE OF LOYAL MINISTERS." It is the same thing, said from a different aspect. To shun naturalness is to be irreligious. To be good is not to be religious according to Lao Tzu: to be natural is to be religious according to him. To be good is not to be religious for to be good one has got to be against evil, which is the opposite of goodness. Naturalness, spontaneity has no opposite. If a sinner lives naturally, he too stands a chance of becoming, good. If a good man lives unnaturally, he is a hidden sinner within. A spontaneous life is a religious life. Flowers

bloom, birds sing, the sun rises. When man also becomes spontaneous, without any hypocrisy, the sun of religion will rise in the firmament.

This seems difficult because if we have nothing to cover ourselves with, to hide our actual being, if all masks are removed from us, what will happen? Just think for a moment; if there is no check on you, no laws to control you, what would you do? Someone will run away with someone's wife, another will look the bank; yet another will kill someone he hates. Just ponder a while. What would you do if Lao Tzu's doctrine prevailed?

In order to improve the quality of the work of his sluggish staff in the office, it is said that a manager, on the advice of a psychologist, put up a notice which read: "Life is short. Do today what you would do tomorrow. Do now what you have to do today." The very next day the office had to close down because the clerk ran away with the secretary, the cashier decamped with the cash and the office boy beat up the manager with shoe. This is what each wanted to do but were postponing. The notice inspired them to carry out their desires.

If you wish to follow Lao Tzu, think less and meditate more. This will make no difference to Lao Tzu, but it will tell you a great deal about yourself. If there is no check on you, what would you do? That is your actual self, your real character. What you do within regulations is just play-acting. It is not your real self. It is a necessity. If you want to know yourself, Lao Tzu will help you in your self-observation. Imagine for a day that no rules and regulations bind you. You will only do that which happens spontaneously. Just think about this; do not put it in action. Then you will realise how mutilated humanity has become because of all rules and regulations.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #19

Chapter title: To live in artless spontaneity and not in doctrines and decorum

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BANISH WISDOM, DISCARD KNOWLEDGE,
AND THE PEOPLE SHALL PROFIT A HUNDRED FOLD;
BANISH 'HUMANITY', DISCARD 'JUSTICE',
AND THE PEOPLE SHALL RECOVER LOVE OF THEIR KIN;
BANISH CUNNING, DISCARD 'UTILITY',
AND THE THIEVES AND BRIGANDS SHALL DISAPPEAR.

The greatest difficulty in understanding Lao Tzu is our level of thinking. It is very difficult to understand him through our mode of thinking. Lao Tzu's way of looking at things is contrary to ours, his logic is absolutely opposite. He sees life from a different dimension altogether. Therefore all the questions you ask are related more to yourselves and very little to Lao Tzu.

If we wish to understand Lao Tzu, we shall have to set aside our mode of thinking. If we approach Lao Tzu with our view-point, our words, our preconceived notions, it will be difficult to decide whether he is right or not. Set aside your views and concepts. Then only will you understand him. Then you shall be able to judge whether he is right or wrong, but not before that. Just to comprehend is an obstacle because our manner of thinking is one thing and Lao Tzu's is just the opposite. It is as if we discern things by our sense of touch whereas he uses his eyes and sees. Or as if we use our eyes and he uses his ears. Then the language becomes different.

As I said yesterday, if consciousness increases, unconsciousness will also increase. Whatever we understand as consciousness is what Mahavira, Krishna or Buddha have explained to us, and this explanation does not hold good with Lao Tzu. So the questions that arise in you are not your questions but questions arising out of a current of concepts that is within you. Now you will be upset. What does this mean?

This means: if Mahavira attains supreme knowledge, because of him one person must fall into complete insensitivity. This becomes an act of violence. We cannot even think that a person like Mahavira who was non-violence incarnate, could bring such a thing about! It sounds strange that when one person's consciousness develops, another person's consciousness sinks to insensibility through no fault of his.

If we question Lao Tzu on this, he will not say that Mahavira's consciousness increased. He will say, "Mahavira went beyond consciousness and unconsciousness." When a person goes beyond both the opposites, there is no trace left of it in the world. If we ask Lao Tzu about Krishna, he will not say he was a man of super-consciousness. If he was a man of super-consciousness, then another man of super-unconsciousness is needed as a counterbalance.

According to Lao Tzu, there are people who have gone beyond consciousness and unconsciousness, they are outside of dualities. No reaction takes place in this world because of them.

But those who are within the vertex of dualities are bound to think in terms of balance and counterbalance. Lao Tzu will not call Mahavira a 'sadhu' because a sadhu is opposed to a 'non-sadhu'. Good and bad are dualities. Lao Tzu would say that Mahavira has gone beyond both. He is neither good nor bad, for to be good he must be connected with evil. If he is good because he tells no lies, because he does not steal, because he does not get angry, then he has to be connected with lies, with theft, with anger. All good qualities are connected with bad qualities; they cannot stand apart from them. So if we say that Mahavira is good, he is still not outside of dualities. And if he has not transcended dualities, evil can also come out of him. But Mahavira is neither good nor bad. These two classes do not apply to him. He is above both.

It is difficult to follow this line of thought, for we have divided our flow of thinking into two categories. There is no third category for us, whereas it is this third category which is the authentic category. He who enters this third category attains the absolute state that Lao Tzu refers to as Tao, which is the natural religion.

So your trouble is the preconceived flow of your thinking. Set this aside and follow Lao Tzu's stream of thought; try to understand what he is trying to say. It is not necessary to agree with him. You may not.

As far as I can see, I do not think anyone who has understood him will ever say he is wrong. One who thinks he is wrong only says so because he has not understood Lao Tzu correctly. Lao Tzu's way of expressing is different, his reach is different, his method of putting forth is different. If you cling to his method you will find yourself in difficulty. This is the difficulty man finds himself in. Mahavira's way of expressing is different. So is Buddha's. So is Krishna's. And Christ is different from them all. The conflict between religion is caused by these different modes of expression which are not correctly understood by people. Man has not yet become wise enough to understand that the difference of expression makes no difference in the eternal truth. Mahavira expresses truth in his way, Buddha expresses in his own way. They have their own characteristic ways of expression. The truth they expound is so great that it can absorb Buddha, Mahavira, Krishna, Christ and any number of enlightened people.

We think truth is a given quantity. If one thing is established in it there is no place for another. Truth is vast. It has a place for all, even for those who are contrary to you. But we think otherwise. If I am established in truth, there is no way for others to also be established in truth. Then what I hold is truth; all else is untruth. Truth is a very big happening that envelops the opposite also.

This is interesting: untruth is such a small thing that it cannot contain the opposite. Have you ever realised that when you support an untruth you never accept its opposite? If you do, the untruth is lost. Untruth is a constricted thing that does not have much room within itself. Therefore he who tells an untruth never accepts what the others say. But truth is a vast happening. That which is opposite to what you maintain can also be the truth. Truth has a place for both. He alone attains supreme truth who sees a place for all truths within his truth.

But we have a narrow, constricted vision; we are tied to our own concepts. Mahavira has said that you are not qualified for darshan till you rise above your constricted vision. This sounds contrary. What Mahavira means is that the right vision is that which rises above all visions. Vision means: my way of

looking. If I have become so one with my way of thinking. I shall never be able to appreciate your way of thinking.

If I am not tied to my own way of thinking, I shall be able to understand and appreciate all other ways of looking at things. Then I begin to understand that no matter how and where the rivers flow, one day they all reach the ocean. Then I will not say that the river that flows to the east will never reach the sea, just because my river is flowing to the west. Then I get a glimpse of the ocean in all the rivers. But if the vision is tied down, the difficulty is immense. Then there is no way to understand.

Lao Tzu is difficult to understand in this respect, for his way of thinking, his manner of viewing things, his method of expression are all unique. But there is a definite joy in understanding him, and if you do understand him, you will have evolved, your vision will expand, your consciousness will reach greater heights. If you cannot understand him, you will remain constricted, narrow.

It is always better to understand the viewpoint of those who think contrary to us. He who thinks as you do cannot change you, he can only add something more to you. You had ten reasons to support yourself. Now you will have twelve, fifteen. But one who thinks contrary to you opens up new horizons for you. Then, not only do you add something more to your perception, but you enrich your consciousness also.

To understand Lao Tzu, you have to set aside your mode of perception a little, otherwise your perception will raise questions which will be meaningless for they will not be based on Lao Tzu's understanding.

If you understand this sutra, it will become clear to you. Leave your intelligence to one side. This seems difficult. To seek knowledge -- this we can understand. But to shake off your knowledge is difficult.

We have three words: one is information, the second is knowledge and the third is wisdom. Mostly, information is regarded as knowledge. The more one knows, the more knowledgeable he considers himself to be. Quantity means quality to him. But what has happened is only that such a person's remembrance has increased. He is now a bigger computer; he has not progressed. Information is not knowledge; remembrance is not knowledge. When information increases, a man becomes knowledgeable, educated, but he does not become wise.

There have been many people in the world who have said, "Do not gather information. Attain knowledge. Information is of no use. However much information you gather, it will all be borrowed. Knowledge is one's own. Therefore leave the borrowed and attain by your own experience." This is quite understandable to us. But Lao Tzu goes a step further and says, "Leave knowledge also; for this knowing and not knowing is a play of duality. It too is a conflict. Leave this also."

Even this we can understand. Buddha too has said, "What will you gain by knowing? You have studied the shastras. To what avail?" The question is not of knowing, but of developing our wisdom, our inner knowledge. Our understanding should increase. Wisdom is the essence of knowledge. Just like perfume is attained by squeezing the essence out of flowers, so wisdom is the sum and substance of all

knowledge, all experiences. Wisdom is a fragrance. When a thousand experiences and knowledges are compressed, one drop of wisdom is attained.

But Lao Tzu says, "Leave your wisdom also." This is too much! Leave information this we can understand because it is all borrowed knowledge. Leave knowledge this too we can understand because there is the duality of knowledge and ignorance. But if we let go wisdom, the mind will say, "Then I shall become like a stone! Then what will be the difference between me and inert matter?" Then, you will argue, "what is the difference between me and the chair I sit on?" These questions raised by the mind become a hindrance in our understanding of Lao Tzu.

Lao Tzu says, "Leave your sagacity, your wisdom." What does he mean? He means that what is grasped can be left also, for it does not belong to you. That which you cannot let go of is your true wisdom. Whatever you can drop, and does drop off, let it go. A moment will come when you will say, "I have nothing more to give up." You have no house, no wealth, no information, no knowledge, no wisdom, no experience. The moment you feel you have nothing left that you can renounce, that very moment you attain true wisdom. The wisdom you are afraid to give up for fear of becoming insentient is no wisdom.

Understand well: that which cannot be renounced is true wisdom. Therefore Lao Tzu says, "Leave wisdom" -- for that which you can let go off, cannot be wisdom. Wisdom, according to Lao Tzu, is the very nature of the wise. One cannot leave one's nature. That which we can leave cannot be our nature.

Says Lao Tzu, "Only that alone should remain which 'I am'." There should be collection of borrowed information and knowledge. Even if it is my own, it is not worth carrying along. Borrowed experiences are useless. One's own experiences are also dead. What I knew yesterday is dead today. The essence of what I came to know yesterday is wisdom. It has become the past; it has turned to dust. Live coal turns into ash it was once a part and parcel of a burning fire. But, if the embers are to be kept alive, we have to shake off the ashes.

Lao Tzu says: "your wisdom is like ash, covering your nature." It comes from your very self; you are the ember. Keep flicking off the ashes, let the alive ember remain; let only your nature remain. Let nothing cover it. Whether it is the ashes of borrowed knowledge or your own knowledge -- both are ashes -- they have to be wiped off. Do not hold on to the ashes of your own embers just because it is your own.

If you live for fifty years, the ashes of fifty years' experience has gathered on you. In this what you have learned from others is information; what you have known yourself is knowledge. The sum total of this information and knowledge, the essence that creates the fragrance within you, is your wisdom. But Lao Tzu says, "Leave this also. Just be your pure self." Become your naked nature -- that which you are. This is what Mahavira calls the atman and Buddha calls the emptiness. These are just verbal differences. Lao Tzu calls it nature, Tao.

"DISCARD KNOWLEDGE, BANISH WISDOM AND PEOPLE WILL BENEFIT A HUNDREDFOLD." If people revert back and become fixed in their pure nature, then sorrow and pain, agony and anxiety, tension and worry shall disappear; and the innocent will flower within themselves. Once the load of your experiences is removed from the consciousness, the soul or consciousness, or whatever we choose to

call that which is within us -- remains in what Heidegger refers to as its pure being. This is what Lao Tzu is talking about. Then people will prosper a thousandfold.

We feel people will prosper as knowledge increases, as experience and information increase, intelligence increases. Lao Tzu says just the opposite. Actually, as all these increase, their dust begins to gather layer by layer on our nature and the embers within are hidden under their weight. Then it becomes a Herculean task to reach to oneself. There will be so many layers to uncover that it will be almost impossible to reach the self.

A human being is like an onion. Remove one layer, and there is another layer; remove this and there is yet another. You are nothing but a collection of knowledge, experience, information, understanding, education, impressions, culture and tradition. Where you yourself are, you do not know. A man is hidden by his own coverings. Lao Tzu tells us to remove all our coverings and be in that which you cannot remove. Then you shall really profit. The greatest calamity that can happen to a person is to lose his own self.

The title of this sutra is; Realise the Simple Self. The word 'simple' should be noted. It conveys the quality of naturalness, artlessness.

Jesus and Socrates both said: "Know thyself". The Upanishads have also used this term. "Know thyself, realise the atman." Lao Tzu says: "Realise the simple self." Not the self that theologians talk of, or learned pundits discuss. Know the simple self that exists even within the ignorant. There is no reference to doctrines, scriptures -- only the simplest you, in all your nakedness, in all your naturalness, know only that. But to know this, you have to erase all that you already know, eradicate it completely. Whatever you have known up to now you shall have to wipe off. Strip off the layers of the onion till there is nothing more to remove; only emptiness remains. Only then know that you have reached near to your simple self. Therefore, remove knowledge and profit a hundredfold.

"BANISH HUMANITY, DISCARD JUSTICE AND THE PEOPLE SHALL RECOVER LOVE OF THEIR KIN."

It happens usually that one who cannot love anyone begins to love humanity. It is very difficult to love one person; it is very easy to love humanity. It is difficult to love your neighbour; it is very easy to love the human race. To love one person, sets off many problems, whereas there are no problems as far as the whole humanity is concerned. Where is humanity? Man is; mankind is nowhere. Wherever you go you will find human beings; you will not find humanity anywhere. Humanity is an abstract concept, and it is very easy to love a concept. It is very easy to love Mother India, but very difficult to love your own mother. Mother India is a concept; your own mother is a living human being. Any relationship with a living being brings problems in its wake, which leads to conflicts and strife.

Therefore it is generally found that those who are great humanitarians are people who have failed to love any single human being. Then they begin to love a dream, an ideal, a concept. A concept carries no uncertainties, no difficulties. This, however, is a great deception. You cannot love humanity; you can only love a person.

Love is a journey. It is a constant purification, an unceasing test, a fire through which one has to pass incessantly. Where there is humanity, there is no fire because there is no one on the other side; you are alone. To say that you have loved humanity means you have not loved at all. It is only a ruse to hide the fact.

It happens generally that a person who cannot love an individual begins to love God. But if he is unable to love a human being, how can he love God? Love for God is not a contrivance to escape loving human beings. Rather, love for God is a culmination of intense love for individuals. You love a person so much, so much that he becomes an opening. He no longer remains an individual. The infinite begins to come through him -- and God stands on your doorstep!

