



Religious Gathekas

by

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Table of Contents

1	The Religion of the Heart	5
2	The Belief in God	6
3	Religion	7
4	The Manner of Prayer	8
5	The Present Need of the World for Religion	9
6	“Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”	10
7	Religion: Universality or Exclusivity?	11
8	Humility in prayer	12
9	The Need for Prayer.....	13
10	The Prophet.....	13
11	How the Wise Live in the World (1).....	15
12	How the Wise Live in the World (2).....	16
13	The Christ Spirit	17
14	The Sufi Form of Worship.....	20
15	Degrees in the Spiritual Hierarchy	21
16	Stages in Following the Message	21
17	The Message of Unity	22
18	The Coming World Religion (1).....	24
19	The coming world religion (2).....	26
20	The Purpose of All Beings.....	27
21	Christ.....	29
22	Buddha.....	31
23	Krishna.....	32
24	Zarathustra.....	33
25	Rama.....	34
26	Abraham.....	35
27	Mohammed.....	36
28	Is Sufism a Religion?.....	38
29	The Religion of All Prophets (1).....	38
30	The Religion of All Prophets (2).....	39
31	The God Ideal (1).....	39
32	The God Ideal (2).....	41
33	Moses.....	43
34	The Universal Worship (1).....	44
35	The Universal Worship (2).....	45
36	The Religion of All Prophets (3).....	45
37	The Universal Worship (3).....	46
38	The Idea of Sacredness	47
39	The Universal Worship (4).....	48
40	Attaining the Inner Life Through Religion.....	49
41	The Kingship of God.....	51
42	Belief and Disbelief in God	53

Religious Gatheka 1

The Religion of the Heart

If anybody asks you, "What is Sufism? What religion is it?," you may answer, "Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which the most important thing is to seek God in the heart of mankind."

There are three ways of seeking God in the human heart. The first way is to recognize God the divine in every person and to care for every person with whom we come in contact, in our thought, speech, and action. Human personality is very delicate. The more living the heart the more sensitive it is; that which causes sensitivity is the love element in the heart, and love is God. The person whose heart is not sensitive is without feeling; his heart is not living, but dead. In that case the divine spirit is buried in his heart.

A person who is always concerned with his own feelings is so absorbed in himself that he has no time to think of another. His whole attention is taken up with his own feelings: he pities himself, worries about his own pain, and is never open to sympathize with others. He who takes notice of the feeling of another person with whom he comes in contact practices the first essential moral of Sufism.

The next way of practicing this religion is to think of the feeling of the person who is not at the moment before us. One feels for a person who is present, but one often neglects to feel for someone who is out of sight. One speaks well of someone to his face, but if one speaks well of someone when he is absent, that is greater. One sympathizes with the trouble of someone who is before one at the moment, but it is greater to sympathize with one who is far away.

The third way of realizing the Sufi principle is to recognize in one's own feeling the feeling of God and to realize every impulse that rises in one's heart as a direction from God. Realizing that love is a divine spark in one's heart, one blows that spark until a flame may rise to illuminate the path of one's life.

The symbol of the Sufi Order, which is a heart with wings, is symbolic of its ideal. The heart is both earthly and heavenly. The heart is a receptacle on earth of the divine spirit, and when it holds the divine spirit it soars heavenward; the wings picture its rising. The crescent in the heart symbolizes responsiveness; it is the heart that responds to the spirit of God that rises. The crescent is a symbol of responsiveness because it grows fuller by responding more and more to the sun as it progresses. The light one sees in the crescent is the light of the sun. It gets more light with increasing response, so it becomes fuller of the light of the sun. The star in the heart of the crescent represents the divine spark reflected in the human heart as love, which helps the crescent toward its fullness.

The Sufi Message is the message of the day. It does not bring theories or doctrines to add to those already existing, which puzzle the human mind. What the world needs today is the message of love, harmony, and beauty, the absence of which is the only tragedy of life. The Sufi Message does not give a new law. It awakens in humanity the spirit of brotherhood, with tolerance on the part of each for the religion of the other, and with forgiveness from each for the fault of the other. It teaches thoughtfulness and consideration, so as to create and maintain harmony in life; it teaches service and usefulness, which alone can make life in the world fruitful and in which lies the satisfaction of every soul.

Religious Gatheka 2

The Belief in God

It is the spirit of all souls which is personified in all ages as God. There are periods when this spirit is materialized in the faith of humanity and worshipped as God, the Sovereign and the Lord of both the worlds, as Judge, Sustainer, and Forgiver; but there are periods when this realization has been less in humanity, when mankind has been absorbed in the life of the world more than in the spiritual ideal. The belief in God comes to humanity like tides in the sea. Every now and then it appears on the surface, usually with a divine message given as an answer to the cry of humanity at a certain period.

So in the lives of individuals at times the belief in God comes as tides, with an impulse to worship, to serve God, to search for God, to love God, and to long for God-communication. The more the material life of the world is before one's eyes, the more the spiritual impulse is closed. The spiritual impulse therefore follows times of sorrow and of disappointment through life.

The belief in God is natural, but in life both art and nature are necessary. So God, who exists independent of our making Him, must be made by us for our own comprehension. To make God intelligible man must first make his God. It is on this principle that the idea of many gods and the custom of idol worship were based in the ancient religions of the world. God cannot be two. The God of each is the God of all, but in order to comprehend that God we each have to make our own God. Some of us seek justice; we can seek for God who is just. Some of us look for beauty; we must find it in the God of beauty. Some of us seek for love; we must find it in the God of mercy and compassion. Some of us wish for strength and power; we must find it in the God almighty. The seeking of every soul in this world is different, distinct, and peculiar to himself, and he can best attain to it by finding the object of his search in God.

The moment one arrives at this belief, one need ask no question of his fellow man, for the answer to every question that springs from his mind he finds in his own heart. The dwelling place of God, which is called heaven, is then found in his own heart. The friend on whom one can constantly depend, someone whom one can always trust, someone whose sympathy and love are secure, someone who will never fail, someone who is strong enough to help, someone who is sufficiently wise to guide one in life, the believer will find in his own heart.

Those who because of their materialistic view cannot believe in the God ideal lose a great deal in their lives. That ideal which is the highest and best ideal, the only ideal worth loving, worth worshipping, worth longing for, worth and through the darkness of night, is God. He who has God in his life has all he needs; he who has not God, though he may have all things of this mortal world, is lonely. He is in the wilderness even if he be in the midst of the crowd. The journey of the Sufi, therefore, is to God. It is divine knowledge which he seeks; it is the realization of God-consciousness which is his goal.

Religious Gatheka 3

Religion

In the ancient Sanskrit language the word for religion is dharma, which means duty. Now, there are two things in the world, one of which we may describe as free choice of action and the other as duty. Everybody follows either the way of free choice or the way of duty. As an example we may think of the child who sees the fire and wants to touch it. This action will show a certain disagreeable result, which teaches the child. This teaching might also have come to the child as a warning from the parents, telling the child that the result of the action would be burning. The child might thus refrain from the action for the reason that it accepted the warning of the parents before burning its hand.

Every child is born in life a pupil, one who is willing to learn and willing to believe. As the Prophet Mohammed says, "Every soul is born on earth a believer; it is only afterwards that he turns into an unbeliever." It is certain that if one had not been born a believer one would never have learned the language of one's country, because if anyone had tried to teach the words and one had refused to accept the teaching as true, one would never have learned the names and character of things. For instance, if it were said, "This is water," and one had not believed it, and had thought, "It is fruit," then one would never really have known what was water and what fruit. A child is born with the tendency to believe and learn what it is taught.

The divine life has a certain capability to give life, and it gives this life as teaching to the children of earth. This teaching is called dharma or religion. Religions are many and different from one another, but only in form. Water is one and the same formless element, only it takes the shape of the channel which holds it and which it uses for its accommodation. Thus the name water is changed into river, lake, sea, stream, pond, etc. So it is with religion; the essential truth is one, but the aspects are different. Those who fight about external forms will always fight, those who recognize the inner truth will not disagree, and thus will be able to harmonize people of all religions.

Dharma has been given from time to time to the world, sometimes quietly, and sometimes in a loud voice. It is a continual outpouring of the inner knowledge of life and of divine blessing. Those who stick to their old forms, closing their eyes to the inner truth, paralyze their dharma by holding onto an old form while refusing the present stream that is sent. As life is the cause of activity, so such persons lose their activity; they remain where they are and are as dead. And when man has been thus paralyzed and shut out from further spiritual progress, he clings to outer forms which are not progressing.

There was a time when the message was given while people were wanting a messenger to come. During the time of Jesus Christ there were thousands and millions waiting for a messenger to come from above. The master came and did his service and went away. Some realized then, and some are still waiting. But the one who claimed to be alpha and omega is never absent; sometimes he appears on the surface and sometimes he is reserving himself.

When directed by the new spiritual inspiration, law, morals, education, and all departments of life come to new life. But if the spiritual current is lacking, there is no further progress in the forms of life. People mostly think that the spiritual message must be something concrete and definite in the way of doctrines or principles, but that is a human tendency which does not belong to the divine

nature, which is unlimited life itself. The divine message is the answer to the cry of souls, individually and collectively; the divine message is life and light. The sun does not teach anything, but in its light we learn to know all things. The sun does not cultivate the ground nor does it sow seed, but it helps the plant to grow, to flower, and to bear fruit. The Sufi message, in its utter infancy, strikes the note of the day and promises the fulfillment of that purpose for which, now and then, the blessing descends from above: for spreading love and peace on earth among men.

Religious Gatheka 4

The Manner of Prayer

There are three kinds among those who are in the habit of offering prayer. There is one who by praying fulfills a certain duty which he considers one among all the duties of life. He does not know to whom he is praying, perhaps to some God. If he is in a congregation he of necessity feels obliged to do as the others do. He is like one among the sheep who goes on without knowing where and why. Prayer to him is something he must do because he is put in a situation where he cannot help it. In order to fall in with the custom of the family or community, and in order to respect those around him, he does as everybody else. His prayer is mechanical, and if it makes any effect, it is very little.

The second kind of person who offers his prayers is the one who offers the prayers because he is told to do so. And yet he is confused whether there is any God and if his prayers are really heard. He may be praying and at the same time confusion may be going on in his mind: "Am I doing right or wrong?" If he is a busy man he might think, "Am I giving my time to something really profitable, or am I wasting it? I see no one before me; I hear no answer to my prayer." He does it because he was told by someone to do it or because it might bring him some good. His prayer is a prayer in the dark. The heart, which must be opened to God, is covered by his own doubt; and if he prayed in this way for a thousand years it would never be heard. It is this kind of soul who in the end loses his faith, especially when he meets with a disappointment and prays, because if his prayer is not answered that puts an end to his belief.

Then there is a third person, who has imagination strengthened by faith. He does not only pray to God but he prays before God and in the presence of God. Once the imagination has helped man to bring the presence of God before him, the God in his own heart is awakened. Then before he utters a word it is heard by God. When he is praying in a room he is not alone, he is there with God. Then God to him is not in the highest heaven but next to him, before him, and in him. Then heaven to him is on earth, and the earth for him is heaven. No one to him is then so living as God or so intelligible as God, and the names and forms before him are all covered under Him. Then every word of prayer he says is a living word. It not only brings him blessing, but also brings blessings to all those around him. It is this manner of prayer only which is the right way of prayer, and by this manner the object that is to be fulfilled by prayer is accomplished.

Religious Gatheka 5

The Present Need of the World for Religion

If one truly observes the present condition of humanity, no one with sense will deny that the world today needs the religion. I say the religion and not a religion because there are many religions existing today called a religion, but what is needed today is the religion. Must it be a new religion? If it were a new religion, it could not be called the religion; then it would be like many religions. I call the religion that religion which one can see by rising above the sects and differences which divide men. By understanding the religion, we shall understand all religions which may be called a religion.

I do not mean that all the religions are not religion; they are the notes. There is music, and that music is the religion. Every religion strikes a note which strikes the demand of humanity in a certain epoch. But at the same time, the source of every note is the same music which manifests when the notes are arranged together. In this way I want to explain that all the different religions are different notes, and when they are arranged together they make music. You may ask why at each epoch all the music was not given but only a single note? In answer I say that there are times in the life of an infant when a rattle is sufficient; for the violin another time in life comes.

During the times of the Chaldeans, Arabs, Romans, and Greeks, different religious ideals were brought. To the few music was brought; to the many only a note. Music has always existed, only man in general was not ready to grasp it and so was given only one note. Consequently the person given the C note and the person given the G note fought together, each saying, "The note given to us is the right note." There have always existed souls who said, "G is right," and others who said, "C is right." All are right notes, and when they are mixed together there is music.

This shows that there is an outer substance of religion which is the form and an inner essence which is wisdom. When wisdom has blessed the soul, then the soul has heard the divine music. Do the words of Christ, "I am alpha and omega," mean that it was only when he came as Jesus? No, that music belongs to alpha and omega, the first and the last. Those who tuned their hearts to listen to music and who elevated their souls high enough heard this divine music. But those who played with their rattle, their unique note, disputed one with the other. They would have refused a violin; they were not ready for it and would not have known how to use it.

Today the world is more starved for religion than ever before. What is the reason? The reason is that while some simple souls held to the faith of their ancestors with esteem, considering religion necessary in life, many souls, with intelligence and reason and understanding of life, rebelled against religion just as the child when grown up throws away his rattle because he is no longer interested in it.

So today religion remains in the hands of those who have kept it in its outer form out of devotion and loyalty to their ancestors' faith; those who are, so to speak, grown up in minds and spirit and want something better can find nothing. Their souls hunger for music, and when they ask for music they are given a rattle, and they throw away the rattle and say they do not care for music. Yet there is the inner yearning for music, the soul's music, and without it their life becomes empty. How few recognize this fact, and fewer still admit it. The psychological condition of humanity has become

such that a person with intelligence refuses music; he does not want music, he wants something, but he calls it by another name.

I will tell you my own experience in the western world. Traveling for ten years I have come in contact with people of intelligence, thinkers, and people of science, and in them I have seen the greatest yearning for the religious spirit. They are longing every moment of their life for it, for they find that with all their education and science there is some space empty in themselves, and they want it filled. At the same time if you speak of religion, they say, "No, no speak of something else, we do not want religion." This means they know only the rattle part of religion and not the violin part. They do not think anything different from a rattle exists, and yet there is a perplexity in them, a spiritual craving that is not answered even by all their learned and scientific pursuits.

Now therefore, what is needed today in this world is a reconciliation between the religious man and the one who runs away from religion. But what can we do when we see even in the Christian religion so many sects opposing one another. The Christians, the Muslims, the Buddhists, Jews, and many others, each considers their own religion and thinks the others are not worth thinking about. Now to me these different religions are like different organs of the body cut apart and thrown asunder. Therefore to me personally it seems as if one arm of the same person were cut off and rising to right the other; both are arms of the same person. When this person is complete and all these parts are brought together, then there is the religion.

Then what is the effort of the Sufi Order? To make a new religion? No, it is to bring together the different organs of the one body which is meant to be united and not thrown apart. Now you may ask what is our method? How do we work to bring about a reconciliation? By realizing for ourselves that the essence of all religion is one and that essence is wisdom, and by considering that wisdom to be our religion, whatever our own form.

The Sufi Order has persons belonging to many different faiths among its members. Do you think they have given up their own religion? No, on the contrary they are firmer in their own faith by understanding the faith of others. From the narrow point of view, fault may be found because they do not hate, mistrust, and criticize the religions of others. They have respect for the scriptures that millions of people hold sacred, though those scriptures do not belong to their own religion. They desire to study and appreciate other scriptures, to find that all wisdom comes from one source, both the wisdom of the East and of the West.

The Sufi Order is therefore not a sect; it can be anything but a sect. If it ever became one it would be quite contrary to the idea with which it has been begun, because its main idea is to remove the differences and distinctions which divide mankind. This ideal is attained by the realization of the one source of all human beings and the goal, which we all call God.

Religious Gatheka 6

"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

In the prayer of the Christian church there is a sentence, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This gives a great key to metaphysics. It gives a hint to the seer that His will, which is easily done in heaven, has difficulty being done on earth. Who stands against His will? Man. Where lies

the will of God? In the innermost being of man. And what stands as an obstacle? The surface of the heart of man. This means struggle in man himself. In him there is the will of God and in him there is an obstacle. In the sphere within him is the will of God, as in heaven; where there is an obstacle to it, that is the earth.

By this prayer man is prepared to remove the obstacle which stands before the will of God. How can we distinguish between these two aspects of will: the will of God and the obstacle, which is the will of man? It is easy for a person with a clear mind and open heart to distinguish, if he only knew the secret of it. For to that which is the will of God his whole being responds, and in doing His will his whole being becomes satisfied. When it is his own will, then only one side of his being is satisfied perhaps for a certain time, and then comes a conflict in himself. He himself finds fault with his idea or action; he himself feels dissatisfied with his own being. The wider the scope in which he sees his idea or his action the more dissatisfied he will become.

