

*The Mystery of Nondualism*

I have escaped and the small self is dead;  
I am immortal, alone, ineffable;  
I have gone out from the universe I made,  
And have grown nameless and immeasurable  
I am the one Being's sole immobile Bliss;  
No one I am, I who am all that is.<sup>1</sup>

THE POEM is by Sri Aurobindo Ghose, twentieth-century yogin and philosopher of Pondicherry in India. It expresses the sense of nonseparation, nondifference, nondualism, that characterizes what some people consider to be the highest reaches of Eastern spirituality. This is the hardest challenge to accept, even to admit that the claim of nondualism has to be taken seriously. This is why it should not be mentioned until it is overwhelmingly clear that the finite ego-self is not the ground of the experience and the claim to nondual union with the Ultimate.

It is again a matter of experience. There are people who insist that they know from experience that in the highest state all distinction between themselves and the Ultimate Reality, or God, disappears entirely—in fact, that it is obvious that such distinction makes no sense, has no possible

reality, and that the appearance of such distinction and separation is delusion or ignorance.

We might reflect that we have no need to go to the East to learn this, and cite the exchange between Jesus and Philip in the Fourth Gospel: Philip demands, as a final appeal, "Show us the Father [the Source, the Origin, the total Account of the Whole Thing], and we will be satisfied." Jesus replies, in effect, "Open your eyes! You're always looking at the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father? Whoever sees me, sees the Father." You have only to omit the restriction of this claim to Jesus alone and take him as paradigm of all reality, to have something very similar to what our friends from the Orient are confessing.

Perhaps we would dare to suggest that this is what Jesus is revealing to Nicodemus by telling him that anyone who aspires to ascend to heaven must have been born from above and come down from heaven in the first place, must be a spiritual reality, born of the Spirit. This is, in fact, the position of the children of humanity, who *are* always rooted in heaven, if they only knew it. "That which is born of the Spirit *is* Spirit." You should *know* this if you're a teacher in a religious tradition.

If we take the nondual suggestion seriously and search through the Gospels, we can find quite a lot of places in which this perspective appears, especially if we interpret Jesus as paradigm for the rest of us, "like us in *all* things, sin alone excepted," or turned around, *we* are like *him* in all things. The insistence on I AM in the Fourth Gospel is the strongest presence of this perspective if you choose to take it that way. The tense is present, *always* present. Just as "what is born of the flesh is flesh," so what happens in time is temporal; it's not a question of a "second" birth, "again," but of an *eternal* birth "from above." You can't *start* to be eternal.

But you can realize it suddenly. And that's the nature of the spiritual experience we're talking about. Master Rinzai,

of the Zen Buddhist tradition, says "It is not that I understood from the moment I was born of my mother, but that after exhaustive investigation and grinding discipline, in an instant I realized my True Nature."<sup>2</sup> Being born of one's mother is flesh from flesh. Realization brings to light the eternal Truth of the Spirit. If you break out of identifying with the flesh—if you "die"—you simultaneously realize birthlessness and deathlessness and know that you will never die. Is this what "believing in Jesus" means? Does it mean seeing him as the Paradigm, the Example not only of *what to do* but of *how it is*, the Revelation to us of our True Nature? When you "believe in him" do you know that you will never die, because you know that you, like him, are a child of God, born of the Spirit, therefore a spiritual being, eternal in the heavens?<sup>3</sup>

Jesus complains frequently that the people to whom he is trying to make his revelation can't "hear" him because they continue to identify with the flesh, with worldly relations and ambitions, with time and finitude. It is only the Spirit in us that can hear the spiritual message. We can't hear it until we to some extent know that *we are* the Spirit. The Spirit doesn't have form; it is like the wind, without origin, without destination, blowing free, invisible. Yet it is our self, luminous. The contemporary American roshi, Eido Tai Shimano, asks, What *can* expound the Dharma—the Revelation, the Spiritual Truth that frees—what *can* listen to it? "This very *you*, standing before me *without any form*, just shining."<sup>4</sup> This is nondualism, Buddhist style.

Let's talk about that for a while, with the help of Eido Roshi. The eighteenth-century Japanese Zen Master Hakuin says that we are "fundamentally Buddha." We are awake, but we don't think we are, we don't feel that we are; we experience fear and guilt and discontentedness. That is why we practice, that is why we sit—to clarify our sense of who we really are. When we become hungry enough for the truth,

"when we have Great Curiosity for the Really Real," then "we bite. And this biting is zazen," sitting meditation.