But each of us is a closed door. There are all walls and no windows. Entry is not possible from any side. Then such an individual closes his eyes and begins to love God, a God found only in his imagination and nowhere else. God is everywhere, but wherever we touch him we shall find an individual. If a person wishes to love a non-individualistic God, he is deceiving himself. He is mistaking the lack of love in himself as love for God and is just deceiving himself.

Says Lao Tzu: "Banish humanity so that you can love human beings. Banish all theories and tenets, for they have no worth. Discard all talk of the far-away so that you can love what is near you."

If we set out for a destination, we have to start from where we are. If I have to make a journey, the first step I take will be from where I am standing. I cannot take a stride from hundreds of miles away, because I'm simply not there -- I have to start from where I am. If I am to walk towards love, the first step I have to take is very close to myself. If I am to proceed towards religion, the first step has got to be very near myself.

When a person declares that he can only love humanity and not humans, he is trying to start his journey from the goal. He begins his journey from where he is not! Another person says: "I can love only God and no one else." If he has found God, there is no longer any need to love Him. But till then, how can he love one he has not met? People say, "We must love God in order to know Him." But how can you love one whom you have never met, never known, one whom you are not even acquainted with? Is your love not a deception then? Perhaps it is a trick to escape from those whom you know and can love, a ruse to run away from them.

We can love God, we can love the vast humanity, but the journey always has to be started from where we are. If we want to go up in the sky, we first have to step out of our house. The last step can only be taken if the first has been taken. No journey starts with the last step. But theories and doctrines put the last step first.

Our minds are filled with high-sounding words, and Lao Tzu is an enemy of words. Our minds are filled with doctrines, so much so that even when we are in the deepest hell we are full of words of heaven and bliss. We hold fast to these words lest they fall away and the hell in which we stand becomes clear and visible to us. So that hell may be hidden from our view, we remain engrossed in talk of heaven. To help

us to forget the reality of the hell around us, we have spread this net of words around us. But it is just a delusion.

Lao Tzu exhorts us to leave these words, this knowledge, these shastras. If there is no love in your life, never mind. But do not start professing love for mankind.

It is an interesting fact and a profound one too, that man cannot exist without love. If he realises that he cannot love humanity, and he is unable to love a human being, a transformation takes place for the first time in his life. He will be so troubled by the fires of torment and restlessness that these will bring about a transformation within him. When a man finds himself incapable of loving a human being and keeps loving God, he fails to create the gap necessary for transformation. It is incumbent on him to know clearly that God cannot be loved directly. Only human beings can be, and this he is not capable of.

Understand this well. If you are to love your neighbour, you have to change yourself. If you are to love God, no change is required. To love humanity, you need not change yourself at all. You are all right as you are. But if you have to love even a small child, you will have to change yourself. To hold a little hand with love, you have to bring about a change in your life. You cannot remain the same person any more. Love is a fire; it is bound to change you. If love does not change you, it means you are under the illusion of love. There is no love really.

Lao Tzu says: banish all the big, high-sounding words: humanity, God, the universe. Feel that there is no love within you. And remember Lao Tzu's alchemy: you cannot remain without love. If you are honest with yourself you will realise that you will have to love those who are near you.

Lao Tzu goes on to say: "Leave humanity, discard justice and people will begin to love each other again. They will recover love of each other." Today, we find no one who loves his own people. One who loves other countries, but not his own is called an internationalist. One who loves all people except his own is called a humanist. There is no trouble in loving the far away.

If a hungry beggar sits on your doorstep, you are not bothered; but if people in Bangladesh go hungry, you are suddenly concerned about them. This is a strange irony. Some poor man lies dead on the road and we are unconcerned, but when we hear of someone dying in Vietnam it is a spiritual catastrophe. What has happened to man? Why does the distant attract him so?

The reason is simple: you can always hold the other responsible for things far away. A man lying dead on your road is your responsibility but for a man dying in Bangladesh or Vietnam, you hold Bhutto and Nixon responsible.

Tolstoy has written an account of his mother. He says she was a very gentle-hearted lady, her kindness was exceptional. She belonged to the Czar's family and was a countess. She was so sensitive, Tolstoy says, that when she went to the theatre, her tears would flow in torrents when she saw a man on the stage dying of hunger or someone's house catching on fire or someone jilted in love. So much so, that her maids in waiting had a difficult time wiping away her tears.

The coach in which they travelled to the theatre would be out on the road where snow fell continuously. Many a time the coachman would be found dead after the show, covered with snow. When his mother saw this, she would get him removed and replace him with another coachman whom she kept as a stand-by. She did this without a twinge of conscience. And this after having cried her eyes out in the play! Tolstoy says that he realised then how clever man is in deceiving himself.

We do not see that which is close to us. We are blind and deaf to all that happens around us. We are alert towards things in the distance. Could not this mother of Tolstoy realise that it was a man who was dead? But he was a mere coachman and a coachman is not a human being. She who was so affected by misfortunes in a play, but was not affected by the reality that was so close to her.

It is possible that this did not occur to her. To cry in a play is an escape. Those who cry in plays are blind and deaf towards the great drama of life that takes place around them. To cry for someone in a drama is an easy way to bring out the anguish within. To cry for the coachman would have proved expensive, for then something would have had to be done about the poor man.

Man has developed a clever plan for himself. He has created doctrines for things far away so as to save himself from his immediate responsibilities. This is such an abominable fraud.

Lao Tzu says: "BANISH HUMANITY, DISCARD JUSTICE, AND THE PEOPLE SHALL RECOVER LOVE OF THEIR KIN."

This is quite a different way of looking at life. Lao Tzu exhorts us to stop worrying about distant things. If love is close by it can also spread far and wide. We throw a pebble in the water. It sets off ripples which start close to the point where the pebble touches the water and then grow wider and wider till they are lost. Has it ever happened that the wider, more distant circles were formed first, and then the smaller ones? Never. The day this happens, Lao Tzu will be proved wrong and not before that.

Life has its rules. Everything starts from the nearest point. If there is love within my heart, it will first touch those around me. Those nearest me will be the first to be affected by the ripples created by my love. If the wave of my love is strong enough, it will begin to touch those further away also. Further and further will it reach if it is strong enough. If my love is so great and strong that it can go beyond the world and up to God, then only is my love worthy to be offered at His feet not before that.

But you are stingy. You say unto yourself, "Why waste such a precious commodity on mere humans? I shall save it all and offer it straight to God. This way I shall be able to offer more to God and thereby profit more."

There is no way for such love to reach God. Love is not a commodity, it is an evolverment. The more you love, the more loving you become. Love is not wealth that can be spent. If it was, it would get less and less as I distribute it and leave me a pauper by the time I reach God. But this is not so.

Love has the same nature as other deeper activities of life. You breathe. The more you breathe, the more alive you become. The more you walk, the more you develop your strength to walk. The more you

see, the more you develop your sight. In the same manner, the more you love, the more your love increases. These are your capabilities. They evolve and develop as you make use of them. They do not grow less upon use. Do not think that by walking or running you are using up your ability to walk. The more you love, the more capable you will be to love even more. It increases every time. Each ripple creates another ripple bigger and wider.

He alone can reach the feet of God who lives so much that the waves of his love keep increasing, ever widening, till no one and, nothing remains outside its orbit. His love passes through all. Each being, sentient and non-sentient is bathed in the current of his love. Its flow moves further and further away till it touches the feet of the absolute.

The little pebble we threw in the water can raise currents that can touch the boundless shores of the infinite ocean. But if the pebble is not confident of its strength and is not sure how many ripples it will be able to create, if it tries to conserve its ripples till such time that it reaches the other shore, then the current will not rise at all.

Says Lao Tzu: "BANISH HUMANITY, BANISH JUSTICE." Please note: Lao Tzu is against justice. It is very perplexing why he should be. We on the contrary, say: "So and so is very just." We never think in the manner of Lao Tzu. Let us try to understand him.

Christianity says: "God is just, loving and kind." Lao Tzu would laugh if he heard this because Lao Tzu says, that a lover cannot be kind, nor can he be just.

If God is just, He cannot be kind. How can He be? For then, he who has to be punished must be punished. There is no question of mercy. He who should go to hell must go to hell -- there is no way out of it. And if God is kind, and he who should have gone to hell is taken into heaven, then God is unjust to those who are in hell. This would mean that God smuggles His flatterers into heaven.

Jainas have removed God from their doctrines. They say there is only straight and simple action. If your actions are bad, the result is bad. There is no one to sit in judgment on you. Action is its own judge. No individual judgment can be unprejudiced, because one can be swayed by kindness and love, or urged on by cruelty. There is bound to be a difference between mine and thine.

Jainas say, "If God is such that He is not kind, He is not loving, then where is the need to involve Him? Let law take its own course." Put your hand in fire and it is sure to burn. Fire does not love. It is not kind or just either. Fire has a basic rule, a gross rule that it follows. So Jainas say that all actions follow their own basic rule and there is no ruler.

In a way, this is correct. If we believe in the ruler, we have to understand two things. If the ruler is just and justice is his watch-word, he cannot be kind. Then mercy is impossible and there can be no appeal. No prayers are meaningful because nothing can be forgiven. And if God is kind, then prayer is enough. Then all stress should be on prayer. There is no sense in saying, "Do not steal; do not deceive others." Then you can do what you like and all that is required of you is to pray!

The village-maulvi told Omar Khayyam, "Omar, you have, reached old age. Now give up drinking. At least, now think of the Day of Judgment, when you shall be standing before God!"

Omar Khayyam was intoxicated. He slowly opened his eyes and, with the cup in his hand, he addressed the maulvi. "I fully believe in God's compassion. God is merciful. Please do not shake my faith in His kindness now that I am near death, My faith is unshakable! This small cup, with a little wine, this insignificant Omar Khayyam -- if He cannot forgive such an insignificant being, what will happen to great sinners? No, no, God is all merciful."

If there is compassion, justice is impossible. If there is justice, compassion is impossible. Both cannot exist together. But the majority of religions hold God to be both just and kind.

Lao Tzu says: "Discard justice, Love is enough." This is also a fact that is worthy pondering on: that justice comes when love is not. The whole concept of justice is born out of the lack, the absence, of love. Let us understand it in this way:

You are touching your father's feet. You say that you are doing your duty. You serve your old mother. You say it is your duty. But have you ever thought about what an ugly word "duty" is? It means: "I am doing something, not because I wish to but because I have to." The heart is not involved at all." My mother is old and since she is my mother I have to take her to the hospital and get her treated. It is my duty.

But when you take your beloved to the hospital, do you look upon it as a duty?

Where there is love there is no duty. Where there is no love, duty comes in. It is a substitute for love. When love dies, the same actions are performed by way of duty. When there is love, there is joy in your actions. When it is a duty, it becomes burden, a load that has to be carried.

Says Lao Tzu: "Justice is the absence of love." If there is love among people, there cannot be injustice. And there will be no need for justice. Justice is needed because of injustice. Lao Tzu says: "When injustice exists, you cannot redress it with justice. Let there be no injustice."

There are two kinds of medicine. One is preventive medicine and the other is curative medicine. One is given before the illness, so that you do not contract the disease and the other is given after the illness, in order to cure it. Lao Tzu says: justice is a cure; a medicine that is given after the illness. Because there is injustice, there is need for justice.

Lao Tzu is talking of that religion in which there is no justice and no injustice. Therefore, he says, "Discard justice." Why? -- because if you discard justice, you will be able to see injustice clearly. Injustice is hidden behind the mist of justice, it does not stop injustice but merely helps it to be hidden.

A follower of Lao Tzu by the name of Lieh-Tzu became the minister of a kingdom for a while. The very first case that came before him was of a man who had committed a very big theft in the house of the richest man in town. When Lieh-Tzu was asked to pass judgment, he sentenced the thief to six months' imprisonment and the rich man also to six months' imprisonment. The complainant was horrified. "Are

you out of your mind?" he roared at Lieh-Tzu. "This is your very first case as the judge of this court and you sentence me whose wealth has been stolen? I shall complain to the king!"

Lieh-Tzu replied, "You have amassed so much of wealth that there are bound to be thieves now in the kingdom. As long as you exist, there are bound to be thefts. Besides, the thief comes afterwards, you are the first thief. Had you not earned so much wealth, this man would not have turned into a thief. Your hand is clearly behind this theft. You are his partner. Half the work has been done by you and half by him. I aim at removing injustice from its very roots. To remove injustice is what I call justice."

The ordinary course of justice is: the thief is punished and the rich man goes scot-free. Lao Tzu tells us to discard this justice because you are merely covering up the injustice behind it. All our courts, all our laws and ordinances are doing nothing but covering up the constantly occurring injustices in history and because of this injustice more injustice is created which we vainly try to control. All this is because the root of injustice is not destroyed.

Lieh-Tzu was brought before the king. The king said, "I too have never heard of such dispensation of justice. I cannot have you as a minister of law in my kingdom because sooner or later you will get me behind bars also. This is the pattern of our society. If the wealthy man is pronounced guilty, how long can I hope to remain unaffected by such justice?"

Lieh-Tzu replied, "It was just to remind you that I passed this judgment."

We are all offenders but the rich, influential offenders go untouched while the lesser ones are caught. The biggest offenders have the government in their hands while the smaller ones have not. Therefore those who try to go against the bigger offenders are caught. Lieh-Tzu told the king that as long as he was the judge, this is how he would dispense justice. His guru has given him a different definition and explanation of justice.

In other words, underneath our very great, and idealistic concepts lie hidden the deepest sins which are not visible to us. And these are imperceptible to us because we have become so habituated, so accustomed to them. They are so ancient, so hereditary, and traditionalised that they have become an intrinsic part of our habits. Hence we are not aware of them, we are totally unconscious of them. So much have they become a part of our very being that if someone points them out we are confounded and hurt.

When Lieh-Tzu says that the wealthy man whose house was burgled should also be punished, we are alarmed. Is this really an alarming matter or is it because we are conditioned otherwise? Deep down, Lieh-Tzu's statement is correct but because it is against our concept, we find it alarming and disconcerting.

Oscar Wilde writes in his autobiography that he devised various ways and means to alarm people, and he found that people get most disturbed when a truth is told. The biggest lie does not disturb people for they are used to it but the smallest expression of truth is most upsetting.

Let us examine a few words that hide profound untruths. "Justice" is one in the name of justice, there is no limit to the sins we commit. Up till now we have held those who work against our set pattern of order as offenders. But we fail to see that the very pattern of the order of wealth in our society is offensive. If we understand this, we can no longer look upon the offender as guilty.

A small child in a primary class picks up his neighbour's pencil and puts it in his pocket. This becomes a theft. From his teacher right up to the President in Delhi, all will condemn this as theft. But let us try to understand the mind of the child. Everyone has a colourful pencil except him. The colours beckon him; all children are attracted to colour. He too wants to possess a coloured pencil and feel the thrill of having one in his pocket. When elders are also not devoid of this weakness to be one better than others, what is one to say to a little child? He also wants to feel the exultation of possessing something new.

Have you not noticed how your style changes when you buy a new car? You feel so exhilarated that you begin to skit like a youngster. If a child wants to do the same, what is the objection? But this child becomes a thief.

If we try to find out the reason why this child does not have a coloured pencil while other children have it, we shall find that the fathers of these other children are bigger frauds, more cunning and clever than the father of this child. If we carry our research in the case of this coloured pen, even further God knows how many sins, how many offences, we shall discover behind it. But these do not seem to have any connection with the pen.

The child picked up the pen because he liked the bright colours on it. What other children had, he too wanted. He too wanted to feel the joy and pride of possessing it, just as the others did. This was very natural. In fact, this is how it should have been. It was no sin. In fact it would have been very unnatural had he not picked up the pencil. But the child is branded a thief.