When in this manner, by the ray of intelligence, one sees life, one begins to distinguish between his own will and the will of God. The kingdom of God which is in heaven then comes on earth. It does not mean that it disappears from heaven, but it only means that heaven not only remains as a kingdom of heaven, but even earth becomes a kingdom of heaven. The purpose behind all creation is that heaven may be realized on the earth. If one does not realize it on earth, he cannot realize it in heaven.

One may ask what I mean by heaven. Heaven is that place where all is the choice of man and everything moves at his command. Heaven is the natural condition of life. When on earth life becomes so entangled that it loses its original harmony, heaven ceases to exist. The motive of the soul is to gain in life the kingdom of heaven which the soul has lost. Nothing one attains in life will give that satisfaction which can be attained by bringing heaven on earth.

Religious Gatheka 7

Religion: Universality or Exclusivity?

Is a certain religion an important thing or is living it an important thing? Perhaps a person belongs to the best religion in the world; he does not live it, but belongs to it. He says that he is a Muslim, or a Christian, or a Jew. He is sure it is the best religion, but at the same time he does not care to live it; he just belongs to it and thinks that belonging to a certain religion that is an accepted religion is all that is needed. People of all different religions have made it appear so, owing to their enthusiasm for their mission in life. They have made provisions for those who belong to their particular religion, saying that by the very fact of their belonging they will be saved on the Day of Judgment, while others with all their good actions will not be saved because they do not belong to that particular religion.

This is a manmade idea, not God-made. God is not the Father of one sect; God is the Father of the whole world, and all are entitled to be called his children, whether worthy or unworthy. In fact it is man's attitude toward God and truth which can bring him closer to God, which is the ideal of every soul. If this attitude is not developed, then whatever a man's religion be, he has failed to live it. Therefore what is important in life is to try to live the religion to which one belongs, or that one esteems, or that one believes to be one's religion.

One must always know that religion has a body and a soul, but if you touch the soul you touch all its bodies, which are like its organs. All the organs constitute one body, the body of the religion,

the religion of alpha and omega, which was and which is and which will always be. Therefore the dispute, "I am right and you are wrong," in the path of religion is not necessary. We do not know what is in the heart of man. If outwardly he seems to be a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, or a Buddhist, we are not the judge of his religion, for every soul has a religion peculiar to itself, and no one else is entitled to judge its religion.

A person who is highly evolved and whose outward conduct, which alone manifests to people's view, may appear altogether contrary to their own way of looking at things, may be accused of being a materialist or an unbeliever, or someone who is far from God and truth. Yet we do not know: sometimes appearances are merely illusions; behind them may be hidden the deepest religious devotion and the highest ideal, of which we know very little. For the Sufi, therefore, the best thing is to respect man and his belief, whatever it may be; his ideal, whatever it may be; and his way of looking at life, even if it be quite different from our own way. This spirit of tolerance, when developed, will bring about the brotherhood which is the essence of religion and the want of the day.

The idea: "You are different and I am different; your religion is different and my religion is different; your belief is different and my belief is different," will not unite but will only divide humanity. Those who, with the excuse of their great faith in their own religion, hurt the feelings of another and divine humanity—whose source and goal is the same—abuse religion, whatever be their faith.

The message, whenever and at whatever period it came to the world, did not come to a certain section of humanity; it did not come to raise only some few people who perhaps accepted the faith, the message, or a particular organized church. No, all these things came afterwards. The rain does not fall in a certain land only; the sun does not shine upon a certain country only. All that is from God is for all souls. If they are worthy, they deserve it as their reward; if they are unworthy, they are the more entitled to it. Verily blessing is for every soul; for every soul, whatever soul, whatever be his faith or belief, belongs to God.

Religious Gatheka 8

Humility in prayer

If we could only know the joy of asking pardon even of our fellowman, when we realize we are in fault, however little it may be! When we ask the Father of all to forgive our fault, joy, beauty, and happiness, spring up in the heart in a way unknown until it is experienced. To think we can ask pardon of Him whose love is unlimited, while our errors are numberless and our ignorance limitless! Think of the joy of asking forgiveness from God! Every moment of our life, if we can see wisely, contains some fault or error, and asking pardon is just like purifying the heart and washing it clean. Think of the joy of humbling yourself before God!

There is a story told of Akbar. He was mourning for the death of his mother, and for a long time his grief was so great he could not overcome it. His ministers and friends tried to comfort him, telling him how fortunate he was and how great was his influence and power. He answered, "Yes, I know it, but one thing grieves me. I have everyone to bow before me, but there was one, when I came into the palace, before whom I could be humble. I could be as nothing before her, and I cannot tell you the joy of that."

Religious Gathekas

Think then of the greater joy of humbling yourself before that spirit and that ideal who is the true Father and Mother, on whose love you can always depend. It is a spark of His love which expresses itself in the earthly father and mother. In whatever manner you humble yourself before Him, it can never be enough. To humble your limited self before His perfection is to deny yourself. Self-denial is not renouncing things; it is denying the self, and its first lesson is humility. The blessing one can receive by prayer becomes a thousandfold greater when it is received by some who are united in the same thought and are praying together.

Religious Gatheka 9

The Need for Prayer

Often mankind thinks, "Since God is the knower of the heart of every man, what does it matter if prayer is recited aloud and gesture or action is made? Would it not be sufficient if one sat in silence and thought of God?" The answer is that it is according to the extent of your consciousness of prayer that your prayer reaches God. If your body is silent and only your mind working, part of your being is praying and part is not, for you are constituted of both mind and body. Therefore, when the mind is praying the body must pray too, to make it complete. In reality God is within you, and as He is within you, you are the instrument of God, and through you God experiences the external world. You are the best instrument of conveying yourself to God. Therefore your thought, action, and word make prayer complete.

The next question is, "When God already knows what we want, what is good for us, and what we need, why should we ask Him for it?" For this I would quote Christ's words: "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you; ask, and ye shall receive." In other words, God knows your need and He knows what you want, but your want becomes clear when it is expressed not by the mind or the body only but by your whole being. That is the secret.

We question, "Why does God need praise from us? Who are we that we should praise God?" We can never praise Him enough, and our praise can never be sufficient, but at the same time our soul is blessed with the impression of the glory of God whenever we praise Him. The soul could praise God every moment and yet be wanting to praise Him more. It is constantly hungering and thirsting to find the perfection of beauty. When to our utmost we praise the beauty of God our soul is filled with bliss. Even to utter the name of God is a bliss which fills the soul with light and joy and happiness as nothing else can.

Religious Gatheka 10

The Prophet

The prophet is the manifestation of the same spirit who can rightfully be called alpha and omega in its fullest expression, although the spirit of alpha and omega is in all beings, in a loving mother, in a kind father, in an innocent child, in a helpful friend, and in an inspiring teacher. The prophet is a mystic and greater than a mystic; the prophet is a poet and greater than a poet; the

prophet is a teacher and greater than a teacher; the prophet is a seer and greater than a seer. Why greater? Because he has a duty to perform, together with the blessing that he brings upon earth.

In the terms of the eastern people, the prophet is called paghambar; there are two other names, nabi and rasul. Although each of these names is expressive of the prophet, yet each name is significant of a certain attribute of the prophet, and each denotes a certain degree of his evolution. Paghambar means the message-bearer, and this word is used for the holy ones who from time to time brought a divine message to a certain community, nation, or race, whenever there was a need to awaken a certain people. The paghambar has worked as an alarm to warn people of coming dangers; the paghambar has brought reforms to improve the condition of his people.

Nabi is the prophet who is not only for a certain section of humanity. Although he may live and move only in a limited region of the world, what he brings has its bearing upon the whole humanity. It may not be fulfilled in his lifetime, but a day of fulfillment comes, even if it is some centuries later that all he brought reaches the whole humanity. Rasul is a term which denotes an advanced degree, where the prophet has not only brought a message to the world, but fulfilled his task during his lifetime, through all the tests and trials that a prophet is meant to meet in life.

The prophet is an interpreter of the divine law in human tongue. He is an ambassador of the spiritual hierarchy; he represents to humanity the illuminated souls known and unknown to the world, who are hidden and manifest and who are in the world or on the other side of the world. The prophet is an initiate and initiator; he is an answer to the cry of humanity, of individuals and of the collectivity. He sympathizes with those in pain, guides those in darkness, harmonizes those who are in conflict, and brings peace to the world, which when excited with the activity of centuries always loses its equilibrium.

The prophet can never tell the ultimate truth, which only his soul knows and no words can explain. His mission is therefore to design and paint and make the picture of the truth in words that may be intelligible to mankind.

Not every man can see the bare truth. If he can see it he needs no more teaching. The prophet, so to speak, listens to the words of God in the language of God and interprets the same words in the human tongue. He speaks to every man in his own language; he converses with every man, standing on his own plane. Therefore he has little chance to disagree, unless there were someone who wanted disagreement and nothing else: there he cannot help.

Besides the words which even an intellectual person can speak, the prophet brings the love and light which is the food of every soul. The very presence of the prophet may make a person see things differently, and yet he may not know that it was because of the prophet. He may only think that that which was not clear to him, or for a moment seemed different to him, is now right and clear. For the prophet is a living light, a light which is greater in power than the sun. The light of the sun can only make things clear to the eyes, but the light that the prophet brings to the world makes the heart see all that the eyes are not capable of seeing.

The prophet brings love, the love of God, the Father and Mother of the whole humanity, a love that is life itself. No words or actions can express that love. The presence of the prophet and his very being speak of it, if only the heart had ears to listen. Verily, to the believer all is right, and to the unbeliever all is wrong. The principal work of the prophet is to glorify the name of God, to raise

humanity from the denseness of the earth, to open the doors of the human heart to the divine beauty which is everywhere manifested, and to illuminate souls which have been groping in darkness for years. The prophet brings the message of the day, a reform for that particular period in which he is born. A claim of a prophet is nothing to the real prophet. The being of the prophet, the work of the prophet, and the fulfillment of his task are themselves the proof of prophethood.

Religious Gatheka 11

How the Wise Live in the World (1)

It is not easy to learn—and after learning to practice—to make life in the world full of harmony and peace. The desire of every person in the world is to possess all he wants, whether it belongs to him or to anybody else. He wants all things to last if they are of any use to him; he wants all those dear and near to him to abide close to him. All he doesn't wish to see must be exiled from the town. Even the whole of nature must work to suit him: the cold must not be more than he wants; the heat must not exceed his desire; the rain must obey him; pain must not approach. There must not be anything difficult in life, and all things and people must be perfect in the perfection of God.

Everybody must act in life as he wishes them to; he alone must be the engineer and all others his machines. They must have all the endurance he demands of them, and at the same time all must be as sensitive as he wants them to be. No one should move against his desire, no bird must fly in the sky, nor even a leaf make a flutter except by his command; he alone must live and all others must live under him. By this attitude I have not described someone in the world, but every individual. The world is a place where every individual wishes to be the king: there are so many kings and only one kingdom, and the whole tragedy of life is accounted for by this.

The wise out of wisdom make life easy. Among the wise there are two categories: one is the master, the other is the saint. The attitude of each in life is quite contrary. The attitude of the saint is to feel sympathy for others, to see the difficulties of the situations of others as of himself, and to sacrifice his wants for the needs of others. He realizes that life is difficult, whereas those who are void of wisdom have still more difficulties as they know not how to surmount the difficulties of life. Out of his love, mercy, and compassion, he thus sacrifices his life to the service of his fellowman by making life easy for them.

In the first place, he sees the worst enemy of his fellowman in himself, knowing that the nature of every ego is hostile. By being resigned to the will of his fellowman and by sacrificing his life's advantages for his brother, he feels he has given his fellowman some relief. By practicing this moral through life at every step, a wise man becomes a source of happiness to all he meets and with whom he comes in contact in life, and his spirit becomes deepened in saintliness.

The spirit of a saint results in being tuned to the whole universe. He is in tune with the climates, with the weather, with nature, with animals, and with birds, he becomes in tune with the trees and plants, with all atmospheres, keynote of the whole universe. All harmonize with him—the virtuous souls, wicked souls, angels, and devils—all become in tune. He becomes in harmony with every object and with every element. He is in tune with those who have passed from this earth, those

in the atmosphere, and those who live on earth. The moral of a saint is very difficult, but the spirit of the saint is a benediction to himself and a blessing to others.

Then there is the way of the master which is quite the opposite. He conquers himself; he battles with life; he is at war with destiny; he invades all that seems wrong to him; he finds the key to the secrets unknown to him. Instead of being resigned to all conditions, all things, and all people, he turns them to the shape that he wishes and molds as he likes the personalities which come in touch with him. He tunes personalities to the tune which suits his orchestration.

He has command over objects, he produces effects in objects which are not naturally there. He can even rise to a state where he can command nature. The spiritual hierarchy is made of the masters. For the world is ruled and governed; although outward governments are different, the inward government is the spiritual hierarchy. In the East such ones whose thought, whose feeling, whose glance, and whose impulse can move the universe are called wali.

Neither of them, saint or master, comes to claim before the world, "Look at me, I am a saint," or, "I am a master," or, "I can do this," or, "I am such a virtuous person," or, "a good person." They keep themselves in humble guise, one like everybody in the world. It is not a claim, it is an action which proves the master. What do they care if the world acclaims them as a saint or as a master? What benefit is it to them? It is only a benefit to the one who is false, because he is glad to be something he is not.

He who is all does not wish that everybody should recognize him as such. A person with riches knows that he is rich; he need not put on fifty rings to tell everybody how rich he is. The one who puts on fifty rings is seldom rich. There is a beautiful simile known in India: the empty vessel makes the noise; when it is filled with water it makes no noise. In short, sincerity is the principal thing to attain in life. What little is gained sincerely and held unassumingly is worth much more than a greater gain void of sincerity, for it is a hill of sand, and the storm will come and blow it away. Verily, truth is the treasure that every soul is seeking.

Religious Gatheka 12

How the Wise Live in the World (2)

There are two distinct paths opposite to each other, those of the master and the saint. The path of the master is a path of war, war with the outer influences which prevent one from making one's way through life. The path of the saint is also a path of battle, but it is a battle with oneself. No doubt in the path of the master battle with oneself is also necessary, for if one did not fight with oneself one would not be able to make one's way through life.

But the path of the saint is a constant battle with the self, for the nature of the world is such that from the good person more good is asked; from a kind person more kindness is demanded; from a person who is patient more patience is expected; from a person who is gentle more gentleness is asked. There is no end to the world's demands: all one gives to the world and more is asked. Always do right, and it is always wrong. Therefore there is no end to the battle in both the paths taken by the wise, and it is the warrior in life's path who in the end becomes victorious. Those who do not have that power remain wandering about in the same place.

Religious Gathekas

The work of the master is to comfort individuals and comfort the world; the work of the master is to keep away all disasters that might be caused by the disharmony of the nature of individuals and of the collectivity. The work of the master is to help the feeble but right and the weak but just, when he is in a situation where he is opposed by a powerful enemy. The work of the saint is to console the wretched, to take under the wings of mercy and compassion those left alone in life, and to bless the souls that come their way.

But there is a third path of wisdom in which there is a balance of the spirit of the master and of the saint. This line is called *kemal*, perfect or balanced, and it is on this line that the destiny of the prophet leads him. For the prophet's work is more difficult and complicated than that of the master or the saint. To the souls who ask him for that compassion which they would ask from a saint, he gives it; to those who ask him for that power and strength which are necessary to be able to stand through the sweeping waves of life, the prophet gives that.

But besides, the prophet is the message-bearer; the prophet is master and servant at the same time; the prophet is a teacher and at the same time a pupil. There is a great deal that he must learn from his experience through life, not in order to make himself capable to receive the message, but in order to make himself efficient enough to give the message. For God speaks to the prophet in his divine tongue, and the prophet interprets it in his turn in the language of men, making it intelligible to them and trying to put the finest ideas in the gross terms of worldly language.

Therefore all that the prophet comes to give is not given to the world in words, but all that cannot be given in words is given without words. It is given through the atmosphere; it is given by the presence; it is given by the great affection that gushes forth from his heart; it is given in his kind glance; and it is given in his benediction. Yet most is given in silence that no earthly sense can perceive. The difference between human language and divine words is this, that a human word is a pebble: it exists, but there is nothing further; but the divine word is a living word, just like a grain of corn. One grain of corn is not one grain; in reality, it is hundreds and thousands. In the grain there is an essence which is always multiplying and which will show the perfection in itself.

Religious Gatheka 13

The Christ Spirit

The words of Christ in the Bible are, "I am alpha and omega," which means, "I am first and last." Would this then mean, "I came on earth only when I was called Jesus, I gave the message and then never came again?" If that were the meaning of "I am alpha and omega," it would have no meaning. Really the meaning is, "I was, am, and shall be."