What happens then is not unlike what we heard from Sri Ramana. Eido says that "we do zazen, asking deeply, What is my True Nature? Where is it?" In the beginning, we think, "I'm practicing, I'm doing zazen." But gradually we begin to realize that there is Something, Something that was there before we were born (according to the flesh) and will still be there after the temporal being we identify with is here no more, Something that is "constantly active." At first we think of It as being different from ourselves, being somewhere else, but as we discover It as boundless, beginningless, endless, unaccountable, we find that It cannot be absent from us or contrasted with us. It is Here. It cannot be different from us, and therefore we cannot be different from It. We experience It living and active in the very center of our own being.<sup>5</sup> And we experience It, as Ramana also said, as "formless." As Jesus also said? All of you, children of the Spirit, are like the wind, formless. The Spirit, called in Buddhism "Mind" with a capital M, is "without form." But this has to be experience, not words, not theory, not doctrine.

From the Buddhists we can learn that this "formlessness" of Mind, of the Spirit, can be experienced in a certain context which they call *anatta*. It means not-substance, not an entity. I think this is a crucial point to grasp. I was helped by the saying, "Only causative linkages, no individual entities." And it helped that I had been studying systems, self-organizing, adaptive, emergent systems. The point about the systems is that by the *interaction* of their functional components a phenomenon arises of the whole simultaneous net of interactions, a phenomenon that has so much identifiable character as a whole that we can validly deal with it *as if* it were an entity in itself. Let me give you some examples: a candle flame seems to have a definite shape—you can recall it, you could draw a picture of it right now. But you know that there

isn't any set *being* there, only the moving stream of glowing bits of carbon flying off the burning wick. They glow because of the interaction "burning"; they rise because of the interaction "gravity"; they become invisible at the tip of the "flame" because of the interaction "heat dispersion." But such apparent entities can be manipulated as if they were beings in themselves. Take, for example, the electron beam that scans your television set. The "beam" is again a moving stream of particles, but the "beam" as such can be pulled this way or that and bent by applying a magnetic field to it. The television picture itself is another instance. Figures appear and hold together as wholes, and we perceive them as identifiable entities, but they are really just moving electrons, constantly and rapidly scanning the surface of the screen. The *relations* among the scintillating particles of the screen create the image, the *phenomenon*, the "appearing" of the picture, which nevertheless can be dealt with—perceived, adjusted, reasoned about, and so on—as if it were a being in its own right. Living bodies are the next example. They are all "dissipative systems": they take in matter, energy, and information from their environments, organize these into their own characteristic forms, and dissipate the useless, the surplus, or the applied matter, energy, information. They seem to be definite *beings*, but they are *traffic flows*, highly complex nets of *interactions*. Our bodies are such traffic loops. And so are our personalities, composed of nets of interactions on the social plane with other systems like ourselves. When we begin to see what is going on from this point of view, our sense of identity has to undergo a significant transformation. We had thought "we" meant our bodies and our personalities, our minds (small m), our characters. Now we see that all these are flowing systems of interactions with other centers of flow of similar levels of organization, or simpler.

All the traffic flows are governed by causal regularities, what the West calls natural law and what the East calls

*karman*, action. The appearance of bounded beings is due to the consistency of the patterning of the flows. Their stability is not forever but it is, in many cases, long-lasting enough for us to deal with these “emergent phenomena” as if they were fixed beings. But there are not really any such beings-in-themselves there, only the interactions. I think this is what is being said in the *Wisdom Sutra*:

All phenomena are born because of causation. Since they are born through causation, each phenomenon has no entity. Because each phenomenon has no entity, there is in fact no coming and no going, no loss and no gain, and therefore this is named *Shunyata*.<sup>6</sup>

*Shunyata* means “emptiness.” No “self-being.” We think there must be a self-being there. Then you can have relations between the beings, have interactions. After all, the actions have to be performed *by* beings, don’t they? We see this so strongly that we believe it is impossible to see things otherwise. The suggestion has been made that this is an effect of our language, which is based on nouns. First you must have a noun, then you can attach a verb to it, to tell something about the noun. We don’t even have a way of saying “interaction” without implying that there are first beings there which then interact. But we may be able to understand that any beings we can conceive of are defined by us in terms of their relations to one another, especially *contrast* relations, each one having some quality that others lack. But if each is thus defined by others, then it does not have its being of itself. Whatever being it has is given it by relations with others.