All our offences are such offences. Then we have institutions of justice sitting in judgment of them. On one hand our society creates these offences, and on the other, sits in judgment. Justice does not eradicate these offences because in itself, it is an arrangement to cover and hide them. Crime increases and so do concepts of justice. People raise slogans of justice and crime increases and becomes more intricate.

Lao Tzu says: remove hollow words and see the facts of life straight and clear, as they are. Banish the concept of justice. If there is injustice, see it as such. Do not hide it: do not cover it. When injustice stands straight and clear before us, it cannot remain for long. Because we do not see injustice, it remains. If the illness is hidden, it remains. The moment it is known, we try our utmost to destroy it. Any injustice that is clearly seen as injustice cannot remain because we will not be able to put up with it. But if you cover it with flowers and spray it with perfume, it will be conserved.

We have all become experts in covering the leprosy of society with colourful things. Now the leprosy has spread all over, and the colourful covering is coming off a little from here, a little from there. We get a whiff of the awful stench within. Then we seal these cracks as best as we can. But the fact is, there is nothing within except a rotting corpse.

What Lao Tzu means is only this: see things as they are. Do not raise a concept against it.

What is our usual habit? We do not worry about things as they are; we quickly construct a doctrine against it. This opposing doctrine becomes the cause of confusion. There is violence within: we create a doctrine of nonviolence. A violent man quickly puts up a board on his house; "Nonviolence is the supreme religion". By doing this he deludes himself that if he is not non-violent today, he shall become so tomorrow or the day after. He is fully satisfied with his efforts in that direction. Does he not bow before Mahavira, does he not follow Buddha? He is only a weak mortal and therefore succumbs to spasms of violence. He hopes to become nonviolent one day. Do you know what this man is doing? He is evolving methods not to look at the rot that has set within him. His violence is terrible.

If this man were to face the violence within him honestly, he could find it impossible to remain that way. If your house catches on fire, you will not waste a moment. You run out immediately. You do not stop to think how you should run out, whether through the door or through the window, whether from the entrance or from the exit, whether you should jump or throw a rope down. There is no time for any deliberation. The fact is, you will not even know when you came out. It is only when you are out, and safe from the leaping flames, that you will know you are out. Only then will you begin to think, and to breathe freely.

If a person becomes aware of the violence within him, of the decay that has set within him, he will not sit to make plans. When the house is on fire you do not plan. I shall get out today, I shall leave the house tomorrow. In the same way, you will not say, "What is the hurry? I am still young. I have a full life before me." When there is fire within, you are bound to jump out.

But to save himself from the fires of existence, man has evolved an ingenious trick: create the opposite and make a doctrine out of it. Do not concentrate on the rot within, keep your eyes fixed on the doctrine: "Non-violence is the highest religion." Keep contemplating it. Think constantly that one day you will become nonviolent. If not today, tomorrow. If not in this life, then in the next. Your effort should be constant. Then gradually you will become non-violent.

This way, you can never be rid of violence. This is nothing but postponement. The outcome of it will be that violence will remain within you unabated. The real you will remain violent, and the artificial you will become nonviolent. This non-violent man will make his own arrangements for non-violence. He will strain the water before drinking, he will not eat after sundown. I do not say do not strain the water before drinking. It is very hygienic. But do not mistake it for non-violence. Nonviolence is not so cheap that you can attain it simply by straining water. But I see people who drink water like this and are convinced they have booked seats in heaven. They are confident of moksha for have they not strained the water before drinking, have they not eaten before it got dark?

Sometimes I have the opportunity of staying with such people when it is dark inside the house, they take their plates outside because outside it is still light. Then I see them gobbling their food so fast in order to finish within the prescribed time. Their very eating is so violent! There is no joy, no sign of love in their act of eating. They are only concerned in getting it over with because after dark they cannot eat.

Lakhs of animals and birds do not eat at night. It does not mean they attain moksha. This is no criterion. Don't eat at night, it is good for your health, good for your body. But it has nothing to do with atman.

The pseudo nonviolent man creates a false theory of non-violence. He says he will not eat green vegetables. How clever these people are! I was staying in a Jaina household. It was during the time of Paryushana. These people did not eat green vegetables during these days, but they had bananas. When I asked them why they took bananas, they said they were not green in colour! By green vegetables they meant all vegetables with green colour. This is nothing but cunningness. "Green" should mean all fresh vegetables. They are actually supposed to eat only dry vegetables but they twisted the meaning and said "green" denotes the colour.

There are some people who contend that only dry food is to be taken. What Mahavira meant was that fruit that falls from the tree by itself and becomes dry should be taken; not plucked fruits. But what people do is they get vegetables, dry them and then eat them when they have dried out. This is no different from those who eat green vegetables. You bring green vegetables and dry them beforehand -- what is the difference? Only you can say that you have taken dry food.

One day a Bhikshu of Buddha went for alms. A piece of flesh from an eagle's beak fell into his bowl. The Bhikshu was in a dilemma because Buddha's orders were to accept whatever fell in the bowl. He came back and asked Buddha what he should do.

It was rare that Buddha ever thought deeply before answering a question but in this case he closed his eyes for a while and then answered. He said, "It is all right. Accept whatever has fallen in the bowl."

Ananda was horrified. "Are you telling him to accept this piece of flesh?" He asked.

Buddha replied "It is not every day that eagles throw flesh in a bhikshu's bowl. This is a matter of coincidence and may never happen again. But if in this case I waive my rule aside and allow you to select what you wish then that would become the rule. People are clever, Ananda, eagles are not that clever. Because man is more cunning. I am constrained to maintain, the rule."

But Buddha did not know that any number of rules cannot diminish man's cunningness. Today we find China, Japan -- the foremost Buddhist countries -- completely non-vegetarian. On every Buddhist hotel sign is put up to say: "The meat here is from dead animals, not killed animals." To kill is to commit violence; there is no sin in eating the flesh of a dead animal. So many animals do not die naturally every day, but the killing is done by others. The hoteliers receive only the flesh that is already dead. They are not a party to it for they are Buddhists.

All over the world Buddhists are meat-eaters. The reason is because of this little incident in Buddha's time. Buddha's contention was that the bhikshu had not done the killing. If that were so, it would have been violence. He neither killed, nor did he beg from the eagle. It was a coincidence. So the Buddhist bhikshu does not beg for flesh but if you put in his bowl, he eats it, he accepts it gladly.

Man easily finds ways and means to make his false doctrines. Within, the real man keeps working, and without, the false man is seen. The false man is a good man, his hopes are all for the future. The real

man within is here and now; all his actions are in the present. As time passes, the gap between the two widens so much that the good man in you is totally ignorant of the real you within. But the real you is your very self; it is your true self.

Lao Tzu says, "Do not create the opposite. Know yourself as you are and live in it." This is a very profound sutra. If I know the violence within me and know myself to be a violent person, if I do not create any concepts against it or try to be nonviolent, one day I shall become non-violent. If I live with my anger, accept the state of anger within me and keep myself away from theories opposed to anger, this very anger will change me. If I accept my sexuality and do not indulge in celibacy, my very sexuality will make a different man out of me. We cannot remain long in that which is wrong, that which is painful, that which is agonising. It is hell, it is fire. We shall burn in it, we shall singe and scorch in it. The very experience will open our eyes and we will tear ourselves away from it.

If a man who is standing in filth looks down and sees the filth and dirt, the crawling worms and insects, and becomes aware of the stench, how long will he stand in it? But he can devise a way: He can look up to the stars, to the moon, and the clouds and forget all about what is at his feet. He can then live comfortably, musing over the sun and the stars. The reason is: the filth in itself is not the cause of pain the cause is the experience of the filth. Violence in itself is not painful. The knowledge, the experience of it is painful. Similarly anger is not painful in itself; the experience of it is painful.

Says Lao Tzu: "Live in yourself, as you are." Then all that is false within will fade of its own and all that is true shall remain.

So Lao Tzu says: "BANISH HUMANITY, DISCARD JUSTICE AND THE PEOPLE SHALL RECOVER LOVE OF THEIR KIN. BANISH CUNNING, DISCARD UTILITY AND THIEVES AND BRIGANDS SHALL DISAPPEAR." These two things are to be understood.

This is an interesting fact: When a man is cunning in acts we look upon as evil, we call it cunningness. But when a man is cunning in acts which we look upon as good, we call him wise, intelligent. But this is a part of cunningness as well. Cleverness, cunningness means: whatever I do, I do with an eye to the result.

When you go along the road, you greet another person only if it is worthwhile to do so. You quickly weigh in your mind the pros and cons: whether he is the son of a minister, or some relation of his, or a relation of his relation, how far is his influence. Even a simple act of greeting is calculated with a clever man. If nothing can be achieved from greeting this man, there is no sense in greeting him.

Turgenev has written a story in this context. He says: "A crowd had gathered outside a hotel where a man had caught hold of a dog by his legs and was about to smash him on the ground because he had bitten him. Just then two policemen arrived on the scene. One looked at the dog and said, "It is just as well. Kill him. He is a nuisance."

But the second policeman looked intently at the dog and said, "This looks like the dog of our boss!"

The first cop at once called the man holding the dog and said, "Do you know what you are doing? He is no ordinary dog. Leave him at once!"

"Hand-cuff him!" he shouted to his colleague. "This man is creating confusion on the road!" Saying this, he took the dog in his arms.

Then his partner said into his ears, "But this dog does not seem to be the one we thought he was." So they handed him back to the man and said, "Kill him. It was a mistake."

But then the first cop again picked up the dog and said, "No, no, he is our master's dog."

This went on. This is the story of all cunning people. Cunningness means: the result is significant; the action is calculated. One man counts the beads on his rosary. A lakh of rounds and his salvation is ensured; he will attain his desire.

I went to a temple where there were thousand of books stacked up. The man who took me round said, "I have taken a vow to have billions of Ram-nam written in order to ensure my moksha." What a preposterous undertaking! This man is mad and so are those who write for him. All he is doing is wasting paper and time. Now there are printing presses. He could have made use of them. He could print any number of Ram-nams. But this man is calculating. If a man applies his cunning to repeating the name of Rama, the name is taken in vain.

A son touches his father's feet and calculates what he will inherit from him. It is said that the sons of rich fathers never lament the father's death. They cannot. Perhaps they are happy. The sons of kings have been known to bring about the death of their fathers. All around us there are manipulations and calculations.

Lao Tzu says that as long as this cunningness prevails, not only in wrong things but also in right things, life can never step out of its hollow artificiality into simple naturalness. Live not in result but in action. Live from moment to moment. Live in the act, not in the consequence. When you pass a stranger, greet him with a smile. This act in itself is fulfilling.

When we go to a small village, we are surprised when the village people greet us. How can you greet a person without knowing him? What is their purpose in greeting you? It seems strange. But it is not strange for these simple village folk. They meet you and they greet you. They do not know who you are, nor do they care what you are. Just to wish someone well is a source of joy to them, so they do it.

We are bogged down with calculations. Our love is calculated, our prayer is calculated. Not only are our shops and business centres filled with cunning but our temples are also an expansion of our cunning. There also we calculate.

Lao Tzu says that this cunning will never let you be simple and spontaneous. Therefore: "BANISH CUNNING, DISCARD UTILITY."

This matter of utility goes even deeper. Our cunning is based on utility. We seek utility in everything. If I develop a new bomb, my name will be paraded in the newspapers. I might even get a Nobel Prize. But if I write a beautiful poem, you will never hear about it in the papers. What is the utility of a song? How many people can it kill; how many people can it provide with work, how many people can be fed and clothed with it? What is the utility of a song or a flower? None whatsoever. They are as good as useless.

This point of view is what is materialisms. An atheist is not one who does not believe in God, but one who believes in utility. A theist is one who does not even glance at utility. Utility is not at all significant. Everything that is best, everything that is excellent in life, is non-utilitarian.

When Galileo wrote his book on the world and its order, he did not mention the word "God" anywhere. He wrote a book of a thousand pages and did not mention God even once! When his friends questioned him he said, "Where was the necessity? In the construction of my happiness, there was no need of God, so I left him out. He was not needed at all. The various forces carried out their respective works. For example. gravity pulled things down; God was not required at all." To Galileo, God was like a poem. Beautiful, but useless.

If we concentrate on utility, what is the utility of love? None. On the contrary, it creates difficulties. Therefore those who are clever never fall in love. Money has its uses, a house has its uses but what will you do with a song, or with love? Can you sit in it, sleep in it? What will you do?

There is one concept of life in which everything becomes a commodity, a thing to be used. A wife is a commodity, a husband is a commodity, a mother, a father, a son, a daughter are all objects, commodities. If Lao Tzu were to read our scriptures he would be shocked. Our scriptures say; a son must be born to every man, or who will perform the last rites? The son's utility is only this: that he performs the last rites for the father. So if a man has no son, he adopts one. Otherwise who would light his funeral pyre?

This is the limit to which cunningness can go. A son is necessary in order to break a dead father's skull! So why are we vexed when he tries to break a living father's skull? For is this not their work? Some do it later; some want to do earlier. Some do at the proper time; some wish to do earlier. But this is just a utilitarian function. No one's life has any value in itself; life in itself is not precious. It is made to be useful for someone else.

In Egypt there are mummies of ancient kings. Their wives and their servants were buried along with the king because they were utilitarian objects for him when he was alive. For thousands of years we forced women in India to commit sati on the death of their husbands for this very reason. The wife was useful as long as the husband lived; otherwise she was useless. She was a means of utility, and nothing more. So she was made to die with her husband. We know how to cover even murder with high-sounding words. We called this murder "SATI". But the man who brought this tradition into being never once thought of ending their lives after their wives' death. Man was always, the owner, the master. The woman only had utilitarian value. A man could get a thousand wives. This manner of looking at life is called materialism.

Each thing has a value of its own. This value is not based on utility. To be, in itself, is valuable. For instance, a woman is precious in herself, and not because she is somebody's wife or somebody's mother or somebody's daughter. She is valuable in herself. You are not more valuable according to what you do. Your value is not the sum total of your actions. What you are is enough. Your actions have nothing to do with it.

Religion is that which relieves you from materialism. The concept that deals with life in terms of utility turns life into a marketplace, where everything is bought and sold. Since everything has its utility, everything has its value.

Emerson has said somewhere. "We do not know the value of things. We only know their price." The price shows the utility of things. The flowering of life, the flowering of existence that is the only thing of love the worth, the only thing of value.

If we try to measure Buddha against Einstein, his value will be less. If both are for sale, who will buy Buddha? Anybody would buy Einstein for he would be useful in making bombs. Buddha would only create confusion. No one will buy him. Buddha can only be bought when people understand the meaning of value, and not the price. Then the flowering of Buddha would have value. He is a person in whose life existence has flowered. If we set aside his utilitarian value, Einstein will appear to be an ordinary man, like any other. What Einstein could do was of value. What he is, is of no value. Hence he is a pauper. But when it came to doing, he is a king. Buddha is rich in his being; there is no question of his doing anything. He is established in non-action.

Says Lao Tzu: "Because non-action is the highest state, reduce the value of actions and increase the value of your being." Lay stress on what you are, and not on what you are doing. Do not worry what a person does, concern yourself with what he is. His being in itself is of value, he is not worthwhile for any other reason. If we try to look at Buddha in terms of utilitarian values, where will we place him? Nowhere. And yet one Buddha is worth a thousand Einsteins but let there be one Buddha! Why is it so? It is because Buddha's being is of intrinsic value. He cannot be valued in the marketplace.

There is an interesting story about the Sufi fakir Fariuddin Attar. The town he lived in was raided by Tamerlane and he was caught by his soldiers. As they were tying his hands, a passerby recognised him. Attar was a wonderful man. Sufi fakirs always tried to hide their identity. He had made himself known as a perfume-maker, but those who knew, knew him to be the perfume itself. He was the ultimate essence of life. This man knew him as such.