Now about the question that arises in the inquiring mind, "Who may this alpha and omega be? What was he before Jesus Christ? What would he be like after the time of Jesus Christ?" For those who put the water of the ocean in a pitcher, that water is from the ocean; but really the ocean is the ocean. Those of different creeds who have different forms of worship and dogmas say, "This is the teaching of Christ." Yes, it is true, but it is not all the teaching of Christ. It is as true as to say, "This is the ocean," if one brought water from the ocean in a pitcher. It is true, but there still is an ocean.

This shows that a shield called Jesus Christ brought the message. It was the shield that was Jesus. This is the secret of that alpha and omega spirit of Christ. If one could only see that spirit hidden behind different shields, one would be constantly in the vision of Christ. In the smile of the innocent child, there is Christ; in the warmth of the mother's heart for her child, Christ is hidden. In the unselfish, self-sacrificing love of the father, Christ shows himself. In the kindly attitude of a friend you can see the spirit of Christ. What is there which has beauty, tenderness, or gentleness which has not the spirit of Christ?

From those who keep Christ away from them he is far, but in reality they themselves have covered their eyes. It is not the fault of Christ, it is their own fault. Christ speaks in the whisper of the wise people of all centuries. He speaks aloud in the voice of the prophet, the warner who comes now and then. Though he comes out sometimes and sometimes hides himself, he is the same always. Man's doubt and skepticism prevent his seeing him. When Christ came in the form of Jesus, those who saw him did not recognize him.

Another side to consider is that the idea of miracles is attached to the person of Christ. In reality the greatest miracle of Christ that any wise man can see is the miracle of Christ's living heart; not wonderworking, but the living God presented to the world. This was the lighted faith which helped the darkness to vanish, not dogmas, doctrines, or theories which all came afterwards. He went to fishermen and said to them, "Come hither, I will make you fishers of men." What does it mean? Does "fishers of men" mean fishers of money? No, he meant by this, "Let love be alive in your hearts, that the whole world may become your customers."

If you analyze what he said, what he taught was very simple. It was not elaborate words and theories; there was not any great literary skill. What was it? It was where the arrow came from. The word was an arrow from the depth of his being. In the Bible it is often said that revelation came with a fiery tongue. What does it mean? If the heart is burning the word comes in a flame.

Where is God? God is in the heart of man. When it is the voice of God that rises in the heart of man it is a divine word. The words of Christ are a tongue of fire that pierces the heart of men. Christ's saying "fishers of men" does not mean making you clever that you may take advantage of man. It is not cleverness; on the contrary, the message of Christ is that simplicity, sincerity, gentleness, and innocence beyond and above all prove the purity of the heart.

In the East the Christ attribute is called mansumiat, innocence. It takes a different point of view from the ordinary one to see the value and power of innocence. Every person is born on earth an innocent soul. He gets the experience of the world and becomes worldly. Then the more worldly he becomes, the more the beauty and power and angelic attributes are covered by the knowledge of the complications of the world. As he develops he tries to learn still more and to bury the spirit of innocence as deep as possible, until the Christ spirit is altogether covered. What he knows is what he has learned in this mortal and false life. What can the knowledge of falsehood bring? Falsehood. The generality is seeking for falsehood and gets falsehood. This can be seen by the simple fact that the man clad with artificial clothes is welcome in society. This shows that man cannot stand the bare truth.

What were the prophets who came in all ages? Whose message did they bring? It was the message of Christ; the Christ spirit spoke through them. The message has never been advertised. It has never been made an object of publicity. They sacrificed their lives to all the opposition on their path. The path of the prophet is the path of constant trouble. If it was the voice of Christ in the words of

the prophet why cannot he speak now or why will he not speak in the future? It is only one voice calling all the time, but man closes the door of his heart.

The prophet is the artist. As the artist draws the picture of nature and brings its beauty before man in a form that man can tolerate and admire, so it is the work of the prophet to bring before men that bare truth, that man cannot tolerate, in a form that he can tolerate and can admire. Whether man understands it or not, that is another question.

Another work of the prophet is that he is all things to all men, and for each one he has a special message. There is no world message; there cannot be a world message. A world message, yes, in the spirit, but not in manifestation. In manifestation, to every individual, nation, and race, there is a special message. Although the people of every sect have made the prophet their own, yet that is as absurd as to limit the sky to one's own country, as if Switzerland had a special sky, or if there were a special sky for England, and one for France. How can one limit the sky? The earth can be limited, not the sky.

Can the Muslims, the Jews, or the Christians limit Christ? Can they say Christ was of the East, not of the West? Could the West limit Christ, as they say Christ was the master of the West? This means limiting the spirit which was for the blessing of all. Limitation is in the shield that hides the spirit, not in the Christ self. In the same way people limit the spirit of Christ by saying it is only spoken of in one particular book. In the book it is kept as water from the ocean can be kept in a pitcher, but to say that it is only there means that the ocean is only in the pitcher, and there exists no other ocean.

No doubt from everywhere in the world the answer of Christ will come if you call him. If you look above or below, Christ is before you if your eyes are opened. If everything is closed, you do not know Christ, nor does Christ know you. This shows there is a wall covering and separating man from Christ externally and inwardly. That means that if a person finds him within he will find him without. Those with closed hearts will implore Christ to come and will wait thousands of years, and he will not come.

How will they recognize him if they do not recognize Christ in their own hearts first? Everything is recognized first in the heart. Pearls are pebbles before swine. Have they no eyes? They have, but the eyes of the heart have not recognized the pearls. Man recognizes the pearls and distinguishes them from pebbles because inwardly he has first recognized them and distinguished the pearls from pebbles. Do not think that there is not a gulf between man and man as between the swine and man! Man can prove worse than the animal, man can act worse than the devil. The devil is a miniature of man's wickedness, as the angel is the miniature of man's greatness. It was the human being which was honored by being Christ; it is the human being who is pictured in the form of Satan. Think what a gulf there is between man and man!

To take off the cover separating man from Christ, a process is necessary. This process is the same which takes away stains and lines from paper by rubbing. The process is safa, from which comes Sufi. Safo means to clean, to wash, or to erase, and by this the soul is purified. This shows the mission of Sufism, and the work of the Sufi Order. Every process of meditation and concentration is to wash the soul of the stains of earthly experiences. The real use of any exercise or practice is that the Christ voice may become audible and that the light may manifest. Once a person has heard this voice, once he has seen this light, do you think that he hears or sees anything else afterwards? No, the ears are dedicated to Christ when once one has found Christ in one's own heart.

The principal teaching of Sufism is that the heart of man is the shrine of God, and one can recognize God in one's own heart, feel His existence, presence, virtue, goodness, and all manner of beauty. It must be remembered that the whole of life around us is a life of falsehood. The more you see and experience, the more you see how very false it is and how much disillusionment there is. The only way of getting over it is to light the lamp in the darkness of night, and all will be cleared. The secret of life is this, to produce beauty in ourselves. When beauty is produced in the heart, then all that breaks the heart vanishes, and the whole universe becomes one single vision of the sublimity of God.

Religious Gatheka 14

The Sufi Form of Worship

I would like to speak a few words to introduce the idea of our movement. The Sufi movement has three aspects of its work: the esoteric work, the devotional service, and the activity of brotherhood. In spite of all the different opinions of the different people in the world, it is an undeniable fact that humanity needs religion greatly. But which religion does it need? Does it need the sectarian religions of old? No. Mankind is getting tired of that idea of being confined in a sect. The new generation today is beginning to see that there is no religion in this world which can be considered inferior to its own; therefore that narrow outlook of the sectarians of the religions does not appeal to them.

Is the Sufi Message a new religion? Certainly it cannot be a new religion. Jesus Christ said, "I have come to fulfill the law, not to give a new law." It is the same religion which Jesus Christ brought continued still further. It is one and the same stream which all prophets have brought and given to humanity, carried along. It is the same stream which is always there. The message of the Sufi is the answer to the cry of humanity today, for it is in agreement with science and it stands to defend all religions. The Sufi does not say this religion is greater than the other, nor does he come out and say this religion and that religion are equal. He leaves it to the individual to think as he thinks. He only holds his service as the proof of admiring all the teachers and respecting all the scriptures which are respected by humanity.

But with all its forms, the Sufi idea also has the formless ideal of worship. The form is to help the one who can be helped by seeing the form, because all education is an education of names and forms. If there were no form and no name we would not have learned them. The form is only suggestive of what is behind it, of the one and same truth which is behind all religions. Therefore this service is a teaching at the same time, yet every Sufi is free to take up a form or not to take up a form. A Sufi is not bound by a form; the form is for his use, not to make him captive.

Is there a priesthood in the Sufi Movement? Priesthood, not in the sense as it is understood, priesthood only to conduct the service and to answer the need of a priest in our everyday life. Those ordained, whoever has the desire to serve humanity by showing an example to the world in all places: in the church, in school, in parliament, and in the court. Woman and man together complete evolution. But at the same time every Sufi is a priest, a preacher, a teacher, and a pupil of every soul that he meets in the world. The only ideal in working is to qualify oneself to be a proper servant in order to serve the cause of God.

Religious Gatheka 15

Degrees in the Spiritual Hierarchy

There are seven grades recognized by the Sufis of those in the spiritual hierarchy: pir, buzurg, wali, ghous, kutub, nabi, and rasul. These are the degrees which come from the inner initiations to which one becomes entitled after having the necessary outer initiations. It is beyond words to express what inner initiation means and in what form it is given. Those to whom the inner initiation is unknown may explain it as a dream or as a vision, but in reality it is something higher and greater than that. I can only explain it by saying that the definite changes which take place during one's journey through the spiritual path are initiations, and it is these initiations which include man in the spiritual hierarchy.

In the life of a saint or a master there are five degrees known, and in the two last degrees the progress of the saint or master is silent. But in the life a prophet, these seven degrees manifest to view. For a saint or a master can do his work by avoiding the notice of the world, but the life of the prophet necessitates coming into the world. Thus as he progresses from grade to grade through his life, he cannot very well cover himself, however much he may want to, from the gaze of the world. The sage of every category—saint, master, or prophet—always prefers not being known to the world, and as he progresses that desire increases more. It is not only out of modesty or humbleness, but also for the protection of the spiritual ideal which attracts dangers of all sorts by being exposed to the common gaze.

All beauty is veiled by nature, and the higher the beauty the more it is covered. That makes it easy for a wise person to find the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet, for one beats his drums and the other tries to keep in the background, if only his work in the world would let him keep back. It is his efforts in accomplishing something that bring him to the notice of the world. However, his longing is to be unknown, for the one who really deserves to be known is God alone.

The work of the pir is helping individuals toward the unfoldment of their soul. The work of the buzurg is to help by the power of his soul those who wish to advance spiritually. The wali controls a community, keeping it on the right track. The ghous helps its spiritual well-being. The kutub spiritually governs a country or a nation. The nabi elevates individuals and bears a divine message. The rasul is the one who has fulfilled the message he has borne.

Religious Gatheka 16

Stages in Following the Message

There are three stages of action through which the sincere followers of the message have to pass, and the difficulty is that each stage has the tendency to keep back the followers of the message from going to the next stage. The reason is that every stage has no end of interest and happiness in it. Another thing is that one stage is quite different from another stage, and therefore each stage is a kind of contrary action to the previous stage.

Now these three stages may be called receiving the message, assimilating the message, and representing the message. For a sincere mureed, the first stage can be so interesting that he may think it is never enough. The heart of the seeker after truth is never full of that endless knowledge. Fill it, and there is still a place to fill. One may receive for ages and it is yet never enough. When the receiver of the message is in that stage, then the activity of the further stages remains unaccomplished.

The stage of assimilation is most necessary; very few can imagine how long it takes for the spirit to assimilate knowledge of truth. One assimilates it by the power of contemplation, by pondering over the subjects that one hears, by practicing the teachings in one's life, by looking at the world from the point of view which has been told, and by observing one thing in its thousand different positions. Many, before assimilating the knowledge, wish to reason with it, discuss it, justify it, and see how it fits in with their own preconceived ideas. In this way they disturb the digestive fire of the spirit, for as the mechanism of the body is always working to help assimilate food, so the spirit is constantly working to assimilate all that one learns through life.

Therefore, it is a matter of patience which requires taking life easily without troubling the mind too much and allowing the knowledge which one has received as a food of the spirit to have time to be assimilated. By trying to assimilate knowledge too fast man loses his normal health; it is just like taking a drug to help digest food, which is not beneficial in the end.

The third process is also necessary; those who care little for the third stage, representing, miss a great deal in life. A person who has seen something beautiful, who has heard something harmonious, who has tasted something delicious, who has smelled something fragrant—alone—has enjoyed it, and yet not completely. The complete joy is in sharing one's joy with another. The selfish one enjoys himself and does not care for others. Whatever he enjoys, things of the earth or things of heaven, his enjoyment is not complete. In this third stage, following the message is fulfilled, when has heard and pondered upon it and passed the same blessing to others.

Religious Gatheka 17

The Message of Unity

Beloved ones of God! My subject is the Sufi message. The word message itself conveys a different meaning from that of an intellectual philosophy. There are two ideas prevailing in the world: one that man has evolved through years and centuries, and the other that, as Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun. Divine truth has always been and always will be the same. No one can improve upon it and nobody can give a new message. The divine tongue at times has spoken loudly, and at times in a whisper.

The consciousness of the divine spirit made Christ say, "I am alpha and omega." Those who limit Christ to the historic period of the life of the prophet of Nazareth surely limit the message, in spite of his open declaration that he is the first and the last. Christ also said, "I have not come to give a new law, but I have come to fulfill the law," which means that no new religion has ever been given, although the world has taken it so.

Not one of the masters came with the thought of forming an exclusive community or of giving a certain religion. They came with the same message from one and the same God. Whether the message was in Sanskrit, Zend, or Arabic, it had one and the same meaning. The difference between religions is external; the inner meaning of all is one. If only man had understood this, the world would have avoided many wars, for war has mostly been caused by religion. Religion was given to the world to establish peace and harmony. What a pity that from the same source should come war and disaster!

The Sufi message is a reminder to humanity—not to any one nation, but to all; not to one, but to every creed—of the truth taught by all the great teachers of humanity. God, truth, and religion are one; duality is only a delusion of human nature. Think then what a great service lies before this message. At this time nation is against nation, race against race; the followers of one religion are constantly working against the followers of another religion; class works against class. Competition, hate, and prejudice prevail everywhere. What will be the outcome? What can poison produce? Not nectar, only poison.

The message is not for one nation, race, or community; it is for the whole of humanity. Its one and only object is to bring about a better understanding between the divided sections of humanity by awakening consciousness to the fact that humanity is one family. If one person in the family be ill or unhappy, certainly he must cause unhappiness to the whole family. Even this is not the most appropriate simile. Humanity is one body, the whole of life being one in its source and in its goal and in its beginning and its end. No scientist can deny this! If part of the body is in pain, sooner or later the whole body is affected. If your finger aches, your body is not free from pain.

No nation, race, or section can be considered a separate part of humanity. Today education, politics, and all directions in life seem to work from an individualistic view, but where must such a tendency end and where will it lead humanity? If each says, "I must get the better of another," where will be the harmony and peace for which all are longing, no matter what race or religion they belong to?

This condition has been brought about by long-continued materialism and commercialism, which have taught every soul the spirit of competition and rivalry. The whole life of each is absorbed in guarding his own interests and trying to take the best in life for himself. Life is one continual fight, and only one thing can ease this fight: consideration for others, reciprocity, and give and take of good, instead of selfishness.

The world's progress, with selfishness as the central theme, will never lead to the soul's desire and aim; it will culminate in destruction. Just as at one time there was a call from everywhere to guard self-interest, now the moment has come for the message to be given for men to understand and consider one another. The happiness and peace of each individual depends on the happiness and peace of all.

The order of Sufis is constituted of those who have the same ideals of service to God and humanity, who wish to devote part or the whole of their life to the service of humanity, in the path of truth. This order exists throughout the world, in most of the European countries and in America. This order has groups, the members of which belong to all the different religions. All are welcome: Christians, Buddhists, Parsis, or Muslims. No one's faith or belief is questioned; each can follow his own church, religion, or creed. No one must believe in any special creed or dogma; freedom of

thought is given. At the same time personal guidance is given on the path, in the problems of life, and in the inner life.

Those who belong to the esoteric school of this order are given, besides personal guidance, the studies which are entrusted only to those who are fitted to receive them. There are subtleties of ideas—spiritual, moral, or philosophical—which cannot be given to everyone at first, but can be given gradually to those who are serious enough to walk in the path of truth. Every seeker after truth must remember one thing, that the first step in the path of truth is to become true to oneself.

Religious Gatheka 18

The Coming World Religion (1)

There are many prophecies and several beliefs on the coming world religion, but I have no desire to make any prophecy on the subject. I only wish to explain what religion means. The present religion, the coming religion, or the past religion is for those who divide the truth, which is one, into many. In point of fact what was, is; and what is, will be. Was this idea not supported by Jesus Christ, who said, "I have not come to give a new law, I have come to fulfill the law?" If Jesus Christ said this, who else can come out and say, "I give you a new religion?" There cannot be a new religion; one might as well say, "I wish to teach you a new wisdom." There cannot be a new wisdom; wisdom is the same—was and is and always will be.

There arises a question in the heart of the inquirers, "Then what is this variety of religions which has engaged humanity for years in conflict, so that most of the wars and battles were fought in the cause of religion?" This only shows the childish character of human nature. The religion which was given and is given, wherever it is given, is given for unity, for harmony, and for brotherhood. But it was used by childish human nature to fight and dispute and engage in battles for years and years. The most amusing thing for a thoughtful person is to think and to see how people have given in the past a most sacred character to war and called it holy war.

The same tendency of making war with one another which began in religion, persisted in times of materialism and turned into war between nations. The differences and distinctions which existed between the different faiths and beliefs still exist, and that prejudice and bigotry which existed between nations still exist in a smaller or greater degree. What does this show? It shows that the meaning of true religion has not been understood by the majority. Therefore that mission that religion had to fulfill for humanity still remains to be fulfilled. It is at that fulfillment that Jesus Christ has hinted: "I have come to fulfill the law, not to give a new law."

Religion can be seen from five different points of view: first, religion which is known to us as certain dogmas, laws, or teachings. When we think and see the conditions of the world, we see that the law is now given by the nation. Every nation now is responsible for the order and peace of the people.

The second aspect of religion is the church and the form of the service. In this, of course, there are differences, and there will always be differences; it is a matter of temperament and tendency, and it also depends upon the customs and beliefs of the people who have inherited that tendency from their ancestors. Some have in their house of prayer different forms and different ceremonies which

help them to feel elevated; others have a simple service. One appeals to one and the other appeals to the other.

No doubt the world is evolving to uniformity. Now we see no very great difference between forms, different customs of meeting or dressing, and many other things. People are coming to a certain uniformity. At the same time, when we look at the subject from a different point of view, we shall find that uniformity very often takes away the beauty of life. People in the countries so civilized and advanced that the architecture and houses are all built the same and who all dress the same become so tired that they go to a different country and see houses and people distinct and different from one another.

For instance the method of writing music and the form of notation for the whole western world is the same, but the distinction between the music of the French, Italian, German, and Russian, gives a stimulus to the lover of music. And so it is in the distinctions of forms. To want to make all people live alike and do alike means to turn all people into the same form and same face, and what would happen then? The world would become very uninteresting. It is like tuning all the keys of the piano to the same note. It is not necessary to change the notes of the piano. What is necessary is to know the way of harmony, how to create harmony between the different notes.

The third aspect of religion is the religious ideal, the Lord and Master of the religion, the Lord and Master that a soul has esteemed as the ideal. It is something which cannot be discussed, something which cannot be argued. The less spoken about it, the better it is. The devotion of a sincere heart gives birth to that ideal which is too sacred to mention, an ideal which cannot be compared or explained.

When the followers of diverse religions dispute over their ideals—the sacred ideals which they have not known, but of which they have only had a tradition—and wish to prove one better than the other, they merely lose time and destroy that sacred sentiment which can only be preserved in the heart. The religious ideal is the medium by which one rises towards perfection. Whatever name a person gives to his ideal, that name is most sacred for him. But that does not mean that that name limits that ideal. There is only one ideal, the divine ideal. Call him Christ, and let the same Christ be known by different names, given to him by various communities.

For instance, a person who has great devotion, great love and attachment for his friend, speaks about friendship in high words and says what a sacred thing it is to become friends. But then there is another who says, "Oh, I know your friend; he is no better than anybody else." The answer to this idea is given by Majnun in the story told by the ancients. Someone said to Majnun, "Leila, you beloved, is not so beautiful as you think." He said, "My Leila must be seen with my eyes. If you wish to see how beautiful Leila is, you must borrow my eyes." Therefore, if you wish to regard the object of devotion of whatever faith, of whatever community, of whatever people, you will have to borrow their eyes and you will have to borrow their heart. There is no use in disputing over the points of each tradition in history; they are made by prejudice. Devotion is a matter of heart, and is made by the devotee.

Religious Gatheka 19

The coming world religion (2)

The fourth aspect of religion is the idea of God. There will always be fights and discussions: "The God of our family is one and the God of your family is another." There have always been fights. In the old times there was a dispute and the people said that the God of Beni Israel was a special God; so every community and every church made its God a special God. If there is a special God, it is not the special God of a community, but the God of every individual. For man has to make his own God before he realizes the real God. But that God which man makes within himself becomes in the end the door by which he enters that shrine of his innermost being, the real God, which is in the heart of man. Then one begins to realize that God is not God of a certain community or people, but God is the God of the whole being.

We come to another aspect of religion, which is not necessarily the law or the ceremony or the divine ideal or God; it is apart from all four. It is something living in the soul, the mind, and the heart of man, the absence of which keeps man dead, and the presence of which gives him life. If there is any religion it is in that particular sense. And what is that sense? The Hindus have called it in the Sanskrit language dharma, which in the ordinary meaning of the word is "duty." But it is something much greater than what we know in our everyday life as duty. I do not call it duty; I call it life itself.

When a person is thoughtful, when a person is considerate, when a person feels the obligations that he has towards his fellowman, his friend, his father or mother, or in whatever relations he has to man, this is something living. It is like water which gives a sense of the living soul; the soul is not dead. This living soul really makes a person alive.

The person who is not conscious of this tenderness and this sacredness of life lives, but his soul is in the grave. You need not ask that man with the living soul what is his religion or what is his belief, for he is living it. Life itself is his religion, and this is the true religion. The man conscious of honor, who has a sense of shame, who has the feeling of sincerity, and whose sympathy and devotion are alive, that man is living and that man is religious.

This religion has been the religion of the past and will be the religion of the future. Religion, if ever it was taught by Christ or any other great ones, was to awaken in man that sense which is awakened when this religion is living. It does not matter in which house you go and pray, for every moment of your life then is religion. It is not a religion in which you believe, but it is a religion which you live.

What is the message of Sufism? Sufism is the message of digging out that water like life which has been buried by the impressions of this material life. There is an English phrase, "a lost soul." The soul is not lost; the soul is buried; when it is dug out then the divine life springs out like a spring of water.

What is digging? What does one dig in oneself? Is it not true, is it not said in the scriptures that God is love? Then where is God to be found? Is He to be found in the seventh heaven, or is He to be found in the heart of man? He is to be found in the heart of man, which is his shrine. But if this heart is buried—the heart which has lost light, life, and warmth—what does this heart become? It becomes

a grave. There is a popular song in English which says, "The light of life dies when love is done." That living thing in the heart is love. It may come as kindness, as friendship, as sympathy, as tolerance, or as forgiveness. In whatever form this living water rises from the heart, it proves the heart to be a divine spring. When once this spring is open and rising, all that man does as an action, as a word, or as a feeling, is all religion; that man becomes religious.

If there is any coming religion, it will be this religion, the religion of the heart. After all the suffering that has been caused to humanity by the recent war, man is beginning to open his eyes. And as time passes, he will open his eyes to know and understand that the true religion is in opening the heart, in widening the outlook, and in living the religion which is one religion.

Religious Gatheka 20

The Purpose of All Beings

In the first place, we must see whether the message is an affair of individuals, or a work that can be done collectively. To see the truth as a whole is beyond the power of the generality. The ordinary point of view of life would be like that of a man in a forest who would see horses running about, one to the north, another to the south.

If one can see the purpose behind things, every little coincidence in life proves it. Man very often thinks about his free will and sees a kind of freedom and pride in what he calls free will. The more deeply he thinks about it, the more he finds that "man proposes and God disposes." Man, individually and collectively, tries to get all that is best in life—happiness, wealth, comfort, and power—all that seems to him worthwhile. If free will really existed, everyone would have these things!

Yet there seems to be free will; man feels it because it springs from his heart, and as long as he understands that it is his own impulse that has come to manifestation, he cannot understand the real meaning of free will. The more one studies life, and the deeper one sees into life, the more one sees that all things adjust themselves. Perhaps it would confuse many and would seem an exaggeration if I said, as any mystic would say, that all is truth, and that truth is all. Of course it is a deep question, and difficult to understand by an explanation, unless one rises above the generality and looks at life from another point of view.

Sa'adi, the great poet of Persia, said that each soul is created for a special purpose and that to fulfill this purpose a light is in his heart. This may confuse many, of course. Some may say, "If I am created for a certain purpose, what is the use of progress? Why not stay where I am since it is my destiny?"

One can help others to understand, but one cannot make them understand. If someone thinks he is a chair or a table, he will remain such, but if he thinks he is a living being, he will feel that action is the object of life, that everything adjusts itself to that, and that every part is made for a purpose, as for instance the parts of a table or a chair. If we think of life and the whole world and see into it deeply, we shall find that we live and move and have our being for a certain purpose. A person may say it is the idea of a fatalist that everything must go through to its destiny. It is not the idea of a fatalist; it is the idea of a seer and of a mystic. The fatalist makes human beings out as chairs and tables; the mystic makes even chairs and tables living beings.

What is after all the purpose of life? No doubt when we take an individual, there is a separate purpose in his life; and when we take the multitude, we see that there is a common purpose; and looking at the whole, we can see that there is a purpose for the whole of humanity. Every purpose, whether for an individual or a collectivity, has a certain value, but the purpose of all beings is beyond value. When every individual is engaged in a certain purpose, and a group of individuals is also, then the whole is also accomplishing a purpose; and this is under a direction, which is called a hierarchy.

What does a person who has not yet seen the four walls of his own village know of the North Pole? If we talk with him he cannot understand. How can one understand what the ocean is like if one has before one only a little tank of water? Friends, to see the planets we must raise our heads. Therefore that spiritual direction that is working in the whole cannot be imagined by one whose whole life has been spent in worldly things. This is a subject which is studied by initiates who are trusted with life's mysteries. They are plain things, but called mysteries because the sneering world is always ready to laugh at what it does not understand.

Again, what is this direction and how may one call it? It is the same direction that one may call Christ. But it has its work in all parts of the world, and if the people of some parts call it by another name, are they wrong? It is only another name. You may ask me what determines the destiny of man to be included in this direction: his birth, his rank, his inheritance, or a special education? Perhaps some may give you the reason of many years continual development from life to life. But to avoid complications and make things simple, as is always the tendency of the mystic, I would say, "What determines one piece of wood to be made into the floor under one's feet and another piece of the same wood the ceiling over one's head?"

If the keys of the pianoforte complained of their unequal places in the octave, what would you answer? Jesus Christ gave a beautiful answer when asked why a person was blind, whether for his faults or the faults of his parents. He answered, "For neither, but that the works of the Lord may become manifest." The Qur'an says that man is egoistic and asks the Lord of the universe why this or that is so, being unjust, and himself a slave of the law. It is as though a child watched a painter who had painted all his life and criticized him; the painter would answer, "I have done this all my life; you judge me according to your little experience, but I know what I am doing."

Of course the wise are forgiving and tolerant and do not hurt the childish tendency in man, but always try to explain. Once an Indian child asked me, "Why should we bow our heads to the earth, when God is in heaven?" Could I answer with metaphysics or philosophy? I said that the head of the Lord was in heaven, but His feet are on the earth. So the child understood; and thus humanity has been consoled and comforted through the ages. But the knowledge that consoles and comforts is only a step towards the knowledge that gives real peace.

There are different views about the hierarchy. Some people think it must be in heaven or in the Himalayas or in Tibet. Now where are the Himalayas or Tibet? It is that place or sphere which is beyond the understanding of ordinary people. Friends, what is precious and inspiring, what elevates you and helps you cannot be far from you. If it were, it would be the worst injustice. If the agency of conveyances such as steamers, ships, and trains exists in all parts of the world, how is it possible that the agency of the conveyance to the peace for which every soul yearns is not also everywhere? The spiritual hierarchy is constituted of those who are seen and those who are unseen, and they live

among you in the crowd like everyone. But people want a sign. "If you are a king show me your crown; if a millionaire show me your check book." Man lives from morning till evening in this life of illusion, and his eyes cannot see the truth.

There is great expectation all over the world just now, that the Teacher is coming. The expectation is as though the Teacher will be coming directly from the sky, and as though the whole world will be already accepting and expecting him on their knees, that lawyers, scientists, materialists, and teachers of the different sects will all agree at once, and he will come. Think of the coming of Jesus Christ in humble garb; no one accepted him during his life. In his unassuming life preaching to some fishermen, was he accepted as Christ? But is he not Christ today? In looking at the lives of different prophets and teachers, were they ever accepted at once? Mohammed was three times chased out of Mecca and had to go in the night. Buddha had to leave India and go to China and Japan. In spite of the whole life's struggle of Moses, in the end he could only work because of the permission of the king. Krishna passed his whole life in Brindavan unknown until, in the war of Mahabharata, Arjuna asked for his blessing and fought. Only then the movement of his message had come.

Does the messenger care whether the world recognizes him or not? The messenger is dead, it is the message that lives in him. It is the dead harp that gives the music, not the living dog or cat when one tries to play on them. The cross is the symbol of annihilation, and after the annihilation of the false personality the message of God comes. The messenger never makes claims. Thousands will listen to those who claim to be messengers, but the wind of the spirit will destroy all that is false. It is not the claim that makes the messenger, it is the message.

Religious Gatheka 21

Christ

The Christ ideal is unexplainable in words. The omnipresent intelligence which is in the rock, in the tree, in the animal, and in man, shows its gradual unfoldment; it is a fact accepted by both science and metaphysics. This intelligence shows its culmination is the complete development of human personality, such as in the personality of Jesus Christ as recognized by his followers. The followers of Buddha recognized the same unfoldment of the object of creation in Gautama Buddha, and the Hindus saw the same in Sri Krishna. In Moses the followers of Moses recognized, and maintained their belief for thousands of years. The same culmination of the all-pervading intelligence was recognized in Mohammed by his followers.

No man has the right to claim this stage of development, nor can anyone very well compare two persons recognized by their followers as the perfect spirit of God. For a thoughtless person it is easy to express his opinion and to compare two people, but a thoughtful person first thinks whether he has arrived at that stage where he can compare two such personalities.

No doubt a question of belief is different. Neither can the belief of the Muslim be the same belief as that of the Jewish people, nor can the Christian belief be the same as that of the Buddhists. However, the wise person understands all beliefs, for he is one with them all.

The question whether a person was destined to be a complete personality may be answered that there is no person who is not destined to be something. Every person has his life designed be-

forehand, and the light of the purpose that he is born to accomplish in life has already been kindled in his soul. Therefore whatever be the grade of a person's evolution, he is certainly destined to be so.

Discussion of the lives that the different prophets have lived, as to the superiority of one over the other, seems to be a primitive attempt on the part of man. Not knowing the condition of that particular time nor the psychology of the people at the time when the prophet existed, man is ready to judge that personality by the standard of ideas which he knows today; this does not do that personality justice.

When a person compares one particular teaching of a prophet with the teaching of another prophet he also makes a great mistake, because the teachings of the prophets have not always been of the same kind. The teaching is like the composition of a composer who writes music in all the different keys and who puts the highest note and the lowest note and all the notes of different octaves in his music.

The teachings of the prophets are nothing but the answer to the demands of individual and collective souls. Sometimes a childlike soul comes and asks, and an answer is given appropriate to his understanding. And an old soul comes and asks and he is given an answer suited to his evolution. When two teachings are brought together, a teaching which Krishna gave to a child and a teaching which Buddha gave to an old soul, it is not doing justice to compare. It is easy to say, "I do not like the music of Wagner, I simply hate it." But I should think it would be better to become Wagner first and then to hate it. To weigh, to measure, to examine, or to pronounce an opinion on a great personality, one must rise to that development first; otherwise the best thing is a respectful attitude. Respect in any form is the way of the wise.

There are simple people who hear about miracles and who give all the importance to what they have read in the traditions of the miracles performed by the great souls. But that is to limit the greatness of God to a certain miracle. If God is eternal, then His miracle is eternal; it is always there. There is no such thing as unnatural, nor such a thing as impossible. Things seem unnatural because they are unusual; things seem impossible because they are beyond man's limited reason. Life itself is a phenomenon, a miracle. The more one knows about it, the more one lives conscious of the wonderfulness of life, and the more one realizes that if there is any phenomenon or miracle it is man's birthright. Who has done it? It is man who can do it and who will do it. But what is most essential is not a miracle; the most essential is the understanding of life.

The soul who realized before he claimed to be alpha and omega is Christ. To know intellectually that life is eternal, or that the whole life is one, is not sufficient, although it is the first step in the direction towards perfection. The actual realization of this comes from the personality of the God-conscious soul as a fragrance in his thought, speech, and action, and proves in the world as incense put on fire.