He told the soldiers that he would give a thousand dinars if they let this man go. The soldiers were tempted: a thousand gold coins for an ordinary man! But Attar intervened. "Wait awhile. Others will give a better price."

The man said, "I shall give 5,000 dinars, 10,000 dinars! Let this man go!" But as the price increased the soldiers were certain that this was no ordinary man. Attar advised them to be patient and wait for a still better price. The soldiers refused to let him go at any price. The passerby left.

Then along came a grass-cutter. "Call that man," Attar told them, "and accept whatever he gives for me." They called him and asked what price he was willing to pay for him. The grass cutter looked at Attar, took out a sheaf of grass and offered it as his price. Attar said, "He knows my worth correctly, Sell me to him." The soldiers were filled with dismay.

Then Attar explained: "The first man knew my worth and yet he talked in terms of price. Therefore, I stopped you. This grass-cutter has no knowledge of value. He looks upon me as a commodity. He looked at me and felt I might be useful to cut grass. This man can think only in terms of utility. That other man knew I was beyond the pale of utility. Therefore I stopped you. It was not right to accept his bid. He was pricing me too low. This man has priced me correctly. I have no utilitarian value. He is not even sure whether I shall be able to cut grass or not. The other man priced me wrong because he knew my worth. Whatever price he offered was too little. In life there is one value and one price."

Lao Tzu says that the value will be discernible only when the cacophony of the marketplace dies down, when prices no longer exist. "DISCARD UTILITY, AND THIEVES AND BRIGANDS SHALL DISAPPEAR." We have turned life into a big marketplace where everything has its price. Each man bears a price tag on his forehead. Each man is for sale. Some for more, some for less. In such a place, what will there be if not thieves and dacoits?

What do we mean by thieves and brigands? They too are people who believe in the utility of things, only they do not have the money to pay. So they try to steal things without paying for them. When everything carries a price and there are people who can pay and people who cannot pay then the latter are bound to obtain things by foul means.

Lao Tzu says: "Let value be, but discard pricing. Then there will be no thefts." Let us try to understand this.

If the values of things remain but no price is fixed on them, what will be the worth of diamonds? In itself, the diamond is just another stone. But it is very expensive. What is so valuable about it? Yet it is always in danger of being stolen; people even kill for it. Why?

The value of a diamond is man-made. If you find yourself in a jungle, hungry and tired, and someone offers you a price of bread, you will willingly exchange it for a diamond. If you are dying of thirst in a desert and someone offers you a glass of water in exchange for a diamond you will not think twice. That is the value of diamonds. Man has set the price on everything. This makes a worthless thing seem precious and a valuable thing look worthless. Therefore says Lao Tzu: "BANISH CUNNING, DISCARD UTILITY, AND THIEVES AND BRIGANDS SHALL DISAPPEAR."

If life is natural and is based on intrinsic values then what Lao Tzu says is hundred per cent correct. There shall be no thieves and brigands. They exist because of the materialistic concept we have given to life. When life is reduced to the utilitarian then thefts will take place; but when life is based on its own value, there can be no thefts. Theft can only take place in bazaars. All our life is lived in the centre of these bazaars. The result of man's efforts for the last 5,000 years have brought all facets of life into the

marketplace. Nothing is outside the marketplace, so we know nothing of nature or truth or atman -- we cannot know.

Lao Tzu says: "Banish all calculations, discard price. Banish cunning, banish knowledge. Banish all your justice, humanity, morality and doctrines and become natural." When he says: "Know the simple self," he is not speaking of any great universal spirit within you that you should realise. He tells us not to involve ourselves in these things; but to try and discover the tiny ray of consciousness within ourselves. Do not give it big names. When you discover the natural lake of existence within you be absorbed in its music, flow in it. The day you open the door within, you come upon the temple within yourself.

When this tiny secret within you comes into your hand, you will attain the majesty of a king. This can only be attained when you succeed in destroying the web you have created around you. This web is intricate and we keep adding unto it every day. The result is that the music of life within us is completely lost to us, so much so that we do not even know of its existence.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #20

Chapter title: The renunciation of spiritual desires the revelation of the simple self

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AS THESE TOUCH THE EXTERNALS AND ARE INADEQUATE, THE PEOPLE HAVE NEED OF WHAT THEY CAN
DEPEND UPON.

REVEAL THY SIMPLE SELF,

EMBRACE THY ORIGINAL NATURE,

CHECK THY SELFISHNESS,

CURTAIN THY DESIRES.

To discard wisdom and knowledge, humanity and justice, cunning and utility, is the negation. Lao Tzu looks upon these as the three illnesses. It is necessary to leave these, but it is not enough. It is essential, but not adequate. The positive has to be manifested.

It is not enough not to be ill in order to be healthy. It is necessary. If there is no illness, it is easier to be healthy. But the absence of illness is not health. Health has its own positive state. Just as in illness there is pain, in health there is joy. When there is no illness, you are outside of pain, but not within bliss. To be outside of pain is not to be one with bliss; they are not synonymous. Bliss is an uncovering of an inner benediction and blessing, an unfolding of the spontaneous blooming within.

Three things Lao Tzu has talked about are like illnesses. All illnesses come from outside; health comes from within. Illnesses are aggressions, health is our nature. The very word 'swasthya' (health) means to be fixed in one's self. No word of any other language explains health so correctly. "swasthya" is a spiritual word also. It means to be established within one's self. Let us understand this in order to understand the sutra.

When there is illness, you are outside yourself. If a thorn pricks the foot, all our consciousness begins to revolve round the point where the thorn is. If we have a headache, all our attention is around the head. If the body aches, the consciousness goes around and around the body. Wherever there is pain, wherever there is any trouble, consciousness has to rush there. Therefore it is difficult for a sick person to understand that he is not the body, that he is the atman. If this is not clear to you also, know that you are ill.

The more ill a person is, the less spiritual he is bound to be. He is body-oriented, because in disease you are conscious of only the body: there is no sign of the atman. The whole mind is concentrated on the disease, and there is only one desire within: how to be rid of the malady. There is no expectation of joy whatsoever. If the disease can be got rid of it is more than can be hoped for.

But to be devoid of suffering is not to become joyful. As the pain draws us outside, so bliss takes us within. If a man does not step out of his house, roam the streets, go out in the world, do not think he has entered within himself. He can keep standing at the door. A man who stands at the door is neither in nor out. Similarly, a man who is neither suffering nor joyful is standing at the door. If he just stands between the two, he will become cheerless, disconsolate. Then neither pain draws him, nor is there the music of bliss within him. Only a dejected indifference is there.

Lao Tzu says that if these three illnesses are got rid of -- and it is necessary to be rid of them -- then the inward opening can be affected. We should not take it for granted that by leaving these three we have reached the destination. This is only the negation. What was wrong has been discarded but as yet the right has not been attained. To attain the right is a different dimension, altogether a different journey. He who holds on to the wrong never attains the right. At the same time, he who has discarded the

wrong has not necessarily attained the right. The wrong has to be discarded, but merely leaving the wrong and making no further effort does not help one to attain the right.

In this sutra, Lao Tzu has tried to reveal the positivity of life, the inner well-being. These three illnesses he has talked about are external and inadequate. People need something to hold on to in their journey.

People hold on to these three diseases for this very reason; they want a support, something to lean on. When these supports are snatched away they find themselves in difficulty, because how can they live without support? One man lives in order to acquire knowledge. As he progressed, he feels he is developing, attaining something. This is his support. One man lives for humanity, morality, justice, religion. He serves mankind. This is his support. One man lives for material gains, for wealth, for status, for fame. This is his support. All these people need a prop, a support, in order to live. But Lao Tzu says, "Leave all three."

It is very difficult to be without an anchor. Then we feel, "How should we live?" What should we do?" We let go of the wrong, and the hands become empty. Lao Tzu agrees that empty hands need an anchor, need a support, but if this support is from the outside again, it will be no better than the ones that have been discarded. This support should now be an internal support, your very own from your inner self.

Therefore Lao Tzu says: "REVEAL THY SIMPLE SELF. EMBRACE THY ORIGINAL NATURE, CHECK THY SELFISHNESS, CURTAIL THY DESIRES." Let us take these one by one.

"REVEAL THY SIMPLE SELF." When our hands are emptied from the external world and there is no object left for the mind, then the full current of consciousness can be directed towards the self. When the eyes no longer look outside, the full power of seeing can be circulated within. When the life-energy is not directed to attaining the external objects, its full power and movement can be utilised for the journey within.

To reveal the self means that all your senses that were, till, now running in and out, all your mind which was, till now, occupied and attracted to the attainment of distant things, all your attention that was, till now, running after everything except your own self, now have to be directed towards your own self. This can only be understood and accomplished if the first three things are discarded.

You sit with your eyes closed, but what you see are external things. You see the world outside, and not any thing that is within you. Close your ears and the sounds you hear are of the outside world. You withdraw your attention from the outside and yet it keeps running outward. This is because of the three things had been mentioned previously. These three outside supports have not broken yet. Because of constant practice and the habit of previous births, the mind keeps running out towards these. Lao Tzu says: "If these three are broken, all the senses can be made to enter within."

Close the eyes and concentrate on one thing; that you will not see any external object. Pictures will appear before the mind's eye because of the old habit, but know that they are from the outside and you are not prepared to see them. Tell yourself time and again that you are not interested; they have no

attraction for you. If you stop taking interest in these pictures, you will find that they will get less and less. They appear because you call them.

No guest comes to the mind unless invited. Nothing can force itself into the mind; your invitation is necessary. It is quite possible that you have forgotten your invitation; or that you have changed your mind afterwards; or that you have no idea when and how, in which unconscious moment you extended the invitation. But the fact remains that whatever comes to your mind is what you have called. Not a single happening of the mind takes place for which you are not responsible.

If you find yourself committing crimes in your dreams and indulging in all sorts of outrages, it is because you have wanted to do so; but you have hidden it from your own self. You get up in the morning and say it was a mere dream and of no consequence. But the dreams are yours and they are not without reason. You have invented them, you have called them. So never underrate them. Dreams tell you about yourself, they inform you about what lies in the folds of your mind. The mind is with you. In the day time you can suppress it but in the night it begins to work.

Psychologists say that if you do not dream you will go mad. This is right. Whatever you suppress during the day is thrown out in the night -- a catharsis takes place. Once we believed that if a man is not allowed to sleep for a number of days he goes mad. Now it has been discovered that it is not lack of sleep but because he cannot dream that he goes crazy. Many experiments have been carried out to this effect and this is a proven fact.

You see many dreams at night. There is a chain of twelve. Twelve times you enter into the dream-state. In between, you fall into deep sleep. Psychologists have experimented on hundreds of people. It is now possible to know by the movements of the eyes when you are asleep and when you are dreaming. We now have machines to measure the intensity of eye-movements. When you dream, the pupils of the eyes move in the same way as when you see a film. A dream is a film. When the pupils do not move, that is when there is no dream the pupils stop. When a person is dreaming and when he is not.

Psychologists have experimented on people for several years. Whenever a person began to dream he was woken up. In seven days' time he became almost insane. Then, this same man was woken up when he was not dreaming. Every time he stopped dreaming he would be prevented from sleeping. After seven days it was found that he was as healthy as ever. There was no difference at all.

Psychologists say that no one suffers because of lack of sleep. We suffer because of our inability to dream. If we cannot throw out the junk we collect throughout the day and it keeps collecting within our unconscious, it can make you insane. Dreams are not without a reason. They are yours; you yourself are in them. So when you close your eyes and begin to see things, it is because of your interest in them.

Stop being interested in them. That is the first step towards revealing the self. Let the pictures come and watch them disinterestedly, become passive. Keep looking; it does not matter. Just like when a man who is seeing a film is suddenly informed that his medical report shows he is suffering from cancer -- this man's interest in the film will be completely lost. The film still continues, and he is looking at it, but now it does not appeal to him, it doesn't hold his attention. In the same manner, when we break away from

these three things, the interest, the appeal, will be lost. The old habit will continue to produce the film, but you will no longer be interested.

Be disinterested in these inner dreams. As your disinterestedness increases, the pictures will become less and less. You will begin to notice the intervening gaps. Then suddenly you will find that your attention is focused on your own self. Your light falls on you; your lamp is revealing yourself. It is the same lamp, the same light that illumined the outside world for you. When the outside world no longer exists, the light of the lamp begins to fall on you.

Close your ears and sit. Outside noises will fall on your ears. You will hear bits of your past conversation with your friends; some long forgotten song will come to your mind and you will actually hear it. Listen to everything disinterestedly. Do not begin to hum the tune to yourself even in your mind. Be passive; do not react to these stimulants. After some time, after a few days, the ears will become silent. There will be no sound. And that day, for the first time, you will hear the sound of the silence within.

Each sense can be turned inwards. Take fragrance for instance. There is a fragrance within which we do not know of. Perhaps that is the real fragrance. But our noses are filled with the fragrance outside and it does not occur to us that there is a fragrance within, the fragrance of the atman.

All senses can be experienced within. Understand the senses well because they are a two-way traffic. The senses are joined to you within and also joined to the world outside. That is how it can bring the news of the world to you; otherwise you would have no knowledge of the world. But we use the senses as one-way traffic. We only take the news of the outside world from them and never of the inside world.

Lao Tzu says: "REVEAL THY SIMPLE SELF." As we see the vast skies above, the moon and the stars, and the flowers and trees and the multitude of faces which are all an experience of the great expanse outside, so also we can experience the profound expanse of the great void within. But for this, we shall have to transform our attention. The outgoing mind has to be called back within; it has to come back home.

The last resting place of this inward journey is the revelation of the self. It is the revelation of knowledge of the self.

Lao Tzu is interested only in the natural. He holds on to it in the same manner as Kabir. Kabir says; "Sadhi sahaj samadhi bhati." In every song, Kabir lays stress on the 'sahaja' (the natural, the spontaneous,). Keep this word 'sahaja' in mind.

If I create a concept of the self before beginning my inward journey, it will not be my natural self. For example, if I come to visit you with a preconceived notion about you, then I will see you through the screen of my preconceived notion. This will not be your true natural self because my notions about you will be mixed with it. I may have come with the notion that you are a very good man. You may look like a good man to me, but perhaps you are not a good man. Perhaps it is the exaggeration of my notions about you. When I have come with a fixed view that you are a good man, then I see only that which proves my point.

Then I begin to select. I will not see all that is wrong in you, I will see only that which is right. I will keep adding the good points till my concept about you becomes strong and increases a thousandfold. Then you appear to me to be a great sadhu. Now, whether this is your actual nature or not is quite another matter. In the same manner, if I have decided beforehand that you are a bad person, I will pick out all the bad points in you. So when we see, we see only a selection, and hence we cannot see the truth. We choose what suits us even to be truth.

If someone tells you Buddha is a bad person and he convinces you, then when you go to Buddha you will not find Buddha anywhere. You will only go and confirm that he is a bad man you set out to see. Man's greatest difficulty is that he proves what he believes. His belief becomes a fact. Our beliefs appear as truths to us and we follow our own concepts. We even construct concepts about our own selves.

Lao Tzu and Kabir, or others who have a concept of the natural (SAHAJA), say that to reveal the simple self within, you have to proceed without any preconceived notions. Otherwise you will experience only your preconceived notions. One man believes it will be like this and like this -- and he invariably experiences what he expected to see. But that will not be the truth. It is a play of his own concepts, an illusion of his own mind, his own projection.

We all have our own views about the atman. Some believe that the atman has a certain form, some that it has a certain colour, some already know what kind of an experience it is going to be. If you go within, with any of your expectations, the experience will not be of the atman but of your own projections.