There are beliefs such as that of salvation through Christ, and the man who is agitated against religion closes the doors of his heart before having the patience to understand what it really means. It only means that there is no liberation without an ideal before one. The ideal is a steppingstone towards that attainment which is called liberation. There are others who cannot conceive the thought of Christ's divinity. The truth is that the soul of man is divine, and when with the unfoldment of the soul it reaches the point of culmination, it then deserves to be called divine.

Religious Gathekas

There is a great difference in the beliefs and opinions of people about the immaculate birth of Jesus. The truth is that when the soul arrives at the point of understanding the truth of life in its collective aspect, he realizes that there is only one father, and that is Go; this world out of which all the names and forms have been created is the mother. The son, by recognizing the mother and father, by serving his mother and father, and by fulfilling the aim of creation, deserves to be the Son of God.

Then comes the question of the forgiveness of sin. Is not man the creator of sin? If he creates it, he can destroy it also. If one cannot destroy, his elder brother can. The one who is capable of making is capable of destroying. He who can write with his pen can rub it with his eraser from the surface of the paper. When he cannot do it, then that personality has not yet arrived at completeness, at that perfection to which all have to come. There is no end of faults in man's life, and if they were all recorded and unerasable, life would be terrible and impossible to live. The impression of sin, in the terminology of metaphysics, may be called an illness: a mental illness, not physical. As the doctor is able to cure illness, so the doctor of the soul is able to heal. If people have said that through Christ sins are forgiven, that can be understood in this way: that love is that shower by which all is purified. No stain remains.

What is God? God is love. When His mercy, His compassion, and His kindness are expressed through a God-realized personality, then the stains of one's faults, mistakes, and wrongdoings are washed away, and the soul becomes as clear as it has always been. For in reality no sin nor virtue can be engraved or impressed upon a soul; it can cover the soul. The soul in itself is divine intelligence, and how can divine intelligence be engraved either with sin or virtue, or happiness or unhappiness; when these clouds are cleared from it, then it is divine in its essence.

The question of the crucifixion of Christ, apart from its historical aspect, may be explained that the life of the wise is on the cross all the time. The wiser the soul becomes, the more it realizes the cross. It is the lack of wisdom which causes the soul to do all actions, good or bad. As it becomes wise, the first thing is that its action is suspended. The picture of that suspension of action becomes a helpless picture, the hands and the feet nailed. Neither can he go forward, nor can he go backward, nor can he act, nor can he move. This inactiveness outwardly may show helplessness, but in point of fact is the pleasure of perfection.

There is another question: that Christ gave his life to save the world. This only explains sacrifice: no man in this world going toward the goal will escape from the test to which life will put him. That test is sacrifice. At every step towards the attainment of the final goal, he will be asked a sacrifice, which will be a greater and greater one as he continues on the path. He will arrive at a point where there is nothing, whether his body, mind, action, thought, or feeling, that he keeps back from sacrifice for others. Thus man proves the realization of divine truth. In short, the Christ-ideal is the picture of the perfect man. The explanation of the perfect man, and the possibility of the perfect man, can be seen in the verse of the Bible: "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven."

Religious Gatheka 22

Buddha

Buddha was the title of Gautama. He was called Buddha because his spirit expressed the meaning of the world buddh, which in Sanskrit means reason. In the Buddhist terminology the Spirit of

Guidance is named bodhisattva, which means the essence of reason. Reason in its essence is of a liquid form; it is the cream of intelligence. When it is crystallized it becomes rigid. Very often intellectuality explains a knowledge formed by reasons, most of them of rigid character. The fine reason is subtle; the finer the reason, the less it can be explained in words. It is therefore that people with fine reason cannot very well put their reason into words. Reason in its essence is the depth of intelligence. The intelligence knows, not because it has learned; it knows because it knows. In this higher reason the Spirit of Guidance is conceived, and from that fountain of reason all the great prophets have drunk.

In the teaching of true Buddhism, Buddha has never been considered as an exclusive personality. Buddha has been known to the Buddhists who have understood his message rightly as a man who attained the realization of that essence of reason in which is the fulfillment of life's purpose. Worshipping Buddha does not mean that the Buddhist worships the personality of his spiritual master. He only means by this worship that if there is any object that deserves worship most, it is a human being, it is the person from whose heart the essence of reason, buddhi, has risen as a spring. By this knowledge he recognizes the possibility for every soul, whatever his grade of evolution, to attain that bliss; he trusts that the innermost being of every soul is divine.

The honey of life is hope. If the knowledge of God does not give hope to attain the divine bliss which is attained in life, that knowledge is of no use. Man may believe in God for years, yet may not be benefitted by spiritual bliss; for spiritual bliss is not only in believing, but also in knowing God. Buddhi, which is subtle reasoning, is the path which leads to the goal. The absence of that keeps a person in obscurity. As the sun is the source of light which shows outward things in life, so buddhi is the inner source of light which enables the person to see life clearly, inwardly and outwardly. The true aim of the disciples of Buddha has not been only to admire Buddha, his name or his ideal, but to take Buddha as an example before them. Their idea is the secret of Sufism.

Religious Gatheka 23

Krishna

The life of Krishna is an ideal which gives the picture of the life of a perfect man. The real meaning of the word Krishna is God, and the man who was identified with that name was the God-conscious one who fulfilled his message in the period he was destined to give his message. The story of Krishna, apart from its historical value and interest, is of great importance to the seeker after truth. No one knows the father and mother of Krishna. Some say he was of royal birth, of kingly origin, from King who is the King of all. Then he was given into the care of Yeshoda, who brought him up as his guardian-mother. This is symbolic of the earthly parents, who are the guardians, the real father and mother being God.

In the childhood of Krishna, it is said, he was fond of butter, and he learned as a child to steal butter everywhere. The meaning is that wisdom is the butter of the whole of life. When life is churned, then out of that comes butter-wisdom. That he was stealing it means wherever he found wisdom he learned it. He benefitted from everybody's experience—that is stealing.

Plainly speaking, there are two ways of learning wisdom. One way is that a person drinks to excess, then falls down in the mud, and then the police take him to the police station. When he

recovers from his drunkenness, he cannot find his clothes, and he is horrified at his own appearance. This makes him realize what he has done. This is one way of learning, and it is possible that he still does not learn. The other way of learning is that a young man in the street sees a drunken man and sees how terrible it is to be in this position; he learns from that. That is stealing the butter.

The latter part of Krishna's life has two very important aspects. One aspect teaches us that life is a continual battle, the earth is the battlefield where every soul has to struggle, and the one who will own the kingdom of the earth must know the law of warfare very well. The secret of the offensive, the mystery of defense, how to hold our position, how to retreat, how to advance, how to change position, how to protect and control all that has been won, how to let go what must be given up, the manner of sending the ultimatum, the way of making an armistice, and the method by which peace is made all must be learned in this life's battle. Man's position is most difficult, for he has to fight on two fronts at the same time; one is himself, and the other is another. If he is successful on one front, and on the other front he proves to have failed, then his success is not complete.

The battle of each individual has a different character, depending upon his particular grade of evolution. Therefore every person's battle in life is of a different and peculiar character. No person in the world is free from that battle; only one is more prepared for it; the other, perhaps, is ignorant of the law of warfare. In the success of this battle is the fulfillment of life. The Bhagavad Gita, the Song Celestial, from beginning to end is a teaching on the law of life's warfare.

The other outlook of Krishna on life is that every soul is striving to attain God, but not God as a judge or a king, God as a beloved. Every soul seeks God, the God of love, in the form it is capable of imagining. In this way the story of Krishna and the gopis signifies God and the various souls seeking perfection.

The life and teaching of Krishna has helped the people of India very much in broadening the thought of the pious. The religious man, full of dogmas, is often apt to make dogmas too rigid and expects the godly or the God-conscious to fit in with this standard of goodness. If they do not fit in with his particular idea of piety, he is ready to criticize them. But the thought and life of Krishna was used by the artist, the poet, and the musician to make a new religion recognizing the divine in natural human life. That idea of considering a spiritual person exclusive, remote, stone-like, and lifeless ceased to exist. The people of India became much more tolerant toward all different aspects of life, looking at the whole life at the same time as an immanence of God.

Religious Gatheka 24

Zarathustra

The life and teaching of Zarathustra give an example to those who tread the spiritual path of the manner in which to begin the spiritual journey. Zarathustra is said to have been born from the huma tree. The interpretation of this idea is that the Spirit of Guidance does not come direct from heaven; he is born from the human family and the tree is the family. It has been a great error of some religious people that out of devotion to their master they placed him, through their imagination, on a pedestal where they themselves could not ever prove him to be through reasoning. It can only stand on the horizon of faith. No doubt faith is the foundation and the lamp which lights the path, but reason is the globe over it which makes its light appear.

The purpose of this whole creation is fulfilled in attaining that perfection which is for a human being to attain. All the saints, sages, prophets, and masters of humanity have been human beings; they have shown divine perfection in fulfilling the purpose of being human. Zarathustra's spiritual attainment came first by his communication with nature. He appreciated, adored, and worshipped the sublimity of nature, and he saw wisdom hidden in the whole creation. He learned and recognized from that the being of the creator, acknowledged his perfect wisdom, and then devoted his whole life to glorifying the name of God.

To those who followed him in the path of spiritual attainment, he showed the different aspects of nature and asked them what they could see behind it. He pointed out to his followers that the form, line, color, and movement that they saw before them and which attracted them so much must have been accomplished by an expert artist. It could all work mechanically and be perfect, but no mechanism, however perfect, can run without the help of an individual. Therefore he showed them that God is not an object which the imagination has made, though He is molded by man's imagination outwardly. In reality, God is the Being, such a perfect being, that, if compared with other living beings of this world, He is beyond comparison. He is the only Being. The way of worship taught by Zarathustra was to worship God by offering homage to nature. For nature suggests to the soul the endless and unlimited Being hidden behind it all.

Religious Gatheka 25

Rama

Rama, the great prophet and ideal of the Hindus, was at the same time the example of a god-head. The character of Rama is said to have been foretold by Valmiki. The training which was given to Rama by a great rishi whose name was Vashishta was to bring out that kingdom of God which is hidden in the heart of man. In this particular respect Rama was not only an ideal for the Hindus of that particular age, but was a model to mold the character of those who tread the spiritual path in any age.

Rama was a prince by birth, but was given to be trained under a sage, where he lived the life of solitude, study, and play all together. He was not only taught to read and write, but he was trained in athletic sports and in all manner of warfare. This shows that the ancient people had education in all directions of life. Rama completed his course of study about the time of the prime of his youth. The story of Rama has been always considered as the most sacred scripture for the Hindus; it is called the Ramayana. The Brahman recites this story in a poetic form to which the devotees of the master listen for hours without tiring. They take it as their religious training.

The most interesting part of Rama's life is his marriage. In ancient times there was a custom that the husband was chosen. This custom came out of the tendency to warfare. At every little trouble the princes of the time were up in arms even in such matters as marriage. In order to avoid war the father of Sita invited all the princes and potentates of his land and gave the right of selection to his daughter. There was a time appointed when they all gathered in the royal gallery adorned in their regal ornaments, decorations, and garbs.

Religious Gathekas

Rama lived a simple life. He had not yet known what princely life means, for he was being trained under a saint, where he ate the same food as the sage did, wore the same simple clothes as the sage, and lived in the woods in solitude. Yet the brightness of the soul shines out even without ornaments. When Sita entered among this assembly with a garland of flowers in her hands, her first glance fell upon Rama and she could not lift her glance from that ideal of her soul to anyone else, for her soul recognized the pearl in its heart. Sita, without a moment's pause, came immediately and put the garland on the neck of that youth, so simple and unassuming, standing with an innocent expression behind all the shining hosts. Many marveled at this choice, but many more became as glowing fire with the thought of envy and jealousy. Among them, the one who was most troubled was the king of Lanka, Ravana. For Sita was not only known as the most beautiful princess of the time, but also was called Padmani, the ideal maiden. As Rama was an example in his character, so in Sita the ideal character was born.

Then came the separation of the two. Sita had followed Rama in his twelve years of vandavasa, which means roaming in the forest. Once she was left alone in the woods while Rama had gone to fetch some water, and at that time Sita disappeared. After great difficulty and great grief the trace was found: she had been taken prisoner by Ravana. She steadily lived for Rama in this captivity and would not yield to Ravana's temptations and threatenings. In the end victory was won; Rama fought a battle with Ravana and brought Sita back home.

This story gives the picture of life as a struggle for everyone, in a small way or in a big way. The outer nature of the struggle may be different for everyone but at the same time no one can live in the midst of this world and be without a struggle. In this struggle the one who wins in the end has fulfilled the purpose of his life; who loses in the end has lost.

The life of Rama suggests that, spiritual strife apart, the struggle in the world is the first thing to face. If one keeps to one's own ideal through every test and trial in life, one will no doubt arrive at a stage when he will be victorious. It does not matter how small the struggle, because victory won in the end of every struggle is the power that leads man further on the path towards life's goal. The life of man, however great and spiritual, has its limitations. Before the conditions of life, the greatest man on earth or the most powerful soul will for a moment seem helpless. But it is not the beginning that counts, it is the end. It is the last note that a great soul strikes which proves that soul to be real and true.

Religious Gatheka 26

Abraham

Abraham, whose name seems to come from the Sanskrit root Brahma, which means the creator, was the father of four great religions of the world. For from his descendants, who were called Beni Israel, came Judaism Christianity, and Islam, besides Zoroastrianism.

Abraham was the first to bring the knowledge of mysticism from Egypt, where he was initiated in the most ancient order of esotericism. The place which on his return he chose to establish as a center, with the idea that some place must be the world center, was mecca. Not only in the age of Islam did people make pilgrimage, but at all times the sacred center of Mecca was held in esteem by

the pious who lived before Mohammed. The family of Jesus Christ is traced in the ancient tradition from the family of Isaac, and Mohammed came from the family of Ishmael.

The prophecies of Abraham have always been living words, though various people made different interpretations according to their own ideas. To the mind of the seer the prophecies of Abraham have a very deep meaning.

With his great knowledge of esotericism, he has been a great patriarch among his people. He was interested in everybody's trouble and difficulty. He was thrown into the midst of worldly responsibilities, to learn all that he has learned from it, and then to teach his knowledge and experience to those who looked to him for the bread of knowledge. No doubt, the stories of ancient times very often strike our modern ears as most childish. But the way they were told and the people that told them all make a great difference. In the first place, there was such a scarcity of lettered people in those days that the stories were told by the unlettered who certainly must have improvised upon every legend they told and pictured it according to the artistic development of their particular age. Nevertheless, truth is there, if we only knew how to lift the veil.

Abraham's life not only makes him a prophet but a murshid at the same time. He was a mystic and he gave counsel to those who came to him in need. He examined them, treated their minds, and healed their souls according to their needs. The most remarkable thing one notices in Abraham is that, besides being a prophet and a mystic, he lived the life of an ordinary human being, one with his fellowmen in their times of pleasure and sorrow.

One story of the life of Abraham which has been the source of great argument in the East is the sacrifice of Isaac. It is not only an argument in the East, but also alarming to a western mind. They can put a thousand questions to give a proper reason and justification to such an act. But at the same time, if we looked from the ideal Point of view, no sacrifice for a beloved ideal can be too great. There are numberless souls whose dear ones, their beloved mates, husbands, or sons, have been sacrificed in this recent war. They could do nothing else; they had to surrender their will to the ideal of the nation and offer the sacrifice for the cause of the nation, without thinking for one moment that it was unusual.

When we think deeply on the problem of life, there is no path in the world, whether spiritual or material, which we can tread successfully without a sacrifice. Sometimes the sacrifice is great, sometimes small; sometimes the sacrifice is made first, before achieving the success, and sometimes afterwards. As sacrifice is necessary in life, it is made by everyone in some form or other, but when it is made willingly, it turns into a virtue. The greater the ideal, the greater the sacrifice it demands. If one saw wisely the process of advancement in any direction of life, it is nothing but a continual sacrifice. Happiness comes from understanding this nature of life and not being hurt or troubled by it, but knowing that it is by sacrifice made to the end that man attains to the desired goal.

Religious Gatheka 27

Mohammed

Mohammed is the one among the prophets whose life is to be found in history. Born of the family of Ishmael, Mohammed had in him the prophetic heritage, and before him that purpose to

be fulfilled which had been prophesied by Abraham in the Old Testament. The Prophet became an orphan in his childhood and knew what it is in the world to be without the tender care of the mother and without the protection of the father. This experience was the first preparation for the child who was born to sympathize in the pain of others.

Some say once, others say twice, and others say three times, a miracle happened: that the breast of the Prophet was cut open by the angels. Some say they took something away, and instantly his breast was healed. What was it? It was the poison which is to be found in the sting of the scorpion and the teeth of the serpent; it is the same poison which exists in the heart of man. All manner of prejudice, hatred, and bitterness, in the form of envy and jealousy, are the small expressions of this poison which is hidden in the heart of man. When this poison is taken away in some form or other, then the serpent remains with its beauty and wisdom but without its poisonous teeth.

So it is with man. Man meets with hardships in life, sometimes too hard to stand at the moment, but often such experiences become as higher initiations in the life of the traveller on the path. The heart of man which is the shrine of God, once purified of that poison, becomes the holy abode where God Himself resides. As a youth Mohammed travelled with his uncle, who went to Syria on a business trip. He knew the shortcomings of human nature, which have a large role to play in the world of business. He knew what profit means, what loss means, and what both mean in the end. This gave him a wider outlook on life, because he saw how eager one is to profit by the loss of another. Human beings live in this world no better than the large and small fishes in the water, who live upon one another.

When the time came to defend the country against a powerful enemy, young Mohammed stood shoulder to shoulder with the young men of his land to defend his people in their terrible strife. His sincerity in friendship and his honesty in his dealings endeared him to all those far and near, who called him by the name Amin, which means trustworthy. His marriage with Khadija showed him to be a man of devotion, a man of affection, and an honorable man as husband, father, and citizen of the town he lived in.

Then came the time of contemplation, the fulfillment of that promise which his soul had brought in the world. There came moments when life began to seem sad, with all the beauty and comfort it could offer. He then sought refuge from that depression in solitude. Sometimes for hours, for days, or for weeks sitting in the mountains of Gare Hida, he tried to see if there was anything else to be seen. He tried to hear if there was anything to be heard; he tried to know if there was anything to be known. Patiently Mohammed continued in the path of the search after truth.

In the end he began to hear a word of inner guidance, "Cry on the sacred name of thy Lord." As he began to follow that advice, he found the reecho of the word his heart repeated in all things of nature, as if the wind repeated the same name he did. The sky, the earth, the moon, and the planets all said the same that he was saying. Once in tune with the infinite, realizing his soul one within and without, the call came, "Thou art the man, go forward into the world and carry out Our command, glorify the name of God, unite them who are separated, waken those who are asleep, and harmonize one with the other, as in this is the happiness of man."

Often Khadija found Mohammed had covered himself with a mantle, that he might not see himself, and was trembling at the sight of the responsibility that was thrown on him. But she kept telling him, "You are the man, a man so kind and true, so sincere and devoted, and so forgiving

and serving. It is your work to perform; fear not, you are destined to it by the Almighty, trust in His great power, and in the end success will be yours."

When Mohammed gave his message, to his surprise not only enemies but also friends near and dear to the Prophet turned against him, and would not listen to a new gospel. Throughout the insults and the harm and injury they caused him and those who listened to him, he still continued, in spite of being exiled from home three times. He proved in the end, as every real prophet must prove, that truth alone is the conqueror, and to truth belongs all victory.

Religious Gatheka 28

Is Sufism a Religion?

The question is sometimes asked whether Sufism is a religion. Yes, Sufism is the religion, not a religion. As it is the religion, it has always been and will always be. What we call Judaism, Christianity, or Islam is all Sufism in its essence. The question of whether the Sufis have a religion, a form, or a dogma may be answered, "The Sufi is not subject to form or dogma, but the Sufi uses form and dogma as the soul uses a name and a form." The one who questions the importance of a name and form must first come out of his body and then ask, "Why is there a form?" He must become free from the name and form he has. A man carries in his heart his own name, yet he says, "Anything that has a name, I am against it."

In this world of names and forms, it is absurd to say we do not need a name or a form. Therefore what a Sufi does with his realization of the essence of religion is to arrive at the understanding of the use of names and forms. He does not allow names and forms to blind him; he takes names and forms and uses them towards that purpose which he has to accomplish through life.

The Sufi worship is a worship of all scriptures and all religions. But this does not mean that we have a discussion or a debate on comparative religion by this worship. Neither do we believe only in certain scriptures. We do not mean that these scriptures on the altar are the only ones to which we adhere and which we respect, rejecting the other scriptures. By kindling the lights in the name of the great religions of the world, we do not mean that we believe in only these particular religions and we reject the other religions. It is only meant that our religion is what may be called the religion, a religion which embraces all scriptures and all religions, a religion which recognizes the value of wisdom, and a religion the God of which can be found in truth alone.

Religious Gatheka 29

The Religion of All Prophets (1)

The different candles which are lighted in the Universal Worship signify our adherence and our respect to all different teachers, different religions, and different scriptures. Therefore this universal worship, the Church of All, is in reality all churches. It is a service, it is a worship, and at the same time it is a training of our mind to tolerate the religions of different people. If he reads the history of religions, how the followers of different religions have had battles and wars against one another for the defense of the outer forms of religions, a person with a just mind will admit

Religious Gathekas

that the followers of the great teachers have not followed the belief or the teachings of the great ones thoroughly.

This universal worship, the religion of all those teachers who have come and gone. This was the message of Jesus Christ and all other great teachers of humanity. Therefore it is not a separate line; it is the same line and the same message which is being given to the world. It is the continuation of all the great religions which have come from time to time, and a unification of all, which was the desire of all prophets. In reality the wish of the great teachers of humanity is fully gratified in this worship, because it was this that was their idea: to come—as the result of their teaching—and give the message to humanity. Although we are very few whose destiny it is to serve God and humanity in this direction, we ought to feel ourselves blessed. In the strength of that blessing, we should feel fully encouraged and helped to serve God and humanity.

Religious Gatheka 30

The Religion of All Prophets (2)

The Sufi movement is a preparation for world service, a world service chiefly in three directions. One direction is the philosophical understanding of life; another direction is bringing about brotherhood among races, nations, and creeds; the third direction is the world's greatest need, which is the religion of the day. Now you may ask, "What need is there for a new religion?" The answer is that it is not a new religion, it is the continuation of the same old religion which has always existed and will always exist, a religion which adheres to all the great teachers and all the great scriptures accepted by large numbers of mankind. On its altar are the scriptures of the Hindus, the Hebrews, the Zoroastrians, the Buddhists, the Christians, and the believers in Islam; candles are placed representing all the different religions of the world.

Can it be ever called a new religion; are these new religions; are these scriptures new scriptures? It is the unification of religion which was the dream of Jesus and the inspiration of Mohammed, which was the object of Abraham and the desire of Moses. What the prophets of the past could not bring about, owing to the difficulty of conditions at the time of their coming, is brought about today as the granting of their prayers which have been made for thousands of years in the past.

Therefore, although the Sufi movement is in its infancy, yet it is servant of God and the whole humanity, and the fulfillment of the object of this mission is the world message. The blessing that we receive in this service is the blessing of all the great teachers and prophets and Illuminated Souls, all in one.

Religious Gatheka 31

The God Ideal (1)

God and the God Ideal may be explained as the sun and the light. Just as there come times when the sun becomes covered by clouds, so there come times when the God Ideal becomes covered by materialism. But if the cloud for a moment covers the sun, that does not mean that the sun is lost to you. So if in the reign of materialism the God Ideal seems to have disappeared, yet God is there

all the same. The condition of the world is just like the ever rising and falling waves. Sometimes they seem to rise and sometimes to fall, but with every rising and falling wave the sea is the same; so with all its changes life is the same.

We find that during the past few years all over the world there has come a phase when the God Ideal seems entirely forgotten. This does not mean that churches have disappeared or that God does not exist, but that a light that once was there has been covered and has ceased to light us. As there is night after day, so these changes of condition come in life: light and darkness.

In the age of science on the one side, materialism on the other, and commercialism on the top, man seems to have blinded himself by acquiring wealth and power so that he sees nothing else. It is not that there is no search for light: it is the nature of every soul to search for light. But the great question is, how can light come when nation is against nation, race against race, and the followers of one religion against the followers of another? How can there be peace and light? The sign of day is that all things are clear, and the sign of night is that nothing can be found or seen; there are clouds.

The most dreadful nightmare the world has ever seen has just passed away, and although that wave and that nightmare seem to have gone, the effect is still here. The effect that is left is worse than the cause, for prejudice is worse than bloodshed. When man thirsts for the blood of his fellowman, how can we say that there is light? If a man can eat joyfully at his table when his neighbor is dying of hunger, where is the light? That is the condition of humanity today. What is the cause? It is because the light, the God Idea, is not there.

I was once amused by a very simple answer from a maid. When somebody came to the door and knocked, the maid was not free to go at once but took her time. When at last she came, the man was very cross and said, "Why did you not open the door quickly?" I asked the maid, "What do you think was the reason for the person's being cross?" She said with her innocent expression, "Because there is no God with him."

Friends, the word of Christ is that God is love. If God is love then we, every one of us, can prove God in us by expressing God in our life. Yes, according to the external customs of the different religions, one goes to church, one to the mosque, one to the synagogue, and one to the temple of Buddha. But the inner church is neither in the mosque nor in the synagogue, but in the heart of man, where God abides and which is the habitation of Christ. With this divine element lighted in man's heart, he will go to the house of prayer and then his prayer will be heard.

There is a well-known story in India that a girl was crossing a place where a Muslim was performing his prayers: the law is that no one should cross where a person is praying. When the girl returned, the man said to her, "How insolent! Do you know what sin you have done?" "What did I do?" said the girl. And the man said that no one was allowed to cross. "I did not mean any harm," said the girl, "but tell me, what do you mean by praying?" "For me, prayer is thinking of God," said the man. "Oh!" she said, "But I was going to see my young man, and I was thinking of him and I did not see you. If you were thinking of God, how did you see me?"

The idea, therefore, friends, is that prayer becomes living if it is offered from a living heart. From a dead heart, prayer has no meaning and is dead. There is a story of an Arab who was running to the mosque where the prayer of God was being offered, but before he could arrive the prayers were finished. On his way he met a man coming from the mosque and asked him, "Are the prayers

finished?" The man replied that they were finished, and the other sighed deeply and said, "Alas!" Then the man asked, "Will you give me the virtue of your sigh in exchange for the virtue of my prayers?" And the other agreed. Next day the simple man saw the Prophet in a dream, who told him that he had made a bad bargain, for that one sigh was worth all the prayers of a lifetime because it was from the heart.

There are different human beings in different stages of evolution, and it is natural that every human being according to his particular stage of evolution imagines God before him when he prays. It is questionable for anyone else to judge the one who prays and say, "God is not this or that." Persons who force their beliefs on others often put them against that belief, even if that is the true belief. It requires a great deal of tact, thought, and consideration to explain or correct the belief of another. In the first place, it is insolent on the part of man to want to explain God, although man today would like not only to explain but even to examine whether the spirit of God exists.

The other day I was much amused to hear that there are people who not only want to take photographs of spirits, but even to weigh the soul! It was good in ancient times when the state had respect for the God Ideal and religion and taught that respect to humanity. Today man wishes to use what he calls freedom in religion, even in the foundation of all religions, the God Ideal! But then it must be remembered that it is not the path of freedom that leads to the goal of freedom, but the path of the God Ideal that leads to the goal of truth.

Religious Gatheka 32

The God Ideal (2)

Man has respect for his mother or father, husband or wife, or for his superiors, but they have limited personalities. Where then shall he give most respect? Only to one being: God. Man can love another human being, but by the very fact of loving another human being, he has no scope; to express all the love that there is, you must love the unlimited God.

One admires all that is beautiful in color, tone, or form, but all that is beautiful has its limitations. When one rises above limitations, there is that perfection which is God alone. Many people say, "Yes, the perfection of all things, of love, harmony, and beauty is God, but where is the personality of God? This is the difficulty which some feel when at loss to find something to adore or worship which is different from all they see. In all ages men have perhaps worshipped idols, or the sun, or fire, or some other form as God, because they were not able to see further than their eyes could see.

Of course it is easy to criticize or to look at anyone with contempt, but really that shows that every soul has a desire for someone to admire, adore, and worship. There is a story of a peasant boy who heard the name of God preached and he came home and felt great love gushing from his heart, but he could not imagine God. And he began to say, "O God, if you would come to me, I would love you so much. I feel so full of love for you that I would bathe you in this river and keep you warm in my blankets and I would protect you from harm. I would sing to you and dance before you." Moses happened to pass by in these parts, and heard what the boy said. He said to him, "Beware, O boy, what you are saying. God is beyond the conception of man. You make him limited by saying such things." But no sooner had Moses said this than a voice came from within, saying, "Moses, thou hast

given Us great pain. Here was one who loved Us and did not know what We are or what We are like. Now you have broken his heart, for he could not understand Us otherwise."

This teaches us how gentle we ought to be with the faith of another. As long as he has the spark of the love of God, this spark should be slowly blown upon that the flame may rise; if not that spark will be extinguished. How much the spiritual development of mankind in general depends upon a religious man: he can either spread the light or diminish it by forcing his belief on others.

Although there can be no trace of the personality of God on the surface, yet one can see that there is a source from which all personality comes, and a goal to which all must return. And if there is one source, what a great personality that one source must be! It cannot be learned by great intellect or even by the study of metaphysics or comparative religion, but only understood by a pure and innocent heart full of love.

The great personalities who have descended on earth from time to time to awaken in man that love which is his divine inheritance found echo in innocent souls rather than in great intellects. Man often confuses wisdom with cleverness and cleverness with wisdom. But these two are different; man can be wise and not clever, and man can be clever and not wise. By cleverness a person will strive and strive and will not reach. It is a stream, the stream of love, which leads towards God.

There is a story of a king who was travelling and hunting in the woods, and the king was hungry and stopped at the house of a peasant who treated him very kindly. When the king was leaving this peasant, he was so touched with his kindness that without telling him he was a king he said to him, "Take this ring, and if ever you are in trouble, come to me in the city and I will see what I can do for you." After a time there was a famine and the peasant was in great trouble; his wife and child were dying, and he set out to see this man.

Of course, when he showed the ring he was brought to the king. When he entered the room he saw the king busy in prayer, and when the king came near to him he said, "What were you doing?" "Praying for peace and love and happiness among my subjects." "So there is a greater one than you, to whom you must go for what you seek? Then I will go to Him who is greater and on whom even your destiny depends." He would accept no help, and at last the king had to send what was needed quietly to his home, first saying that no one must tell him that it came from the king.

The idea is that it is not only belief but faith which is necessary. Belief is a thing, but faith is a living being. The warners and teachers of humanity and the great preachers who have come from time to time when darkness prevailed, what message did they bring? Did they bring new religions or new theories to the world? No. Jesus Christ said, "I have not brought a new law, but I have come to fulfill the law." Who else at any time could bring a new theory? The scientist perhaps, but not the spiritual messenger. Then what did the spiritual message bring? It brought to the world a living God, a light hidden beyond words. With the spiritual message God has sent His life and light upon the world.

The work the Sufi movement is destined to do in the present epoch is to bring about a better understanding among the followers of the different religions. The Sufi message is not a new message, although it strikes the note of the day. It is the re-echo of the same voice heard in all ages. At the present time, when races, nations, and the followers of different religions are all against each other, a word of unity and peace alone can unite all together in God.

The Sufi Order is not a community and not a religion; it is a nucleus of the human brotherhood which is the inner call of every soul. The Sufi message is given to all nations; it is a call to all races and to the followers of all religions. It teaches people to follow whatever religion they may profess, but to follow it truly and understand it better; not only to believe in God and the words of Christ, but to have faith in him and his divine word. We must think of the tolerance of the master and of his forgiveness and what the world would be today if we had it too. If we follow the natural religion—that divine impulse that is in every heart—then we shall be living the true religion.

Religious Gatheka 33

Moses

Moses, the most shining prophet of the Old Testament, gave the world the divine law in the Ten Commandments, which is reality was the interpretation of the divine law that he perceived, expressed in the words of those who stood before him at that time in the world's civilization.

It is interesting to notice the Sufi saying which comes from the ages, "Be the follower of love, and forget all distinction." For in this path of spiritual attainment to claim that "I am so and so" is meaningless. Moses was found by the riverside by a princess, who knew not what family he came from or his father and mother. Only the name of God came to the mind of every thoughtful inquirer as to the father and mother of Moses.

When people compare the teachings of different religions and readily form their opinions upon them, they are often mistaken; it is premature to make such distinctions. There comes a stage in the evolution of an illuminated soul when he begins to see the law hidden behind nature, the true psychology. To him the whole of life reveals the secrets of its nature and character. When he gives an interpretation of these secrets to others, they become limited, for they take the color of his own personality and the form of the thought of those to whom the message is given.

The story of Moses as told by Sufis is most interesting and helpful to the traveller on the path. Moses has been the favorite character of the poets of Arabia and Persia, and in the poems of the Persian Sufis, Moses is often mentioned as Krishna is mentioned in the poetry of the Hindus.