Therefore Lao Tzu says: have no conceptions when you go within. Be absolutely empty. Go with a free vision. Wear no coloured glasses or else you will see the same colours in the atman. That is why different religions in the world have described different experiences. These are not authentic experiences; they are coloured by the colour of their conceptions.

There is another difficulty with the journey within: you have to travel alone. You cannot check in with someone, you cannot compare your experiences with another; you cannot even ask whether you are on the right or wrong path. If you go to the market and you choose something because it is yellow in colour -- if others insist it is not yellow, you will become afraid that you have become colour-blind. But in the inner world you have to be alone. So any preconceptions are dangerous for there is no way to check with others. No one is in a position to tell you what you see and what you don't see. You are absolutely alone.

Because of this absolute aloneness, you have to be relieved of every single preconception or else there is no way of correcting your illusions. In the outside world, we correct our -- selves by the example of others.

Mulla Nasruddin went to the tavern with his son. Both began to drink. Mulla began to advise his son, "You must know when you should stop drinking" he told him. "I shall tell you how to decide. See those two men sitting at the next table? When they appear to be four to you, you have reached the limit."

The boy turned and looked at the men. "I see only one person on that table!" he told his father. Nasruddin had already taken a bit too much. He was already seeing two in place of one. And he was advising his son! The son could see for himself that there was only one person at the table. In the outside world we can check things, weigh them.

Therefore, science has been able to lay down laws whereas religion cannot. Each man has to enter on his journey alone. And there are very few people who start their inward journey without any preconceptions -- some Buddha or Lao Tzu. Otherwise the Hindu enters the inward path as a Hindu, the Mohammedan as a Mohammedan, the Christian as a Christian. You take all your concepts and teachings along with you and then you see within what you have set out to see. Illusions are easy to create within oneself because there is no one there but you.

Therefore, time and again, Lao Tzu stresses the simple self. By "simple" he means devoid of all concepts. Lao Tzu goes even a step further. He says, "Do not go within even with the belief that the atman is there, for that also becomes a preconception."

When anyone asked Buddha, "Does the atman exist or not?" he would reply, "Go within and see for yourself. If I say it exists, it would be wrong. If I say it does not, that also would be wrong."

The man would say, "How can both be wrong?"

Buddha would say, "Both would be wrong in both cases I will be giving you a concept. If you go within with the knowledge that the atman is, you will experience the atman even if it does not exist. And if you go with the knowledge that there is no atman, you will not have any inkling of it even if it is there."

Man gets captured and enslaved within the capsule of his own concepts. Once he is caught within his own beliefs, nothing can free him. The biggest jail-house is that of our own beliefs and ideas. So Lao Tzu or Buddha would say: "Do not believe anything. Simply go within. Whatever is, know that; whatever you meet, see. Do not acquaint yourself with the unacquainted prematurely. Do not cover the unknowable with your knowledge. Let the stranger remain a stranger. It is not proper to know anything about it before you know it."

This is the meaning of the simple self. Therefore Buddha never talked of Ishwara or atman. Buddha seemed to be an atheist. This was natural. He did not believe in God but he did not believe in the atman either. Buddha said, "I believe only in the void." But you can build no concept on emptiness. If you think you can, it will not be shunya (emptiness). Whatever can be conceived becomes an object. Emptiness has no shape and hence cannot be conceived. We have many concepts of God. Look at the number of idols we have created. We also have many concepts of the atman.

There are many peculiar concepts about the atman. Some say it is in the shape of our thumb: some say it is in the shape of our body. Still others say it is like a fluid; it assumes the form of whatever it enters. In the human body it takes a human form; in an ant it takes the form of an ant; in an elephant it assumes the form of an elephant.

But what is the concept of shunya (void)? Shunya means that which cannot be conceived.

Buddha has said, "If you want to know my belief, my faith, I have faith in only one thing; shunya (emptiness). And because I do not wish to create any concept in you, I say that I do not know whether there is an atman within or not. But one thing is certain -- there is emptiness within you. Enter the emptiness. Do not ask me what this emptiness is like, for emptiness is that which is not. How can you express that which has no form, no colour, no shape?"

Lao Tzu says: "REVEAL THY SIMPLE SELF." Do not heed religious teachers and pundits who educate you about the form of the atman, who say that the atman is like this or the atman is like that. Leave all thoughts about the atman that you have gathered and enter within, so that that which is can be revealed.

"REVEAL THY SIMPLE SELF. EMBRACE THY ORIGINAL NATURE." Do not ask what your nature is like. If you ask, you go astray, because for then a concept will be formed. Do not ask, do not even think, do not seek. Just enter within and taste it for yourself.

Buddha has said, "The ocean is salty wherever you taste it." At no time, nowhere, has the ocean water tasted otherwise. The emptiness within also tastes the same to whomever tastes it. But this taste is like the dumb man who tastes candy. He cannot tell what the taste is like. Man has no words to express the taste of the emptiness. It is so enormous that all words fall short of it. So do not ask. Step within, embrace that which is so close to you, be immersed in it. Drown!

But we set out in search. We seek even the atman in the outside world. Even when we seek our own selves we ask others. It is as if we were to ask a stranger the way to our own house! Can any insensitivity be greater than this?

Whenever we ask another, our experience of the self becomes adulterated. Yet we are willing to accept this, because to believe the other is a very natural desire in an ignorant person. The knowledge is cheap. It is free, easily available. Self-knowledge entails a great deal of effort and labour. We have to proceed ourselves.

Secondhand knowledge acquired from others will not do in the quest for truth. You have to lay down the load, unburden yourself of all concepts. You have to enter within as if your boat has capsized and you are thrown on an unknown island. You do not know where you are; you know nothing about this place. Each step is an adventure in a strange land. Like Robinson Crusoe, you will have to discover everything yourself. This is the meaning of the simple self. With each step you will discover things as they are within, you will taste the original taste of the emptiness.

Pseudo-tastes can also be created outside. You must have seen a hypnotist working. If you have not, you can try this experiment. Make a child lie down and suggest to him that he is falling asleep. It is not only with children that you can do this. Thirty per cent of people can be worked upon in this way. In a short while, the child will fall asleep. Hold an onion before him and say, "This is an apple, a delicious apple. Eat it." The child will eat it and smack his lips. He will say it is tasty.

This is hypnotism. But in everyday things we also hypnotise ourselves. Do you remember what you felt when you took the first puff from a cigarette? But since everybody smokes, it must be enjoyable. When you took your first sip of coffee did you enjoy it? This is nothing but hypnotism.

And we are told taste has to be cultivated! When you drink coffee for the first time you will find it bitter. It is no fault of the coffee. You are not refined; you are uncultured. Keep taking coffee over a period of time and you will develop the taste. Then it will be difficult for you to remain without coffee. What has happened? You have hypnotised yourself, you have been hypnotised by your friends and even by the advertisements of the Coffee Board. Now coffee has become delicious. But this taste is false; it is not authentic.

In the same way, the inner taste can also be false. Therefore Lao Tzu exhorts us to embrace the simple self within.

If you are impressed by Mahavira -- and people like Mahavira are impressive; it is very difficult not to be impressed by them -- then you sway to his music, you get carried away by his fragrance, you lose yourself in him. Then you catch hold of his words. You take these words and go within. You will get the same taste that Mahavira has spoken about. But this taste will be false. It will be like the taste of coffee - cultivated. The words echo within you. Mahavira's image is established within you; the idea of Mahavira has taken hold of you. Now you will live in this hypnosis. But this experience will not be the experience of the self.

Mahavira has also said that this is not self-realisation. He told his followers, "You will not attain the self unless you leave me." What did he mean by this? What he meant to say was: "Let my words inspire you, but let them not become your conceptions. Let my words arouse the thirst within you but let them not become the water to quench your thirst."

This distinction must be understood well. My words should awaken the thirst within you, but they should not become the water. You should not become satisfied by quenching your thirst with the water of my words. Otherwise you will be cheated out of your finding your own means to quench the inner thirst.

In spiritual life it is profitable to be influenced and it is also profitable to be non-influenced. You should be competent enough to arouse the thirst and alert enough not to come within the hold of the words. The guru's words should not become your burden.

Lao Tzu says: "Be alert, be natural and embrace your atman. RENOUNCE YOUR SELFISHNESS AND CURTAIL YOUR DESIRES." What is meant by selfishness? Not what we usually mean, because he has told us to discard that long ago. When he has already told us to banish wisdom and discard utility, selfishness does not mean the same thing as we know it to mean. It has a profounder meaning. We discarded selfishness when we gave up our habit of viewing things from a utilitarian angle.

Then what does Lao Tzu mean by selfishness? Here, the meaning of selfishness is self-centredness. An ordinary man's trouble in life is that he is self-centred. If he loves someone it is with a purpose. It is this purpose that destroys his life. We are all self-centered and we employ many subtle means to this end.

Mulla Nasruddin knocked at the door of a very wealthy man. The man opened the door. Mulla said, "A man is in great debt, he is dying. Help him."

The man took out a rupee and gave it to him saying, "Your thoughts are virtuous, go and help him." Mulla took the rupee. As he was going away the man asked him, "May I know the name of this poor man?"

The Mulla said, "It is myself."

After a fortnight the Mulla went again. This time the man looked at him intently and said, "It seems that someone is neck-deep in debt."

The Mulla said, "You are right."

"He is a very poor man," said the master of the house.

"You are right again," said Nasruddin.

"And I suppose that man is you?" he asked again.

"No," said Nasruddin, "you are wrong this time."

The wealthy man said, "I am glad to hear that," and he gave the Mulla two rupees.

Then, as Mulla went down the steps he called out, "Can I ask you a question good man? I understand the inspiration behind your generosity last time but what is the motive behind your sense of compassion and service this time?"

The Mulla replied, "This time the creditor is myself. The debtor is a very poor man; he cannot repay me. So I am going about collecting funds so that he can pay me. Do you understand now?"

If we look beneath all acts of charity and service we shall find self-interest at the root of it. We all live in self-interest.

A man leaves his house, family and business and goes to the forest. He cannot have any self-interest; he has removed himself from the mundane world. But Lao Tzu says this is height of self-centredness. He is insistent on seeking his self, on attaining liberation, on finding bliss and being rid of pain. This is selfishness concerning the other world. It is plain and simple self-centredness because this man is also worried only about his own self.

Lao Tzu tells us to drop this also, for this too is a hindrance in knowing the self. If I make an investment in knowing my self, if I feel that by attaining the self I shall obtain bliss then my eagerness, my interest, will not be in attaining the atman but in attaining bliss. If I can attain bliss without going through the

arduous task of knowing the self, I shall never take the trouble of finding the self. If someone were to tell you that you will know the self but you will not attain bliss, what then?

It has been said that Junnaid, a Sufi fakir, went to his guru. The guru asked, "What have you come for? Answer in one sentence. I do not like too much talk."

Junnaid thought all night. In the morning the guru called him. Junnaid said, "I want to know myself."

The guru said, "If you have to undergo untold pain and hardship in the quest, would you still want to know yourself?"

Junnaid said, "I want to know myself in order to attain bliss."

"Go and think again," said the guru. "When you are in search of ananda, why do you say you are seeking your self? If you seek ananda (bliss) and if it can be attained without the self, what is the purpose of knowing the self?"

Nietzsche has said that people are caught in the clutches of religions because they think they can attain bliss through them. No one is concerned about either God or the soul or truth. The day you tell them religion has nothing to do with bliss, it will be difficult to differentiate between the worldly and the religious. They both run for the same purpose. They seem to be running in different directions, but the goal is the same.

One man amasses wealth, because he thinks he can gain happiness through it. One man prays because he feels prayers lead to happiness. No matter how contrary these two may seem in their actions, they are not contrary. Their thinking is the same and their journey is also the same. There is not the slightest difference.

Lao Tzu says: give up selfishness. If you want to know your self and experience the simple, the natural, do not build any expectations on it; that by knowing the self, I will attain this or that. There should be no thought of attainment, no self-interest. This is difficult, but is not difficult to transfer our self-interest from the mundane world to moksha (liberation); it is not difficult to shift our self-interest from wealth to religion. It is very easy.

The truth is that the more greedy a man, the easier he can become religious. It is easy to make him understand: "What are these pebbles you are gathering? Will all this gold and silver go with you when you die? If you want real wealth, give to charity, which will stand you in good stead after death." If you are a small-time miser you may perhaps feel; "We'll see what happens after death." If your greed is intense you will deliberate: "If these coins are useless after death, let me convert some into the currency that works there." So the greater the greed, the quicker you will become religious because now your greed has acquired a new dimension where it can expand. But only those who have no greed can enter the realm of religion. They are not interested in liberation, in bliss or heaven.

Lao Tzu says: drop your selfishness. This selfishness is of another plane. Here, it is mentioned in connection with self-knowledge. Do not think of bliss. Who knows whether you will attain it or not

attain it? Who knows what you will attain there? There is no guarantee of what you will find there. You set out to know with the simple knowledge that you are.

Not to know oneself is a great absurdity. I am, but I do not know who I am! You set out to know yourself for this reason alone: that you do not know who you are, even though you are. Let there not be any other self-interest. Do not hope to attain joy, do not hope to attain immortality or tranquillity or even to solve the mystery of life. Attach no strings to knowing the self. He who does so has still his eyes on some attainment so he will be going around and around outside of himself. He will fail to go within. He alone can go within who has no desires left. Therefore Lao Tzu says: "CHECK THY SELFISHNESS: CURTAIL THY DESIRES."

These desires are the desires of a spiritual man. The desires of the mundane man ended with the first sutras. "Spiritual desires -- this appears contradictory. We cannot imagine that there can be spiritual desires. As long as these desires persist, spirituality cannot be born within a person. Those whom we call sannyasins are invariably people who have left their carnal desires and have caught hold of spiritual desires. The authentic sannyasin is one who has no desires, neither worldly nor spiritual.

Jesus' death was near at hand. He was going to be captured by the soldiers that night. In the last moment, as his disciples began to depart, one of them asked: "In the kingdom of God, you shall be seated beside God. Where shall we, your followers, be seated?" These people may have gathered around Jesus because of his promise of the kingdom of heaven. The word "kingdom" must have enticed their greed. They must have been filled with the desire of attaining happiness. They left the mundane world for a better bargain.

The so-called champions of religion always teach people: "What is there in this impermanent world?" If they were to be asked, "If it was not impermanent, then would it have everything?" -- then what? They say, "What is man? He is a collection of flesh and bones." If he had gold and silver within, then what? These preachers only help to incite the greed within you by changing the dimensions of your desire. Their main question is what is in it for you? They are not opposed to desires at all. The place where you have centered your desires is perishable. So they say remove your desires from there and fix them on the eternal.

Lao Tzu does not suggest changing the direction of your desires. He tells you to eradicate them. Understand this difference well.

I am running after wealth. Somebody reasons with me, "What is this madness? What is there in wealth? Tomorrow you will die. And then? Death will surely come; it is inevitable. If you must run, run after God who is the real wealth!"

My greed totters. I begin to think, "I may amass wealth but death is a certainty. Money works everywhere but death accepts no bribes. I cannot escape death. Then what should I do? I shall run after God." The struggle continues; only the subject changes. The goal is changed; the desire is the same.

People like Lao Tzu say, "Do not run!" They do not say: the world is meaningless; God alone is meaningful, therefore, do not run. That would be selfishness. It would mean that those who are more cunning would strive to attain God. Those who are less cunning strive to gain wealth. Those who are calculating do not indulge in small things. Those who are foolish indulge in lesser things. "What? You are building a house on earth"? How foolish! Make it in heaven. It will be everlasting. So the whole thing becomes a play between more cunning and less cunning people.

Therefore Lao Tzu is very emphatic when he says: "Leave cunning, leave selfishness, curtail your desires." If any desire remains in the spiritual sense, be it in any direction, the wandering remains. Stop! Do not run.

What is the meaning of desire? It means to run to attain something that is far away. I am here; what I want is there: there is a distance in between. To cover this distance is the meaning of desire. I am here; you are there. I want to attain you. There is a distance between us which I have to cover. When I shall cover it I do not know but in my mind I can cross this distance this very moment. I desire a palace. When I can fulfil my desire is unknown but in my mind I will begin to live in the palace.

Desire is the remedy to remove the distance. Desire is the bridge between me and my goal. The goal is like a rainbow. It is visible but does not exist.

He who is filled with desires can never be established in his self. He is always somewhere else, far far away. He can be anywhere but within himself. Where there is desire there is struggle. Where there is no desire there is no running. You stand within yourself, you live within yourself. If you are not trying to attain something, why should you run? You will stop. This state is called samadhi. Desire is running outside of ourselves. Therefore desirelessness is necessary for self-knowledge.

Lao Tzu says: "CURTAIL THY DESIRES." But this is very alarming! If someone suggests that we change our desires, we will be ready. If we are told, "Leave the women of this world. What is there in them? In heaven there are celestial nymphs," the mind is delighted at the prospect. But devas must be there to replace the women on earth. What is there in earthly wine? There are springs of wine in heaven. You can drink it, you can bathe in it, you can swim in it. But remember, if you wish to attain this wine in heaven, you have to give up this miserable concoction what is available on earth. It is a bargain. Those who are cunning fall prey to this deal.

Many times I find that a drunkard is more simple than a sadhu. It should be the other way round. The drunkard is guileless, he is ignorant, he does not know the mathematics. He does not know what he is doing: he is giving up the eternal wine for this miserable liquid! The clever fellow bides his time. He stands with his rosary, and when the time comes he will jump in the eternal springs and fulfil his thirst. But this is a bargain, and in matters of religion there is no bargaining. This very attitude reeks of desire. Desire hides behind it.

You perform your daily puja. For what? You renounce one thing and another, you meditate, you donate to charity. For what? If you have an answer to this question, desires still remain. If you say there is no

reason, no reason whatever, then you do not bargain. Then prayer in itself is enough joy. Prayer is bliss in itself. There is joy in giving.

If you give with the idea of attaining happiness, then it is a desire. If giving is a pleasure, it is religious. If giving is with a motive, it is a bargain. If giving is a joy, there is no ledger where we keep accounts of how much has been given. We make no preparation for any heaven. If, tomorrow we find ourselves in hell, we do not complain and bring our ledgers to prove. We gave, there was joy in giving. The deal is complete. What could be attained, by prayer is attained in the very moment of prayer. Those who do not attain in that moment never attain.

In this world, cause and effect are closely connected. If I put my hand in fire, I will burn myself. If I do not burn my hand now, I will never burn it. If you have prayed now, the bliss of prayer showers on you as you pray. Outside the act of prayer there is no attainment. If there is an idea of attainment, prayer also becomes a desire.

If there is no thought of attainment, every act becomes a prayer. Each act is complete in its doing. We do not carry anything forward. Our connections are severed from the moment that is gone. There is no bargaining. There is nothing in that moment on the strength of which we demand for this moment.

The worldly man always makes transactions. He who makes transactions is very much in the world. It does not matter what the commodity -- wealth or heaven -- because a deal is a deal. A spiritual man never negotiates. He lives from moment to moment; he lives totally. Lao Tzu tells us to do away with desires because they do not let you rise above the world of transactions. Then whatever you do is with an eye to some ultimate gain.

Someone asked Omar Khayyam, "You have sung so many songs. Why?" Omar Khayyam said, "Go ask the flowers, the rose that blooms, why? Ask the stars. They twinkle at night. Why? Ask the wind. It has been blowing since time began. Why?"

In nature there is no purpose anywhere. Except for man, everything in the world is purposeless. But amongst men, only two types of people are purposeless: one whom we call insane and another whom we call 'paramhansa', one whose intelligence is in disorder and one who has gone beyond intelligence. There is some similarity between the mad man and the paramhansa, some qualities within them are the same. This quality is the quality of purposelessness.

Lao Tzu says: abandon all these: selfishness, purposelessness, bargaining, desires, and you shall be able to embrace your innate nature. You will be able to become established within yourself. And except for this -- establishment in one's own self -- there is no other religion.

But we think of even the greatest things in terms of attainment only. People come and ask, "What will we gain by meditation?" What should I tell them? Only one answer is the right answer. "By meditation you shall attain meditation." But this is useless! It would seem like a tautology and what can it solve? They will ask again what will be attained from the meditation that is attained by meditation? They want an answer in rupees, annas and paise.

Maharshi Mahesh Yogi has impressed many in the West because his answers are substantial. He says, "You will attain wealth, you will gain success, you will gain health." The Americans were satisfied: the transaction was clear. Meditation leads to wealth and success. Then meditation can be sold in the marketplace. People like Lao Tzu cannot be sold in the marketplace. If you ask him what is the attainment he will say, "You are not yet qualified to be given an answer." What are you asking? It is as if you could ask, "What can be attained through love?" Then you disqualify yourself -- even in the case of love. You are only fit to gather shells on the shore." What answer can be given to such a person? What will he understand even if he is answered? Nothing.

People ask, "What is to be attained from religion? What is to be gained by prayer? What will we obtain from meditation?" They do not know that when a man leaves the language of negotiation, only then can he enter the realm of religion. As long as he asks, he stays in the mundane world.

If we are assured of some solid gain, we shall be ready to run towards God. All we want is to run, to struggle. To stop is very stifling for the mind; it becomes restive. So people like Lao Tzu frighten us.

Confucius returned from his visit to Lao Tzu a frightened man. When his disciples asked him what sort of man Lao Tzu was he said, "He is not like a man. He is like a lion! You go to him and each hair on your body trembles, you break into a sweat. Do not ever go to him. He shakes your very soul. One look of his and your life-breath trembles like a leaf!"

This is bound to be. Lao Tzu makes you tremble, because what he says is the ultimate. He does not care to tarry over lesser things. He never answers petty questions. He will not even say that meditation gives you peace. If you want peace, take a tranquilliser and go to sleep! Why hanker after meditation?

But even when people come seeking meditation, they come for peace; they come for health. All kinds of people come, but they all come with desires. We treat our temples no better than our brothels. We also go there filled with desire. Wherever we approach with desire we turn that place into a brothel because we wish to buy something. We throw coins in temples and take care that the sound is loud enough so that it may vibrate in all corners of the temple and if God is anywhere around He may know of it that you have donated a whole rupee!

Bodhidharma left India. When he went to China the king called him and said, "I have built lakhs of temples, I give lakhs as bhiksha to the bhikshus, I have translated all works of Buddha into the Chinese language, I have distributed lakhs of Buddha's idols. I have done a great deal to spread Buddha's religion. Tell me, Bodhidharma, what shall I gain from all this? What honour will I attain?"

But he asked the wrong man. There were thousands of bhikshus who would have given him an answer to please his ears. They would have said: "God's grace is on you, oh king, there has not been one like you before in this world! The gods and the Buddhas are showering blessings on you. You shall attain the ultimate bliss of religion!" The king made a mistake in asking Bodhidharma. He took him to be an ordinary bhikshu. But people like Bodhidharma only come once in a while, so the mistake was only natural.

Bodhidharma said, "Shut up! Now that you have asked, you will not get even that which you might have got. You asked and therefore you lost."

The king was upset. He became restless. Perhaps Bodhidharma did not quite understand. He said again, "I have done so much. And all to no avail? I will get nothing in return?"

"Desire of reward is a sin," said Bodhidharma. "Forget what you have done or you will be crushed under the weight of all your good deeds!" Bodhidharma advised him, "We are not crushed by the weight of our sins alone. The burden of virtuous deeds also kill. A load of any kind drowns a man. A man tries to shake off his sins sometime, but he holds on to his good deeds like a vice. These are stones round your neck, oh king! Drop them. Let them go!"

The king, however, did not like this. Our desires will never approve of such advice. King Wu did not appreciate Bodhidharma's advice. Bodhidharma said, "I shall not enter your kingdom. I shall go back. I thought you had understood religion and therefore took joy in spreading it. I did not know that religion was a transaction to you." Bodhidharma never entered Wu's kingdom. He went to the other side of the river.

King Wu was restless. For a long time he had awaited the coming of Bodhidharma, who was of the stature of Lao Tzu and Buddha. How he had disappointed him! He tore his hopes into shreds. If he had only sealed his actions with his approval and told him that the gates of heaven were already open for him, that his liberation was certain, he would have been so happy!

If desires alone are our pleasure there is no place for us at the entrance of religion. If to be desireless is our only pleasure, then only can we enter. Desirelessness is a necessary state for religion, It is not a matter of petty desires alone; deep and mysterious desires hold the mind captive.

A man came up to Buddha and said, "If I meditate, perform sadhanas, how long will I take to become like you?"

Buddha replied, "As long as the thought of becoming like me persists, it will be difficult. This thought is a hindrance. Leave it, Meditate but not with the thought of becoming like me."

Some other person came and asked Buddha, "Amongst your 10,000 bhikshus, how many are like you?" Buddha replied, "Many." "But they cannot be seen," the man said.

Buddha replied, "They themselves do not know it."

The man still asked, "But you must be knowing it. So none of them are like you."

Buddha gave an unusual reply. He said, "I committed some sins in my last birth. As a result of this I had to be born as a teacher. I am completing my penance."

Among Jainas there is a full scripture on this subject. Because of certain actions, a man is born a Tirthankara. The last bondage of certain actions brings the Tirthankara into the world. Then he has to teach people in order to cut the bondage.

Buddha said, "Because of some past actions, I have had to bear the burden of being a teacher. So I have to go through this. We each bear the fruit of our actions."

Buddha had done no such thing. He was completely lost in the shunya. Within him there was no one who could explain. Everything was lost; all was empty!

When everything is thus lost, everything fades away. There are no desires, there is no self-interest. Then the emptiness that arises out of it is your nature, it is the Tao.

The Way of Tao, Volume 2

Chapter #21

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Question 1

ONE FRIEND HAS ASKED: IS IT NOT NECESSARY TO RUN IN ORDER TO STOP?

It is necessary. But you are running already. You have run enough. There is a long history of previous births behind you where you have been running. You are the result of this. Now it is no longer necessary to run; now it is necessary to stop.

But our mind finds many ways of deceiving itself.

A moral teacher taught little children, "If you wish to be freed from sins, you must repent; you must pray. You should confess your sin before God and vow never to do it again." After the lesson was over he asked the children, "What must you do to liberate your selves from sin?"

A little child answered, "We must commit a sin."

You have to commit a sin in order to be rid of sin. But it is not enough to sin, you have to do something more. It is necessary to run in order to stop, but that does not stop you from running -- the race is on! What we call life is also a race. So do not console yourself that you are running because you want to stop. We can always postpone our halting for the future, but, remember, you have run enough. It is already too late.

It is possible that our mind is still not satiated. It never is. That which is satiated is not the mind. The mind will keep on running, now here, now there from one goal to another. But if this race is a long agony, a long suffering.... And it is! It cannot be anything but painful.

But the mind's logic is that the pain, the suffering, is because we are not running fast enough. If we increase our speed, we might reach the goal. Or perhaps the pain is that others have run faster and reached, and we have not reached. Or that our pace is all right, but the direction is wrong. Or we think; the pace is correct, the path is correct, but perhaps the object of our goal is not correct. So we change the goal. Instead of wealth we choose religion; we change from the mundane world to the spiritual. Then we feel we should now be able to complete our race.

No, it will not end. The very running is wrong. Neither the road is wrong, nor the runner, nor the pace of running, nor the goal. Running in itself is wrong.

If we understand Lao Tzu we will know that activity in itself is a mistake. To stop, to relax and drown in non-activity, is the correct thing. So no race is the right race -- according to Lao Tzu. To stop is the right thing. No stopping can be wrong. All activities are wrong. Non-activity, passivity, is one's absolute nature.

Question 2

ANOTHER FRIEND ASKS: YOU HAVE PLACED WORLDLY DESIRES AND SPIRITUAL DESIRES IN THE SAME CATEGORY. WORLDLY DESIRES ARE BASE DESIRES, AND SPIRITUAL DESIRES ARE VERY HIGH DESIRES. BESIDES, WORLDLY DESIRES HAVE TO BE RENOUNCED IN ORDER TO ATTAIN SPIRITUAL DESIRES.

If you have understood Lao Tzu, you will know that according to him no desire is worldly and no desire is spiritual. Desire of any kind is worldly; only desirelessness is spiritual. Therefore, worldly desires and spiritual desires have no meaning. Desire itself means the mundane world. As long as you desire you are in the mundane world. Then even if you desire is to attain liberation, you are still a worldly person. When you have no desires, even if you stay within the world you are in beatitude.

Understand it in this way. Desire is not related to the object. Desire is not a question of what you want, desire is the fact that you want something. What you want is irrelevant. Whether you ask for wealth or

status or religion or liberation as long as you ask, you are in the world. When you stop asking, you are in liberation.

Therefore, we cannot ask for liberation. One attains moksha who does not ask for it. Liberation (moksha) cannot be turned into a desire. Beatitude is not the result of a desire, it is not the goal of any race. Rather, to come to a dead halt in your race is moksha. Moksha is not the end of a journey. When the race no longer is, that is moksha. Then it does not matter where you are: the moment you stop there is moksha. When the mind stops wandering and becomes fixed, moksha is attained.

The mind cannot be stable in any desire. The very word "desire" means the wandering of the mind. So Lao Tzu does not differentiate between worldly desires and spiritual desires. The so-called religious people are, therefore, disturbed by Lao Tzu's teachings because they are proud that they have developed higher desires and renounced the lower ones. No desire is a high desire. No poison is greater, no sin is greater. Poison is poison, sin is sin; desire is desire. There is one snag however: there is a possibility of adulteration. If there is no adulteration it is a pure desire. The desire for worldly things is an adulterated desire; the desire for liberation is an unadulterated desire.

Our friend is worried that I have called spiritual desire worse than worldly desires. The world and desires go together; there is no connection between liberation and desires. The world cannot be without desires, but liberation has nothing to do with desires. Therefore he who has developed the desire for liberation has fallen upon pure poison. A man may succeed in attaining his worldly desire, but one who harbours the desire for liberation, never attains it. It is impossible. So a man who desires liberation is doing a dangerous thing. He is heading for sure disaster, because liberation means the end of all desire: desirelessness. Salvation and desires are far apart. There cannot be any relationship between them anywhere.

So the worldly man is not committing as great a mistake as a so-called spiritual man. What the man of the world seeks is possible, whereas the quest of the spiritual man is in vain. A man who runs a shop in order to amass wealth is seeking the possible, whereas a man sitting in the forest in quest of God seeks the impossible.

In fact, God cannot be sought. When all quest stops, he is found to be present, here and now. Because of the quest he cannot be seen. When a man runs fast in search of something, he fails to notice things around him and, so, passes by the very thing he is looking for. A man travelling in a bullock-cart has enough opportunity to observe things around him, but, when a man travels in a plane all details are lost. He cannot see flowers, he cannot see birds, he can only see clusters where trees are. If a man travels in a rocket, even the jungles are lost. Nothing can be seen. Speed blinds the vision. As the momentum of desires increases, we become more and more blind. The dust that is raised does not allow us to see anything.

That which we seek is only visible when there is no dust, no smoke in our eyes. The mind should be so relaxed that there is not the slightest stir, not a single ripple. Everything should be silent, serene. The mind should be as tranquil as a lake. Then, that very moment, we see His rejection in the silent waters.

Lao Tzu says: desire is the world. Therefore, no desire can be spiritual. Those who paint their desires with spirituality deceive themselves. The worldly man can be forgiven, but the so-called spiritual man cannot be forgiven for he has applied a carnal rule to God. Desire, greed, are all carnal desires. And the aim is God!