Moses was walking in the wilderness looking for fire when he saw from a distance smoke rising on the top of a mountain, so he climbed to the top of the mountain in order to find that fire. But on arriving at the top of the mountain, he saw a glimpse of lightning so powerful that it went throughout his whole being. Moses fell down unconscious on the ground, and when he recovered his senses he found himself with illumination. From that time Mount Sinai was the place where he often went and communicated with God. This story is very enlightening when one thinks that it is possible that all the illumination that is desired can come to a soul in a moment.

Many think that spiritual attainment can be achieved by a great labor. No, labor is necessary for material attainment; for spiritual attainment what one needs is the seeking soul like that of Moses. Moses' falling down upon the ground may be interpreted as the cross, which means, "I am not, Thou art." In order to be, one must pass a stage of being nothing. In Sufi terms it is called fana, when one thinks, "I am not what I had always thought myself to be."

This is the true self-denial, which the Hindus called *laya*, and the Buddhists annihilation. It is the annihilation of the false self, which gives rise to the true self. Once this is done, man approaches closer and closer to God and stands face to face with his divine ideal, with whom he can communicate at every moment of his life. The law of God is endless, as limitless as God himself, and once the eye of the seeker penetrates through the veil that hangs before him, hiding from his eyes the real law of life, the mystery of the whole life manifests to him. Happiness and peace become his own, for they are the birthright of every soul.

Religious Gatheka 34

The Universal Worship (1)

What is this Universal Worship? Although in its infancy, it is the religion of the day and the faith of tomorrow. But what religion is it? It is the same religion of which Jesus Christ said, "I have not come to give a new law, I have come to give the old law." What is this new message? It is the same old message that has ever been.

Are the workers of this message priests? No, they are the soldiers of the army of peace, the army which is working to bring about peace in the diverse religions of this world, which have disputed, argued, and kept themselves away from one another, looking upon one another's religions as wrong.

Then what is our idea in this service? In this service we learn something. We learn that wisdom, wherever and at whatever time it came to the world, was one and the same truth, the truth which is the only religion; it is truth which will save. Is it not, then, the religion of Christ, without limiting the master to a certain period only and to a certain book only? To the thoughtful person it is the message of Christ. But is it not also the message of Buddha, is it not of Mohammed and Moses, of Abraham and Solomon? Have they come with many truths, or have they come with one truth? If they came with many truths, there must be many gods, and if there are many gods and many truths, then if we cannot understand one another's language we cannot understand one another's heart. But it is not so; we can understand one another's heart, even if we cannot understand one another's language.

What does it teach us? It teaches us that in this world of variety of names and forms, where we see each other separated and divided, individually and collectively, by being different nations and religions, in that spirit we are one and the same, and in that spirit we can unite. Can that be religion, which in one moment can separate the children of God from one another in the name of faith and in the name of religion? Where lies true happiness? In the understanding of one another, in our unity with one another, and in our harmony with one another.

Imagine the troubles that humanity has gone through the past few years; do these troubles seem to end? Not at all. If the troubles seem to end in one form, then in some other form they arise. It seems like a blood poisoning, wherein if one wound is healed it takes its outlet at some other place. How can the world be purified and rise above this difficulty? Not by political and financial activities. No, religion is the healing of the world of humanity. Which religion? Not this religion or that religion, but the religion, the only religion, the religion which is the religion of Hindu, of Muslim, of Christian, of Jew, and of everyone. For we all, whatever be our caste, creed, race, nation or religion,

can only unite in one—and that is that one God—and in truth, and our only happiness is in this unity which unites us in God and in truth.

Religious Gatheka 35

The Universal Worship (2)

What is religion? Religion is a lesson which teaches the manner of living right and reaching the object for which we are born. This religion has come time after time to the world, through those who have brought the message of God. Those who came with this message of religion have given it in diverse forms, in accordance with the evolution of the people at that particular time, but the religion was one and the same. There never has been any other religion than one, for God is one, truth is one, and so religion is one. If there is any difference, it is a difference of form, not of the soul. It is the same water, pure water, perhaps filled in several pitchers. One pitcher is made in India, the other in China, the other in Arabia, perhaps the other in the western world. It is like a stream which comes through the fountain and falls in various streams, but it is one and the same stream.

The real understanding of religion is not in disputing over the diversity of the forms, saying, “Your religion is worse and my religion is better.” The true religion is in recognizing that one life in all. There are different candles on the altar, each candle named for a different teacher and religion, but it is one and the same light. What then does this service teach us? This service teaches us one light and different lamps. It is not the lamps that are to be taken first into the mind. No, it is the one light that should be taken to heart. It is this religion of unification which Jesus Christ came to teach. The teaching of Moses and the efforts of Mohammed were all towards this one object. All that Buddha taught and all that Krishna said sums up in one thing, one light that is the divine light. The guidance that comes from that light becomes the path for humanity to tread upon.

The Sufi movement, though in its infancy, is destined to serve God and humanity in this direction. The Sufi message is the re-echo of the same divine message which has always come and will always enlighten humanity.

Religious Gatheka 36

The Religion of All Prophets (3)

Religion has its place in the world, whatever be its condition. From the beginning of civilization there has been some religion or other followed by people. Of course, whenever a new religion came, the old religion was routed out. But what was routed out? Was it the religion or the corruption that was routed out? The truth is the truth, religion is religion. That religion can never be routed out.

That religion which is the need of the human soul has always been and will always be. It is only the outer form and its outer dogmas which have perhaps been corrupted at times because they did not answer the purpose of humanity at that stage of evolution. Not understanding that, man has very often revolted against religion, not knowing that it was a revolt against corruption, not against religion.

Religious Gathekas

Now the world as we find it today is again in a revolt against religion. Revolt is like an intoxication. People do not know, when they are in revolt, whether they do right or wrong. When a person is cross with his friend, by seeing the defects or the faults of the friend he forgets his merits.

Therefore man today, intoxicated in a revolt against religion, which means against corruption, revolts also, ignorantly, against God, or form, or prayer, or anything which appears to him religious. But if you ask his soul, if you asked the deepest part of his being, you will find that there is some place for religion. What has this revolt brought about in the western world just now? It has brought about a condition in which it has become the fashion to be an atheist. There are people who wish to mention the name of God, and yet they are afraid it will be against the fashion and the custom of the day. It is just as in the past: an atheist in the past would not dare to say that he did not believe; he had to respect the custom. The outcome of this condition is that man is absorbed in material gain, and spiritual gain and heavenly inspiration are way out of his sight.

The Sufi movement is intended to play its part at the present moment in this condition of the world. And, however small and infantile, it has a wide horizon and a vast field of work before it. Its work is to bring to the world that religion which has always been the religion of humanity: nature's religion, respect for one another's belief, one another's scripture, and one another's teacher.

It is not, therefore, only a church, it is a school where we learn to respect the religions of all the people in the world and their scriptures and to pay our homage to the teachers that they have esteemed the most. This was the object of all the great prophets, and at the present moment this object, held by all prophets, is being fulfilled. And in this way with us is the blessing, inspiration, and power of all souls who have for ages come in this world and wakened humanity towards that goal which is the longing of every soul.

Religious Gatheka 37

The Universal Worship (3)

The service of the Church of All is a universal worship. In this service a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist, and a Hindu service—all services—are included. Therefore the blessing of Christ is given from the altar to the seeker of Jesus Christ's blessing; the one who seeks the blessing of Moses is given the blessing of Moses; the one who seeks the benediction of Buddha, there is the benediction of Buddha.

But those who seek blessing from all of these great ones who have come at different times are blessed by all. This service, therefore, is the fulfillment of the desire of Christ; this is, therefore, the service which Moses would have had if he could; and this is the service which Mohammed had intended, for Islam was meant for all religions in the world. No great teacher ever came on earth with the thought of dividing people into different sects and communities.

Our movement, therefore, is busy rendering our service to God and humanity in this direction, without any intention of forming an exclusive community, but to unite in this service the people of all different religions. This movement, in its infancy, is commencing its work, but its culmination will be a world movement. It is the world message and that religion which will be the religion of the

whole humanity, a religion which does not distract the mind of any person from his own religion, but makes it more firm and enlightened and more sympathetic to his own religion. It is a religion which teaches tolerance towards the faith of another, a religion which opens a person's heart to words of wisdom, no matter what direction they come from.

This is not only a church, but this is a school where we can learn the lesson of tolerance, learn to adhere to all teachers and to respect all scriptures. This lesson teaches us that we need not give up our religion, but we must embrace all religions in order to make the sacredness of religion perfect.

Religious Gatheka 38

The Idea of Sacredness

The feeling of sacredness comes from that profound depth of the heart which may be called the divine chamber; therefore it is religious feeling which is to be valued rather than the outward form. People in all ages have called those who did not worship in the same form as themselves heathen or pagan, and this hatred has caused all the wars and disagreements between the religions of the world. However high, beautiful, or wonderful the religious form may be, if there is no sincerity of the heart it is nothing. Therefore, the true religion is that sentiment which is to be found in the deepest depth of our being. When once that sentiment has become real, one naturally begins to respect the same sentiment in another person.

I have very often seen the sign of the true religious person. A person who is truly religious, if he sees another person—to whatever religion he belongs—occupied in his way of worship, he respects him because he feels the same feeling in his heart. It is just like the language of the mother: the sentiment that a mother has for her child. She may go to the North Pole and see a mother from quite a different land, but she will know her feeling though she may not know the language. Religion is the sacred religious sentiment; religion is not a form. And if this sentiment is there, then one respects that sentiment in every form.

There is a story that Moses was passing through the countryside, and he saw there a young farmer who had perhaps for the first time heard a religious sermon and had heard the name of God. This farmer sitting there leaning against a tree in nature was calling to the God whose name he had heard in the sermon. He said, "O God, if I ever saw you, if you came here, you cannot imagine what I would not do for you. I would take you home and give you all the nice food I can make for you; my best clothes I would give you, and I would take such great care of you. If the wolf came, I would first give my life to the wolf before it could touch you. If you only knew how I love you, you would certainly come to me."

Moses heard this discourse and said to the lad, "What are you saying? God, who is the protector of all, you cannot protect. No danger can touch Him, He is above all danger. Wolf and tiger and lion are all His, He has made them; He does not depend upon our earthly food." The boy felt such a feeling of despair that he did not know where to go or what to say or to think. As Moses went further he perceived, as he used to perceive, the voice, the message of God. The voice said, "What have you done Moses? We sent you to the earth to bring closer those who love us; you have separated them. Every lover of ours pictures us according to his mentality. We do not concern ourselves in what way he approaches us, for we know his deepest feeling towards us."

Religious Gathekas

It is to learn and to understand this idea that the Sufi movement has this Universal Worship. In this Universal Worship whatever form a person has does not matter; as long as he believes in God, he may come together with other human beings without thinking about belief in this or that. This worship does not take anyone away from his own way; it only presents before everyone his own scripture. In this service one begins to train oneself to love one's own religion and to tolerate the religions of others.

At this time when the world is divided into so many sections, one working against another, it is most necessary that humanity must at least unite in God. For whatever difference there may be among human beings, before God there is no difference. He is the father of all humanity, and we all go before Him as His children. This Universal Worship reminds us of this, and this Universal Worship prepares us to sympathize with one another and to be blessed by all forms of wisdom which have come to us by different great teachers of humanity. There is one God and there is one truth, so in reality there cannot be many religions; there is only one religion. By the realization of this truth we shall be truly benefitted by what is called religion.

Religious Gatheka 39

The Universal Worship (4)

What does this service mean? The service, a religious service, is a drill before the battle. And what is the battle? Our everyday life. If the service is only the religion, then we can only have the religion once in a week, and six days without it. But that is not the thing. This service is the winding which winds the mechanism of thought, the unity of all religions and of all people. It is for this winding that we come to the service every week; the mind is wound just like a clock to continue for the whole week.

What we receive here is the idea that God is one, truth is one, and religion is one. There cannot be two religions; that is confusion and the illusion of the human mind. When people cannot understand each other, then they say, "Your religion is different, my religion is different." But the difference does not belong to God, it belongs to the earth. We are on the earth, but we are not bound to the earth; we are bound to God.

In the realization of God and in the love of God, what are we expected to do? We are expected to unite with one another in the thought of God and in the love of God. How should we derive the greatest benefit from this service we attend? From the time we leave here that idea must continue in our heart. If we are in the office, in a factory, or in the market, the idea must be there; the prayer must continue with us in all our works in life. Not only the prayer of glorifying the name of God, but that lesson that we receive in that prayer: that all wisdom is from God. From whatever scripture, whatever religion, whatever form, it all comes from one source.

Remember that a person might ask, "How can it be that all scriptures and religions will be placed in the same place?" A Christian might ask, "How can the Buddhist or the Hindu religion or the religion of the Hebrews be in the place I consider my religion?" But he must first know that the Jewish person is thinking the same way, and the Buddhist and the Hindu also are thinking in exactly the same way, perhaps even more. Therefore the object of this movement is freedom. It is democracy of religion, at the same time not interfering with anybody's faith, ideal, idea, or belief.

For instance, there is a Christian belonging to this movement who thinks most of his religion and of his teacher; there is a Hebrew, perhaps thinking most of his religion and yet belonging to the Sufi movement; there is a Buddhist who also considers his religion most. Do you think we have any objection to it? Do we interfere with his ideal or with his devotion to his teacher? It would be as absurd as for a person to think that a child should think of the mother of another more than of his own. And who has the right to place the great teachers or the scriptures by comparison in such and such a place? No one. Our heart's devotion to the ideal we adore is that place where we can place our ideal. It is our affair; no one can interfere with it.

A few girls were playing one day, and each girl said in turn, "My mother is better," while the other said, "No, my mother is better." They were all discussing and arguing. But the girl who was wisest among them said, "Oh no, it is the mother who is adorable, whether it is your mother or my mother."

Does the Sufi movement, therefore, interfere with anybody's devotion to his teacher? Never. But at the same time it invites souls to see the source and goal of all wisdom to be one. In this truth all the blessing that the soul is longing for will be bestowed.

Religious Gatheka 40

Attaining the Inner Life Through Religion

Very often people divide the esoteric or inner part of life from the exoteric or outer form of religion. But if to divide them in conception is possible, to divide them in reality is like separating the head from the body. As head linked with body makes the form complete, so religion with inner life makes the spiritual ideal perfect.

Nevertheless the thoughtful and wise of all ages, with their philosophical minds, their scientific tendencies, and their intellectual strife, often thought of separating religion from the inner life. But if they are separated, it is just like bread without butter, milk without sugar, and food without salt. But there is a reason why this tendency has very often come, especially among thoughtful people. The reason is that it is natural that, when the body becomes a corpse and life leaves the body, even the dear ones who loved the person begin to think, "As soon as possible we should clear away this body."

For when the one they loved is gone from it, the body is left as a corpse. So when the inner life, which is just like a breath in the body of religion, departs from it, then the religion becomes like a corpse. The most faithful adherents begin to feel that it is a corpse.

In all ages and in all periods of history, we can trace a limit of years for a religion. Why? Because it had breath and the spiritual aspect in it. But when that inner life departed, it was left like a corpse. Still the faithful kept it, but those with intelligence could not keep it any longer.

As the rain falls year after year and gives the earth new life and new sustenance, so it has been necessary that the new message of spiritual upliftment should come. Whenever it came, people have fought against it, not knowing that it is the same truth, breath, and soul of religion that has come again. The secret of religion is that the rainfall of last year is not different from this year's; it is the

same water, the same sustenance, and the same energy. As vapors it rises and as raindrops it falls. As Solomon said, "There is nothing new under the sun." It has always been the same message, only brought in different bottles with new labels.

What is the most important necessity of religion? Besides all the moral principles that religion teaches and besides all the ethics that religion gives, there is a central theme which can be traced as the nature of life and spirit. And what is it? It is to make that perfect being intelligible to the limited mind of man. What is done for it? The ideal of God is preached. The prophets who brought religion from time to time made their central theme the ideal of God. Every one of them tried his best to make a picture of that ideal such that the people of that period when they lived could grasp it easily and benefit by it in order to fulfill the purpose of spiritual perfection.

But the different pictures that the great prophets of the world made very often differ from one another. One finds that in order to make one photograph clear, there have to be many different developments of it. A plate has to be made and from that plate a development has to be made, then brought onto paper and then retouched. Different processes make a photograph complete. So has it been with those who made the picture of the deity, a picture which cannot be made fully since it is beyond man's power to make. The artists who painted that picture have done their best.

When three artists paint the portrait of one person, the three are different. They only differ because the artists differ. So the prophets did for one and the same motive, in order to make that picture intelligible to the limited mind of man, who knows nothing better than what he knows of himself and of his brother man. Therefore the best picture man can make of God is that of man. In the ancient religions of the East, it is said that God was pictured in man; then the picture of later days was man pictured as God. After that a reform followed in order to separate them and in order to break with the confusion caused by these two opposite ideas, that God was God and man was man.