We cannot point the mundane world in the direction of God. We cannot turn our corporeal tendencies towards the spiritual. When worldly tendencies are annihilated, what remains is spiritual.

Question 3

LAO TZU HAS TALKED ABOUT PURE, ABSOLUTE TRUTH AND HAS LOOKED UPON ALL CONCEPTIONS AS THE ONLY BARRIER THAT PREVENTS MAN FROM ENTERING HIS NATURE. FROM THIS ARE WE TO ASSUME THAT RELIGION AND TRUTH ARE BEYOND THE CAPABILITIES OF AN ORDINARY PERSON? WILL THE EMBRACING OF THE SIMPLE, NATURAL SELF AS DESCRIBED BY LAO TZU -- REMAIN A RARE ATTAINMENT?

It is not beyond the reach of the ordinary man. It is unattainable only by those who consider themselves non-ordinary. An ordinary man is a rare phenomenon. Everyone is non-ordinary. Ask each person you meet -- all are non-ordinary. Have you ever met a person who is ordinary? Even if a person says he is ordinary, he will claim to be very, very ordinary. In other words, I am non-ordinary even among the most ordinary.

Lao Tzu says: "Become ordinary and you shall attain. Your non-ordinariness is your only hurdle." What is our non-ordinariness?

Some men earn wealth in order to be extraordinary. Some one renounces in order to be extraordinary. Our extraordinariness depends entirely on our doing. The more a person does, the more extraordinary he becomes. Lao Tzu says: "All is attained by non-doing." Therefore the extraordinary never attain, because "extraordinary" means one who has attained something, done something.

But it is next to impossible to find an ordinary man. Every person, whether he says it or not, whether he shows it nor not, believes himself to be the centre of everything. He considers himself to be the exception and not the rule. He takes himself to be the peak and is always working with that assumption. Some attain a certain amount of success and feel happy. Others do not and are filled with despair and inferiority.

Question 4

ONE FRIEND ASKS: HOW IS AN INFERIORITY COMPLEX CREATED?

An inferiority complex comes about when you consider yourself to be the greatest but fail to prove yourself. You assume that you are the centre of the world, but cannot prove this by your actions. Inferiority enters the minds of those who aspire to be the very best.

This may seem contradictory, but that is how we have made our lives. If we have to state a straight and simple fact, we have to use the language of contrariness. One who sets out to assert his superiority develops the feeling of inferiority. He begins to feel that he is nothing. He believes himself to be very capable but fails to prove it in actuality. Then remorse and anguish follow.

Question 5

ONE FRIEND ASKS: WE HAVE NO SELF-CONFIDENCE. HOW SHALL WE CREATE IT WITHIN OURSELVES?

Do not create self-confidence. What does it mean to create self-confidence? It means you want to claim that you are something and you want to prove it. It means you consider yourself not ordinary. You want to prove your extraordinariness.

All mad people are self-confident. It is difficult to shake their confidence in themselves. If a mad person takes it into his head that he is Napoleon, all the world cannot persuade him to the contrary. He is convinced within his mind.

I ask you what is the need for self-confidence? Why are you so worried about it? Perhaps you feel the other person is more successful; perhaps he is more self-confident. Your contemporary earns more than you, or perhaps he has made headway in business or politics. You feel you have lagged behind. You feel it is because of the lack of self-confidence. Hence the urge.

To worry about self-confidence means you are comparing yourself with others. Hence the distress. You are you, the other is the other. Had you been alone in the world, would you have felt this disparity? Would you have felt this inferiority complex? No, you would have been an ordinary person. And "ordinary" means you would not have even been conscious of your ordinariness. You would have just been. He who is conscious of his ordinariness has taken a step towards being non-ordinary. That you are is enough. Self-confidence is not necessary; the self is enough. You are! Why do you compare yourself with others?

All kinds of troubles start once you begin to see yourself vis-a-vis others. Someone will have a better nose than you, someone will have better eyes than you, someone will be taller, someone wealthier -- all kinds of frustrations start. As many people as you meet, that's how many inferiority complexes will form within you?

You consider yourself to be the best. This causes problems. You feel yourself to be the highest peak and each person you meet makes you aware of the depth of the abyss within you. The tension created by these two feelings within you is the illness that man suffers from. This is the scourge that destroys man, kills him, makes him rotten through and through. Why compare yourself with others.

Someone went up to Bokoju and said: "You are serene, I am not. How can I become like you?" Bokoju said, "Had I also questioned this, I would never become tranquil. I have only one device: I have never wanted to be like anybody else. I am as I am. You are as you are. I have never wished otherwise."

The man said, "I do not want high philosophy. Show me a simple way. How can I attain your serenity?"

Bokoju told him to wait till the others left. People came and went. It became evening and the man became restless. Bokoju took him behind his house and, pointing to two trees, he said. "Do you see these two trees? One is big, the other is small. It is years that they have been there but I have never heard the smaller tree asking the bigger tree how it too can become big! Everything is at peace here. The big tree is big, the small tree is small."

"Only human beings think about these things," said Bokoju. "The rest of creation is not aware of this distinction, of smallness and bigness. The big do not know they are big. the small do not know they are small. Hence the peace, the quiet. There is no argument, no struggle, no confusion. I am I. You are you. Give up the idea of becoming like others."

The man said, "How can I drop this thought? I am so restless."

Bokoju said, "I am showing you the cause of your restlessness. He who compares himself with others is bound to be restless."

Lao Tzu says: "Accept yourself. Non-acceptance is the root of all the trouble." None of us accept ourselves. The more a person doesn't accept himself, the greater a mahatma he looks to others to be. We are our greatest enemy. If we had our way, we would cut ourselves to pieces in order to remove what was unacceptable.

We all accept the other and not our own self. If we could look within others we would find that they also do not accept themselves. They, in their turn, accept the other. If we were to look into the mind of each person, we should find the same illness -- non-acceptance of one's own self.

He who accepts himself is free from all illness. Where there is no comparison, where is the inferiority? Where is the lowliness and where is the superiority? Then who is ordinary and who extraordinary?

It is good that we compare ourselves with human beings only. Otherwise anything would be capable of giving us an inferiority complex. If a flower bloomed, we would lament that no flower has bloomed within us. If the moon came out, we would wail that we do not have such light on our faces. If a butterfly flew by, we would envy its colours. If a deer ran past we would envy its swiftness. Even the stones by the roadside would fill us with envy.

Compare, and you will become inferior. This is a double ailment: we consider ourselves to be the peak of excellence and then set out to compare. Thus we create two states of tension. In actuality, we see the abyss; and in our imagination, we see the peak. There is no common point between the two. Life breaks into bits between them.

Lao Tzu says: be ordinary. There is nothing better than that. Accept your ordinariness. Since childhood everyone around us has told us, "Be something. Be like this. Be like that." Parents, teachers, are all after us: "Will you remain just ordinary? Be exceptional! do something and show to the world."

Is it not strange that those who have done something to show to the world lie in their graves just like those who did nothing to show the world? Graves make no distinctions. What is the outcome of the work of these outstanding few? It has passed away like in a dream -- like a line drawn in water. Not a trace remains. But we want to do something significant because we consider it a quality.

Lao Tzu says: "Non-doing is a quality." This does not mean that you should do nothing. It does not mean not to earn your livelihood, not to work, not to move your limbs. Lao Tzu says: "Be fixed in non-doing." Let non-doing be your centre. Whatever you do should come out of your acceptance of non-doing and not out of your race for attainment. Then your desires will decline on their own. Your necessities will remain, but your desires will drop. Man's necessities are so few! Man's desires are limitless!

Lao Tzu says that if you live in your ordinary nature, you will do only that much which is enough for you. The birds and animals also do that much; they also do just enough for themselves. But they are not pained and harassed in their work. No bird or animal struggles to be something. All peacocks are the same, all parrots are the same. They eat, they drink, they sleep, they sing, they dance, they fly. No one is ordinary, no one is extraordinary. No one is small, no one is big. They also act, but there is no urgency in their actions; there is no mad competition.

Man alone is mad. His actions have become more than his relaxation. Why do we toil? So that we may rest sometime. But in the end we find we have not relaxed at all. And, ultimately, we die. Then what is our goal?

Diogenes was lying in the sand, resting. He was naked. Sikander (Alexander the Great) came to see him. When he saw Diogenes he said, "Such joy, such bliss! And yet I say, if there is anything I can do for you, please let me "

Diogenes said, "Please stand a little bit away, on the other side. You are obstructing the passage of the morning rays of the sun. What can more you do?"

Sikander was nonplussed, embarrassed. Still he thought he must do something for him. He said, "You do not know who I am. I am the great Sikander. Ask for something -- anything."

Diogenes said, "You were so kind as to step aside from the path of the rays. What can be greater than the fact that now there is no one between the sun and me?"

Diogenes was a man who believed in necessities and not superfluous things. His necessity was that Sikander should step aside. He lived like the birds. He lived in nature. Simply artlessly.

Diogenes asked Sikander, "What do you wish for?"

Sikander said, "I want to conquer the world."

Diogenes said, "What will you do then?"

Sikander said, "Then I will rest."

Diogenes laughed out loud. Sikander was puzzled. He asked him what was so funny. Diogenes said, "I too am resting! To conquer the world in order to rest? This I do not understand. If rest is the goal, I am already resting. You are mistaken, Sikander. Relaxation has nothing to do with conquering the world. You do not know the mathematical rule. Why should a person set out to conquer the world when all he wants to do is to rest? If it was necessary to do so, I would not be resting. And I tell you, you will never be able to rest. You are deceiving yourself that you will. You will die fighting."

And Sikander died that way.

We all think the same way. We think that if such and such conditions are fulfilled we will retire, we will rest. But even if all the conditions are fulfilled, you find that work has become a mad obsession. The result is that by the time your bed is made, you will have lost the ability to sleep. By the time you have gathered your food, hunger will no longer be there. To earn a living man sacrifices his hunger, and to earn a bed he sacrifices his sleep.

There are two types of wretched people in the world. There is one type who is hungry but has no food and there is a second type who has food but have no hunger. Bernard Shaw has said, "There are two classes in the world -- the haves and the have-nots." This is not correct. There are two classes: have-nots and have-nots. Some have food but no hunger; some have hunger but no food.

Remember, the more wretched is the one who has the food but not the capacity to eat it. Food is an external thing; hunger is internal. Food one can ask for, even steal. Hunger cannot be asked for, not can it be stolen. Something has died within this person while he was gathering resources in order to enjoy it. He sacrificed that which he meant to enjoy.

Man is constantly making this mistake. If man enters the realm of non-doing, passivity, only the necessities will remain. The doing, the activity, will not be lost but will remain in proportion to the need. The man who has known this state of passivity within himself becomes an ordinary man. He no longer aspires to be Napoleon or Hitler, a Mahavira or a Buddha. He does not aspire to be anyone but himself. What he is, is enough.

When Martin Luther died he said, "I am going to meet God. All my life I strove to be Christ. Now it occurs to me, God will not ask me why I did not become Jesus Christ. He will ask me, 'Why could you not be

Martin Luther?' He will ask me why I wasted my life being what I could not be rather than being what I could be."

God will not question anyone about why they did not become a Buddha, a Mahavira, a Christ. He will only want to know why you could not be what you could be. But this is the trouble; we try to be what we cannot be and do not give a thought to what we can be. Thus we miss life, we miss the opportunity life offers us. Then we are filled with an inferiority complex. We are filled with despondency, gloom and sorrow. Then life becomes a burden and not a dance of joy.

Lao Tzu says: "A life that is filled with dance -- is a natural life." When he says "dance", he does not mean you should become a dancer like Nijinsky or Udaya Shankar. It is enough that you can dance with joy. Whatever the dance, however badly performed, it should be authentic; it should be yours. You need not be a great singer like Tansen, but the melody that comes out of you should be yours, and yours alone. Then it does not matter if there is no rhythm, no poetry. There is only one demand that existence makes: that it should rise from your heart.

The bliss of God showers on the person who is authentically and honestly his own self.

Lao Tzu is not at all concerned with the extraordinary man. In other religious traditions, the extraordinary is valued very highly. Lao Tzu values the ordinary man. "Be as if you are not. Why should anyone even know of you?" he asks.

Lao Tzu says: "You are meaningful in yourself. Your purpose is in your very self". That you are is enough to show that God has accepted you. That you are is enough to show that God stands behind you, just as much as he stood behind Buddha or Lao Tzu. He has given you the same number of breaths he gave them, the same number of heart-beats. He is partial to none. The sun shines as much on you as it shone on them. The winds go past as freely. All existence accepts you as it accepted Buddha or Lao Tzu.

But when you do not accept yourself, what can existence do?

Lao Tzu says: all talk of ordinary and non-ordinary is pure babble. All comparisons are meaningless. There are variations in the world, but no qualifications. Understand this well.

Nothing is superior and nothing is inferior. There are variations. Buddha is different from you. If he has bloomed like a flower it is because there were never any comparisons in his mind. He did not strive to be above anyone or below anyone. The other did not exist in his vision. He opened himself to the whole world.

Your trouble is that you compare yourself with Buddha, Mahavira, Christ, and Krishna. Your efforts are all towards becoming something or someone that you are not. This is hell itself. To strive to be what one is, is heaven. The day the thought of being something else is destroyed and only the thought of being as you are remains, that day becomes the day of liberation.

Lao Tzu is very much in favour of the ordinary man. He is in favour of attributeless man, a nobody.

Question 6

ONE FRIEND HAS ASKED: OUR EDUCATION, OUR CULTURE, OUR TRADITION, BECOME A COVERING OVER OUR NATURE. IS THERE NO TRAINING WHICH DOES NOT COVER OUR NATURE BUT CAN BECOME A HELP TO OUR NATURE?

Education means that which is given from without, that which is given by someone else. Impressions are that which have been given by others. Therefore all education, all impressions, become a covering on one's nature in an intrinsic way. The only thing that can be possible is that some coverings are complex, more solid, and some are less. Some are hard like iron, others are like the air. But they are coverings all right. Understand this well.

Education is necessary for the world. If you have to live in the world, run after desires, be ambitious, then you must be active; then education is necessary. Education, teaches you how to be active. The more educated a person, the more active he is and the more successful in the world. The less educated a person, the less active he is. Education is the technology of activity.

But to go within one's own nature does not require any education. On the contrary, we need the courage to leave all that we have learned behind. This is an inevitable condition.

Lao Tzu says that clothes cover the nakedness of a person. We can ask if there are clothes that do not hide the nakedness of man. Clothes will hide maybe more and maybe less but clothes cover the body. Clothes can be transparent. Then they will hide the least. Yet they will hide. If a person wishes to be nude, he has to remove his clothes. However transparent the clothes, they have to be removed. Then only the nakedness is revealed.

Nature is our intrinsic nakedness. Culture, past impressions, education, are our clothing. These clothes hide our nature. Ultimately they become so indispensable that we forget that we have a being besides the clothes. This is not only true of our inner being; it is equally true about our outer self. If we were to come upon ourselves suddenly, without clothes, we would not be able to recognise ourselves. We know ourselves only by our clothes.

Those who were detained in concentration camps by the Germans underwent a strange experience. One Jew is psychologist by the name of Frankel was captured by the Nazis and placed in a concentration camp with 500 other Jews from his village. All these people knew each other since they had lived in the same place. The first thing the Nazis did was to take away all their belongings, even their spectacles and wrist-watches, and also the clothes they wore. They were all then completely shaven. Frankel says, "It was impossible to make out who was who. When I stood before the mirror in my utter nakedness, my head shaven, I could not believe it was me."

Your own identification with yourself is through your clothes. If we make a magistrate and a thief stand naked side by side, it would be impossible to distinguish the judge from the thief. It is quite possible that the thief may stand erect while the magistrate cowers. Then the magistrate will be bereft of all his dignity. That is why, clothes are so valuable to us. Snatch away a king's robes and you snatch everything he has away from him.

If this was restricted to our outer selves it would have been all right. But within us also, it is the same. The clothes within are very fine, very subtle. We are not aware of them.

Take, for instance education. If all your learning was taken away from you, what would be the difference between you and your servant? You have spent a few years in college, he has not. This has brought all the difference between you two. You are educated: he is uncultured; Wherever you go, people will greet you, wherever he passes, no one even looks at him.

Have you ever noticed that when a guest comes to your house, you feel someone has come; but when a servant comes you do not feel as if someone has come. You do not consider a servant to be a human being. What is the difference between him and you, as human beings? Is it only this: that you have been to school, that the clothes you wear are a little more expensive? You have hidden your nakedness with expensive garments. He has hidden his with ragged clothes.

Lao Tzu says: "All teachings create coverings on the atman within, on the nature within." All past impressions obscure that which I am. Only when these impressions are lifted can a man know his own self.

There are teachings which smother the self so badly that it is difficult to get rid of them but there are other teachings which you can be taught that can be removed on the slightest provocation. Such a tradition, such a teaching, which is not a burden on the self and which can be removed at a moment's notice, is a religious teaching. Those teachings that cling to the atman like the skin clings to the body, and which are impossible to remove, are irreligious teachings. A religious teaching is that which also shows you the way to be rid of it. Religious teachings give you an education and also give you the means to be rid of this education. All impressions bind us. Only those that can also free us from themselves are religious impressions.

Question 7

ONE FRIEND ASKS: THE REVELATION OF THE SELF IS NOT POSSIBLE BY STARTING THE INWARD JOURNEY WITH PRECONCEPTIONS. PLEASE EXPLAIN WHETHER THE TENDENCY TOWARDS SELF-KNOWLEDGE IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT PRECONCEPTIONS. IS NOT THE BASIC CAUSE OF INQUIRY THE PRE-KNOWLEDGE OF THE OBJECTIVE WORLD?

The question is filled with preconceptions. Our friend says it is not possible to go within oneself without some previous conceptions. Now this is taken for granted. Has our friend gone within and found out? If we start with this idea, the idea itself will become the hindrance and it will be impossible to go within; for then the thought arises: "Why labour for that which cannot be?"

To be conceptless is to keep the mind open, without knowing anything. Make no decisions that it is possible or not possible. Experience, and let the decision follow the experience. If you decide beforehand, the scientificness of the method is lost. Then the mind will strive to prove only that which you have taken for granted. We always tend to prove what we believe, for that alone satisfies the mind.

One friend came and told me: "When you speak on the Gita, I feel very happy; but when you speak on Lao Tzu, I do not feel happy. Rather, I become restless."

The Gita pleases because the Gita is an acknowledged subject. The happiness comes from knowing that I am saying just what he knows. The mind finds peace because the ego is strengthened with yet another brick. The house of the ego has been extended. But if I find that by hearing something one brick of the ego has come off and there is a crack in the foundation, then I am bound to worry. We are not on a quest for truth. The quest comes from our mind. Our mind should prove correct. All the Mahaviras and Buddhas should stand witness to it, and say, "You are absolutely right!" Then the mind becomes very happy.

But these people -- Mahavira, Buddha, Christ, Krishna -- they are troublesome people. They are not in the least worried about you. What is right is right. It does not matter if you are destroyed in the bargain. But remember, their compassion is boundless. If they were to humour you and say you are right, you will always remain an ill person. Your malady will increase if it is corroborated. Whenever you decide upon a concept, the quest of truth ends then and there. To proceed towards truth you have to be completely unbiased.

Our friend has further said, "If we do not believe that there is an atman within, how can the inclination to go within develop?"

He thinks that curiosity is aroused when we know there is something. But curiosity can also be that there may be something, there may not be something. If you were to pass outside this room would you be curious to know what is inside the room without pre-knowledge? The truth is, if you know already what is within the room, there will be no need of curiosity. The greater the belief, the lesser is the inquiry and if your faith is complete, inquiry is not necessary at all.

If you already know, if Mahavira or Buddha have done the spadework and declared that the atman is, where is the need, for you to exert yourself? And once it is known, the matter finishes there. Then you utilise your time in something else. So, you are not at all aware of what is within. There is total darkness, nothing is recognisable. Boundless darkness -- and what is within? Is there death? Is there immortality or simply emptiness? Is there someone, or is there not someone? Then .inquiry is born.

Inquiry, curiosity, means where you stand in awe and you do not know anything. Where there are concepts you are not awestruck for you know already. Perfect inquiry happens only when concepts are completely absent. Inquiry will always be proportionate to the preconceptions. So children are of a more inquiring mind than old men.

Children often ask questions that older people cannot answer. Children have an inquiring mind because they have no concepts. Older people have lost all tendency to inquire because they are filled to the brim with preconceived notions. The child and the old man live in the same world: when the sun comes out in the morning, the child is filled with awe -- where has it come from? what is it? When the flowers bloom the child is mystified. Nothing moves the old man, nothing inspires him. And when the child asks -- for ask he must -- the old man discourages him. The reason is that he still does not know, and does not care -- his curiosity is dead.

This child, in turn, will give the same discouraging reply to his son: "You will know when you grow up." But what do grown-ups know except the fact that their sense of curiosity is dead? They bind themselves laden with readymade answers, but they do not have a single question to ask.

If the body gets old with age that is only natural but the atman becoming old with age is a very sad happening. Nothing is more beautiful in this world than a young, childlike inquiring atman within an old body. Then the within is as fresh as the morning dew and life is rich with experiences. Experiences have not gathered within like rubbish, nor have old concepts gathered like dust on the self. Then the child twinkles in the old man's eyes. When a person has the experiences of life and the curiosity of a child, he is nearest to truth.

But our trouble is that we think if we know nothing beforehand, where is the sense in searching?

The meaning of search is that we set out to discover. to know that of which we knew nothing. It is because we know nothing that we set out to know. Conceptions are the death of the self. They are ways of escaping from the truth.

This friend asks: "Is not pre-knowledge the fundamental cause for curiosity?" If there is pre-knowledge, inquiry is foolish.

How can knowledge exist before knowledge? When knowledge is, it is. Then all inquiry ends. The real danger is that without knowledge it is possible to lose one's curiosity. This happens when we take the knowledge of others as our own. This we call prior knowledge. Mahavira says. "The atman is infinite valour, infinite bliss, infinite knowledge." And so on. This is his knowledge. But this is borrowed knowledge for us. What does it mean? It means that we have no knowledge, no experience of the atman, but we accept Mahavira's words.

How many people have accepted Mahavira's words? How many of these have actually set out in search, as Mahavira did? So many people believe in Buddha, but who seeks like Buddha did? It is God's good grace that Buddha did not come across some other Buddha to give him readymade knowledge. He searched himself and found. Truth is attained when we seek ourselves. It is not so cheap that we can

buy it from others. Knowledge can be attained from others, but Lao Tzu tells us to shun all knowledge, all such wisdom, which is borrowed.

Question 8

IS SELF-KNOWLEDGE NOT BLISS-INCARNATE? IF IT IS, WHY DO YOU HESITATE TO ACKNOWLEDGE IT AS SUCH? THE SCRIPTURES HAVE CLEARLY STATED THAT THE ATMAN IS BLISS.

The scriptures may believe the atman to be bliss-incarnate. Those who have said so must have known. All who have known have known the atman to be bliss. But the danger starts when even those who do not know believe it to be so. The danger is not for those who have known but for those who have only heard. You also have heard and believed. You neither know what bliss is nor what bliss-incarnate is. Nor do you know what the atman is. It is only that the word "bliss-incarnate" is very pleasing to the mind.

You have known pain, you have had a glimpse of joy. but you have no glimpse of bliss. So when you are told that the atman is bliss-incarnate, you feel it must be joy, an abundance of joy, everlasting joy -- something like that. For you, anand (bliss) means only an expansion of joy -- condensed happiness, never ending. But bliss is related to joy as much as it is related to sorrow, in that it is related to neither.

You have no knowledge of the atman and no knowledge of bliss, but continuous hearing makes you feel that the atman is bliss. By merely saying that the atman is bliss, nothing happens.

Lao Tzu does not say that the atman is not bliss. He only says, "We shall say nothing about the atman. Go and discover for yourself. We can only show you how to go. We shall not say what you will find there because you are such clever and cunning people that you will make no effort to go within. You will merely keep repeating, "The atman is bliss, the atman is bliss; and hypnotize yourselves into forgetting completely that you have not set out to find it, that you know nothing about it."

What is truth? Any answer to this is only words. You hear words and not truth. Constant repetition makes you acquainted with more and more wonders. Known words are dangerous.

There is a custom among the Jews, and it is a very valuable custom -- not to take the name of God. They call God "Jehovah" which means: he who has no name. This is only to guard against the fact that constant repetition may bring about the illusion of knowing. This word "Jehovah" is also not to be used otherwise it would also become a name.

There are many difficulties for man. Those who understand these difficulties will not tell you what the atman is. They will only tell you how you can go towards it. Where is the sense in talking to a blind man about sight? It is enough to discuss and investigate the possibilities of his regaining his eye-sight. The danger is that if you talk to a blind man about light, he listens. His ears are sharper than ours. His memory is also more sharp. The energy that would have been normally used by the eyes to see is

diverted to the ears, to the brain; they become more active. He will also hear and remember all he hears about the atman. His remembrance strengthens day by day till he forgets he is blind, that he has not seen light, that he has no direct knowledge of it.

Those with sight say, "Light is like this." Likewise, our friend says: "The scriptures say." What has one man's eyes to do with a blind man? He cannot lend them to him. What he needs is his own eyes. But the blind also learn their lesson by heart. That is why Lao Tzu refuses to discuss the atman. He only shows us how to improve our sight. Once the sight is restored that is enough.

Question 9

ONE FRIEND ASKS: WHY SHOULD WE BE RELIGIOUS WHEN WE DO NOT KNOW THE BEGINNING, WHEN WE DO NOT KNOW THE END; WHEN WE HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD OR ATMAN? WHY CAN'T A BUDDHA WHO EXPERIENCES THE TRUTH GIVE THIS EXPERIENCE TO ALL?

No one wants you to be religious -- at least Lao Tzu does not tell you to be. Religious people have created such confusion that it is better if they cease to exist. No one wants you to be religious.

Lao Tzu says only this: "Be what you are." You may ask, "Why should we be what we are?" The answer is that that is all you can be. There is no way of becoming something else. You may try to become something you are not, but you will simply be wasting your life.

Then you might say, "Why should we not waste our life?" Nobody can stop you from doing what you like. Buddhas also accept defeat. They cannot make you realise truth. What can sages do? All they can do is to tell you of the bliss they have attained; the peace, the enlightenment, that they have received. And in so doing, they can only hope to stimulate your thirst for the same. They cannot give you enlightenment on a platter, but can make you interested in it. You may ask why they attempt to arouse your thirst. Try to understand this a little.

If you do not wish to be religious, how is it that you are here. How come you have raised this question? There is a restlessness within that has brought you here. You took so much trouble to raise this question! One thing is certain -- you are seeking something. Otherwise why did you come? Why did you ask this question?

There is some quest. What is it you seek? Buddha calls it dharma, Lao Tzu has named it Tao. Whether you know it or not, you are seeking religion. You do not even know what you seek. Investigate within. What are your expectations, what is your search? We do not even know who we are, why we are, for what reason! It seems as if we have been thrown into this world without any rhyme or reason.

There is a turmoil within you. This restlessness will not end till you experience your roots within this existence. Till we realise the relationship between the existence and ourselves, this restlessness will plague us. What other meaning can there be of being religious?

There is no need of indulging in words. To be religious means to be conscious of the relationship between the existence and myself, to establish a connection with the vast universe so that I am no longer a stranger in this world, no longer a foreigner. The whole world is one large family, a family in which the sun and moon and stars, the rivers and the mountains, the animals and trees -- all! all! -- are equal members. It is to know that "I am in my own house." To be religious is to feel that this world is your house.

But a house is not a home. Houses there are in plenty. When a spiritual bond exists between you and the house, when there is a spiritual union, then a house becomes a home. The irreligious man lives in the mundane world; the religious man in God. A deep relationship is established between the religious man and the world. Everything in the world brings forth sweet melodies on the strings of his heart. Then the sun no longer is a stranger to him, nor the moon, nor the stars. Everything seems to be his very own. The whole vast expanse is his home. This feeling is religiousness.

If you are seeking a family, if you are seeking love, then you are seeking religion. When you fall in love with a person, you make one person religious in this world. The larger the family, the greater the joy.

There are some people who are their own family. They have no relationships. If such people begin to feel like outsiders, where is the wonder? Colin Wilson has written a book called THE OUTSIDER. This book is a symbol of the world today. In this age, every man feels he is a stranger. He wonders why he is, what is his relationship to the world. Who is his, and to whom does he belong? There seems to be no connection. Man feels uprooted like a tree that has been pulled out from its roots. He is in limbo.

A religious person is one who sets out to seek his roots. Simone Weil has written a book -- 'THE NEED FOR ROOTS'. She is one of the few religious people of this age. She has said, "Religion is the search for roots." This uprooted tree, hanging in mid-air, wasting and withering away, has to be rooted firmly back into the ground. Then only will it become green once more; then only will it flower again.

To be religious is to seek one's own self. The quest for a bridge, for a connection between the universe and ourselves, is religion. Religion is to seek the deep, intrinsic love between ourselves and the universe.

I am not telling you to become religious. I only say that there is not a single person alive on this earth who does not want to be religious. Even if he denies religion, he is seeking it. Each man seeks religion; what words he uses for his quest are his own choice. What form he gives to his desire is his own business. I can tell you with authority, I have not come across a single person who has not wanted to be religious.

Those whom we call atheists, they too are in search. In fact, this alone is man's search. He is eager to know whether he is an incongruous, useless part of the world or whether he is of some significance. Is his being of some value to the vast expanse? The search for value is the search for religion.

Value, not price. If there is a value to your bring, it means that the world has developed from within you, the enormous current of consciousness has evolved from within you. This whole universe loves you; it would be incomplete without you. It would never have been the same; something would have been missing. There is a profound flow of give and take between you and the universe. Each moment it takes from you; each moment it gives to you. There is a deep, inner union. The quest for this inner union is religion.

I am not telling you to be religious. No one becomes religious this way. In fact, the irreligiousness of today is the outcome of the constant effort of the moralists to make people religious.

Charles Darwin has written about a confounding experience he carried out. He had read that there are certain things which, when tried for a particular result, bring about the opposite consequence. He was a man of science. He found it impossible to believe without proof.

He called ten youths from his neighbourhood and placed a snuff-inhaler before them. He asked them whether they knew the effects of snuff. They all said, "Yes. We know that when it is inhaled it brings about a torrent of sneezes."

"Very well," said Darwin. "I will place ten gold coins here. Whoever sneezes first will get the gold coins." The ten boys tried their utmost; the prize was tempting. But not a single one could sneeze no matter how hard he tried!

You also will not succeed. Try to sneeze -- you cannot. Sneezing happens; it cannot be brought about.

You can be religious, but nobody can make you religious. That is why religious teachers all over the world have made this earth irreligious. They have tried to tempt their followers. But everything has its own mechanism. There are things which can happen only in the most natural conditions; they cannot be made to happen.

Therefore, Lao Tzu stresses the natural. He says the absolute truth is revealed only in a natural state. The more simple and natural you become, the quicker will you be able to manage the jump. The harder you try to bring it about, the more impossible it will be.