But the present message, which comes of necessity, is that God is in man and man in God, and yet God is God and man is man. If it had been possible, a thousand years ago this Church of All with scriptures and with candles in the name of all the great ones would have existed. It was the longing of the awakened souls; it was the ideal of the wise ones in all ages. What prevented them? The multitude, the childlike followers of a certain religion who would stick to their own and would not wish to listen to another, who did not know what was their own and what was another. When there is one Father, and all human beings, His children, come from Him and go to Him, where lies the difference, where is the "other?" The "other" comes by the faults man makes before his own intelligence.

Was it not the desire the Mohammed, was it not the wish of Jesus Christ, was it not the task of Moses, and was it not the wish of Krishna or Buddha that wisdom in all its aspects be understood and that all those who sacrificed their lives and energies in service for man may have their service fulfilled and humanity blessed and benefitted by what they brought? Was it not the wish of Rama that all men of the world should come together understanding that there is only one religion?

The evolution of man today has allowed it, and we must be thankful that we can gather together even some few souls who can tolerate such an idea and be patient and try to understand that behind all religion there can only be one truth and that there is only one truth. We are willing to listen to the words of all the great souls who have come perhaps thousands of years before us. What

is left of them is in their words; we can see the glimpses of their feelings in their words. Why should we not be benefitted by them?

The Universal Worship, therefore, is the religion of the future, which brings to humanity the ideal of the unification of religion and the ideal of getting above sectarianism and the limitedness of communities and groups. We must remember that any political or social efforts will not be complete unless the uniting in God, the only source in which humanity must unite, is held fast in truth.

Religious Gatheka 41

The Kingship of God

The God ideal has been regarded by different men differently. Some have idealized God as the king of earth and heaven. Some have a conception of God as a person; others think of God as an abstraction. Some believe in God, others do not. Some raise the ideal of the deity to the highest heaven; others bring it down to the lowest depth of earth. Some picture God in paradise; others make an idol and worship it. There are many ideas and many beliefs and different names, such as pantheism, idolatry, belief in a formless God, or belief in many gods and goddesses. But all are striving after something in one way or another.

If I were asked how many conceptions there are of God, I would say as many as there are souls, for all, whether wise or foolish, have some conception of God. Everyone knows God in some way and has his own picture of Him, either as a man, as the absolute, as goodness, or as something beautiful or illuminating; everyone has some conception, and even for the one who does not believe in God the name exists.

Very often the unbeliever is an unbeliever because of his own vanity, though this is not always so. He says that only simple people believe in God; he sees that there are millions of simple souls who worship God and yet it does not raise them higher, so he sees no virtue in the worship of God. Others believe in the God ideal so long as they are happy, but when their condition changes and when sorrow and trouble come, they begin to doubt whether there really is a God.

I have often met people who had had a great belief in God, but having lost a dear one, after having vainly prayed and implored God that they might keep him, they lost their belief. I once met a most unhappy mother who had given up her belief in God after the death of her only child. It grieved me to think that a soul so religious, tender, and fine by that one great sorrow in life had given up her faith. I told her that while I sympathized with her most deeply, at the same time in giving up her faith she had brought herself a much greater loss, a loss which nothing could make up.

In the Bible and in the other scriptures we read that we should glorify the name of God. Is God raised higher by man's worship; is He made greater by man's belief in Him? The answer is that God is independent of all that man can do for Him. If man worships God, believes in Him, and glorifies Him, it is for man's own good. Belief in God serves the greatest and only purpose in life, for the fulfillment of which man was born: that purpose is the attainment of that perfection which may be called divine.

Why must God be called a king? Why not any other name? The answer is that it is impossible for words to explain or define God, but all that man can do is to use the best word for the greatest Being, the supreme Being, and he uses this word because language is poor and he can find no other or better one.

Again comes the question of the metaphysician or the philosopher when he reads all is God and God is all. He says, "If God is goodness, what then is the opposite of goodness? Is it outside God? If so, God is limited. Then something else exists as well as God. Are there two powers, rival powers? What is the power called evil?" It is true that God is all, but you would not call a man's shadow the man. What is evil then? It is only a shadow. What is illness? It is another illusion. In reality there is only life: real existence. Illness is lack of life; it is a shadow and an illusion.

The Being of God is recognized by His attributes. Therefore man speaks of God as the just God; he sees all power and all goodness in God. But when the situation is changed and he sees God as injustice, he begins to think that God is powerless and he judges the action of God. But one must look at this from a different point of view. Human beings are limited and imperfect, and from our own imperfect standpoint we try to judge the perfect Being or His perfect action. In order to judge, our vision must become as wide as the universe; then we might have a little glimpse of the justice which is perfect in itself. But when we try to judge every action by limiting God and by attaching the responsibility of every action to God, we confuse our faith and by our own fault we begin to disbelieve.

The error is in man's nature. From childhood man thinks all he does is just and fair, so when man thinks of God he has his own conception by which he tries to judge God and His justice. If he is forgiving, he tries to overlook God's apparent injustice and find goodness in God and to see the limitation of man. This is better, but in the end man will realize that every movement is controlled and directed from one source, and that source is the perfection of love, justice, and wisdom, a source where nothing is lacking. But it is so difficult for man to have a perfect conception of the God ideal and he cannot begin in a first lesson to conceive of God as perfect. So the wise must be tolerant of all the forms in which souls picture their God.

There is a story told of Moses. One day he was passing through a farm and he saw a peasant boy sitting quietly, speaking to himself, saying, "O God, I love you so, if I saw you here in these fields, I would bring you soft bedding and delicious dishes to eat. I would take care that no wild animals could come near you. You are so dear to me, and I so long to see you. If you only knew how I love you I am sure you would appear to me."

Moses heard and said, "Young man, how can you dare to speak of God so? He is the formless God and no wild beast or bird could injure Him who guards and protects all." The young man bent his head sorrowfully and went

Then revelation came to Moses as a voice from within, which said, "Moses, what have you done? You have separated a sincere lover from me. What does it matter what I am called or how I am spoken to; am I not in all forms?" This story throws great light and teaches that it is only the ignorant who accuse others of a wrong conception of God. Everyone thinks the other person must believe in and worship his God. Everyone has his own conception of God, and this conception makes the steppingstone to the true ideal of God.

Then there are others who believe in God but do not show their belief in any outward religious tendency. People often misunderstand them, and yet there is something very beautiful hidden in their heart, not understood and not known. There is a story told in the East of a man who used to avoid going to the house of prayer and who showed no outward sign. His wife often wondered if he had any belief in God; she thought a great deal about this and was very anxious about it. Then one day she said to her husband, "I am very happy today." The man was surprised, and asked what made her happy, and she said, "I was under a false impression, but now I have found out the truth and I am glad." He asked, "What has made you glad?" She replied, "I heard you saying the name of God in your sleep." He said, "I am very sorry." It was too precious and too great for him to speak of. He felt it as a great blow after having hidden this secret in the deepest part of his being, because it was too sacred to speak of. He could not bear it, and he died.

We cannot say from the outward appearance who believes and who does not believe. One person may be pious and orthodox and it may mean nothing; another may have a profound love for the deity and a great knowledge of Him and no one may know it. What benefit does man receive from believing in the kingship of God? How does he derive real help from his belief? He must begin to realizing the nobility of human nature. Not that one must expect everything to be good and beautiful, and if one's expectation is not realized think there is no hope of progress. For man is limited and his goodness is limited. No one has ever proved to be your ideal; you may make an ideal out of your imagination and whenever you see goodness lacking you may give from your own heart and so complete the nobility of human nature. This is done by patience, tolerance, kindness, and forgiveness.

The lover of goodness loves every little sign of goodness. He overlooks the faults and fills up the gaps by pouring out love and filling up that which is lacking. This is real nobility of soul. Religion, prayer, and worship are all intended to ennoble the soul, not to make it narrow, sectarian, and bigoted. One cannot arrive at true nobility of spirit if one is not prepared to forgive imperfect human nature. For all, worthy or unworthy, require forgiveness; only in this way can one rise above the lack of harmony and beauty, until at last one arrives at the stage when one reflects what one has collected.

All the riches of love, kindness, tolerance, and good manners a man then reflects, and he throws the light onto the other person and brings out those virtues in that other, just as watering a plant makes the leaves and buds open and the flowers blossom. This brings one nearer to the perfection of God in whom alone one sees all that is perfect and all that is divine. As it is said in the Bible, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Religious Gatheka 42

Belief and Disbelief in God

Belief is natural and disbelief is unnatural, for belief is born in man and unbelief is acquired. If the child had been born with unbelief, he would not even have learned the language of the mother. If she had said, "This is water," the child would have answered, "No, this is bread." Every child born on earth is born with a tendency to believe what is told him, but experience in this world full of falsehood teaches man to disbelieve. Every soul comes from the world of truth, and opens his eyes in the world of falsehood. Every child comes into the world with that purity of heart whose natural

tendency is to believe, and later he acquires the tendency to doubt. The Prophet has therefore said, "Every child is born a believer; it is afterwards that he becomes an unbeliever. "

The right explanation of unbelief would be that everything that is strange to man he explains by reason and by knowledge already acquired, and when something does not tally with what he already knows, he disbelieves. Doubt is earth-born, and belief is heaven-born. Light is caused by the sun, and shade is caused by the earth. The light of the soul, therefore, is belief; the mind gives unbelief. In belief a hidden power exists, and that power is called self-confidence. The person who trusts another does not always trust by the power and influence of another person, but by his own power and confidence.

If it were in the power of the person to make another believe, then every great soul that came to the world would have made the world believe in him and his word. Belief is according to the power of one's self-confidence. You find the tendency to trust in a brave man, in a wise man, and in a great man; the tendency to doubt and disbelieve you will find in the weak and insignificant man, who does not know what he believes. This shows that he who trusts himself will trust all, and he who does not trust himself cannot trust anybody. The trust of the person who trusts another and does not trust himself is an illusion; his trust is not alive. It may appear as strength, but it is a weakness. He holds onto something he does not know, and it seems trust. A person who cannot believe in himself cannot believe in a friend. How can he who does not believe in another believe in God, who is beyond the comprehension of man?

Now, coming to the idea of the belief in God. Each of us sees everything in this world as our sight allows us to see it. Therefore one chooses for oneself a particular color. One chooses blue, another red, another violet. If one color had the same effect upon every person's eye and mind, everyone would choose the same color. And so with form and feeling. Although we can understand words such as love, gratefulness, sincerity, and beauty, yet the sense of love, sincerity, gratefulness, or beauty in the heart of one person cannot in any way be compared with the same feelings in the heart of another person. Therefore each person's belief is peculiar to himself. Not only are there so many different faiths in the world, but in one particular church how many differences! When you think of the people attending one church, if you examine the feelings of each person, they are different.

Everything in the world that has a name is imaginable; the one and only Being the imagination cannot reach is God. And yet as God is manifested in all things and in all beings, so in all things and in all beings there is always a part which is unimaginable. That itself is the proof that God is not only a separate God beyond comprehension, but God is all and all is God. Man can reach God only as far as his imagination can take him. But the most sensible thing man can do in the pursuit of God is to humble himself and bend in all humility and say, "Thou art farther than I can ever reach, and all I can do is to accept Thee in all humility." The one who, by understanding the idea of God in man, claims, "I am God," besides all errors deprives himself of the great beauty of journeying from man to God.

Man in all ages has tried to imagine and has passed his imagination on to his fellow men, saying, "God is such and such." He saw in the fire the purifying influence, he worshipped it and believed in it, and said to man, "I see God in this." He looked at the sun as something standing before the world without protection and giving light, and he said, "I will worship it." Man imagined God in nature, he gave sacredness to trees and to some birds and animals and called them sacred, and worshipped God in them.

That shows that there is somewhere the ideal of the divine in man; his tendency is to reach it, but he does not know where to reach so as to admire and worship. There have been in the world's rise and fall times of evolution and times of degeneration, and with these have come times of evolution and times of degeneration, and with these have come times when man worshipped God in nature and times when he worshipped God in animals. He has constantly striven to reach some ideal, for trying to reach brings him a happiness that he can find nowhere else in the world.

When the tendency of imagining God reached still higher, man found greater manifestations of God, not in animals or in nature, but in man. As all things in this world of variety have superior and inferior degrees, so the divine is seen more at one particular stage of man's evolution. No doubt man is proud and has the spirit of rivalry and jealousy. He never gives in to his fellowman, however spiritual and however greatly the divine be expressed by him. Man has always fought for what he calls the equality of man.

All the keys of a piano produce sound, but if they were all equal where would the music be? Some are higher and some are lower, and all together make the music. There is a saying in the Hindu language that the diamond is not required to tell its price: its nature and its light prove it. Those who came with the divine spirit gave light, the message from above, and their work proved what they brought.

Man has always shown his childish tendency. Man is not only a child when he is young, but often man is a child all his life. In every period of the world's history, people have fought together, some for one master or scripture and some for another. It is just like people from one country fighting people from another, saying, "Your country cannot produce diamonds," or, "On your coast there are no pearls to be found, but on our coast there are plenty." Man clings to the exterior form of scripture and teaching and has lost hold of the spirit, whose light pervades all the earth. People have given up their religion, but still churches exist and scriptures exist. What is lost? It is the light which illuminates and gives man his belief.

Doubt acts as a cover over all things, right and wrong. Today doubt is a cover over multitudes, over nations, over races, and over communities. Can you remember one instance in history when one race distrusted not another nation, but a whole race? The friendship between men and races and nations and religions is all for self-interest. The central theme of the whole of life is selfishness, not the confidence and belief that Christ taught to man. Religion without confidence is religion without foundation; but a religion based upon confidence is the true belief.

Belief can be explained as being in four different grades. One belief is that which comes by the strength of collectivity: "If my neighbor is of the same belief, of course it is true; I must believe it also." This is not different from sheep and goats; when one is walking, all the others go with it. If the leader goes east, all go east, because the belief of one strengthens the others. Of course it cannot be helped, it is the nature of man; but if this collectivity is wrongly directed, it must result in disaster. For such a belief there are two ways open, the right way and the wrong way. But one thing must be understood: belief is the path, not the goal. The one who stays on the path is at a loss, but the one who walks on the path will reach the goal. Belief which does not raise man but keeps him in the same place is a dead belief, and the man who holds that belief is a dead believer. But the belief that opens a path for man leads to the goal.

The second kind of belief does not depend upon collectivity, but upon man's reason. He reasons out his belief, and he fortifies his belief by the strength of his reason. This belief with reason can become a secure foundation, but at the same time, reason is a danger to belief, and reason can destroy belief. The one who makes his belief lead and reason follow finds his way illuminated; but he who makes his reason lead and his belief follow finds that his belief has no existence. Belief is heavenly and reason is earthly; belief we have brought with us, but reason we have learned here.

The third sort of belief is conviction. In this stage one believes not only from reasoning but by examples, not only in theory but by the experience gained by practice. One believes what one's soul apprehends and what one's own soul tells one. It is beyond the power of the generality to arrive at this belief. Thus, for instance, two people may say, "We are one in spirit," because although they may not have the same joys and sorrows they know that they are one in spirit. To take another example, one may believe in the same way that the source and the goal are the same. The fourth kind of belief is actual realization of what one believes. This belief cannot be spoken of in words.

The ultimate belief is no longer a belief; it is reality. If it is sufficient for our life to believe what others believe and if we are content with that, then that is sufficient for our purpose. But if there is the desire in our soul to arrive at such a belief where doubt does not exist, where all is seen as clearly as in the daylight, then we must seek for a way to advance in our belief. Therefore what Sufism teaches and what the Sufi strives after is to arrive from the state of belief of the collectivity to that state where everything is clear as daylight. We all seek light, whether in an earthly form in a heavenly form; the difference is which light we seek. This proves that every heart is longing for the light. Wealth, power, and position will not suffice his purpose, and in the end man must attain the light of the soul if he wants to accomplish his purpose.

At this time there seems to be a period of great degeneration that has ruined the world, and the desire for light is in every heart. Man is groping in darkness to find something to satisfy his need just now. Some are going after wonderworking, clairvoyance, and spiritism. In whatever form one seeks for God, one will arrive in the end. The only difference is that between a straight path and a curved path, which is much longer. The idea of Sufism is to bring humanity, nations, and religions, now so far apart, into harmony and unity by awakening the thought of unity in souls. It is a message not to one community or race only, but to the whole humanity; not a call to join any particular church or religion, but a call to join in the human brotherhood.

The Sufi movement does not consider it any profit that everyone should become a member, although it welcomes all who feel attracted to it. Its chief purpose is awakening the spirit of brotherhood in man. Together with this aim there exists a school of esoteric teaching, and for those who take interest in inner culture it is a source of blessing. The Sufi movement exists in America, France, England, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. It welcomes all who would wish to take interest in inner culture.

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