The challenge to us is that perhaps “entity” isn’t a good category for doing metaphysics—especially practical, experiential metaphysics. But, we may protest, if we are not each an entity, a being in oneself, who is responsible for our actions? One answer is: As long as you believe yourself to be a finite moral agent, you are responsible. There must be someone to reward or punish, we feel. There must be judg-

ment. This is the foundation of religion. Without this, not only would there be no meaning to life, but people would simply run wild and commit all sorts of crimes. Identifying with the finite ego as moral agent is essential to civilization, to religion, and to any kind of personal satisfaction.

We try to get to unselfishness and compassion without giving up the sense of the self whose nature it is to be selfish. The Buddhist challenge says, If you are interested in good behavior and compassion, then first give up the sense of the ego-self, see that it is unreal; then it will no longer make demands, have cravings, react with anger and violence when its egohood is thwarted. It is contradictory to continue to hold to such an ego-self and at the same time require it to go against its necessary nature, which must be to sustain its proper finitude and self-definition. Real compassion is not an ego-ego relation as anger or envy or desire or grief is. You do not get to compassion while still holding to the entity of the ego-self. See through this idea of “entity,” realize that that is a false perception; then compassion will spontaneously arise. But then there will be no one to reward, to enjoy the fruits of this self-sacrificing service to others, no one to be praised and recompensed. True. There will be no ego-personality there to receive the reward. There will only be universal love and compassion. Too bad.

It is a strong challenge, but we may want to search through our tradition again to see if there is any sign that this is what Jesus was trying to tell us—that God is not a judge who metes out eternal rewards and punishments according to the deeds of our short and ignorant lives, but is rather an all-embracing Lover who makes no distinctions among God’s Beloved. Perhaps God is even a single Loving Life circulating among all, a God who says, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” Perhaps “entity” is a category to be discarded, just as “worthiness” was a category to be discarded—see the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard—and just as “ranking” was a

category to be discarded—see the injunction not to be like the Gentiles’ “great men” and its follow-up in the footwashing, which eliminates both “lords” and “servants” in favor of “friends.” Perhaps the perfection of God lies in sending sun and rain on good and evil, just and unjust alike, and if we want to be perfect, we must be like that [Mt. 5:45, 48]. No favorites, no preferences. No differences in the Ultimate.

Sosan Ganchi Zenji says, quoting an ancient Taoist text:

“The perfect Way knows no difficulties

Except that it refuses to show preferences; . . .

To set up what you like against what you dislike—

This is the disease of the mind.

“Come to me,” Jesus calls to those who can hear, “all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you relief.” You don’t have to try to give up your ego-adherence as if it were a bad habit and a disvalue—something you “ought not to” do. You simply drop it because you’ve found out it was a mistake, *not true*. You don’t continue to bother with something that’s not true. Know the Truth and be free. Come to me and get relief. The Great Relief: No Ego-Entity. Come to me and identify with me rather than with those falsehoods. I am the Reality beyond the appearance of the ego-entity. I am the Way—the Tao—and the Truth and the Life. I am Buddha-Nature. I am in you, and you are in me. There is no Buddha apart from us, no Dharma apart from us. Whatever happens to any one of us, even the least of our kindred, happens to all of us. “I am sitting you, you are sitting me.” “In the myriad forms, a single body is revealed.”<sup>7</sup>

This “come to me” echoes and re-echoes throughout the Gospel: Come to me, follow me, walk with me, stay with me, stay awake with me, abide in me. But how do we get to “come”? Rinzai says it took him “exhaustive investigation and grinding discipline.” Jesus himself admits, “The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:14). Essential to this work is close

attention to the directive, “Do not judge by appearances, but render a right judgment” (John 7:24). The Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha begins with Right Views, “right judgment.”

So we sit and attend to shifting our understanding from apparent reality to the really real, Eido Roshi says. It is “perhaps the biggest part of our practice as human beings.”<sup>8</sup> Once your attention is drawn to the impermanence of the phenomena that appear as if they are entities, your perception of them can alter radically and your sense of identity with them will weaken. You will see your bodily interactions with other bodies and your personality interactions with other personalities, and you will *see* that you are not that. Body and mind will “drop off.” In the Hindu idiom, you will be like the bird at the top of the tree who looks on as the lower bird hops about pecking at sweet and sour fruits. In the Christian symbology, the Temple will start to come apart, stone by stone, the structure in which you had been believing and worshipping.

In the beginning, we feel that “we” are practicing, we are getting rid of false ideas, we are gaining insight, we are getting closer to our true self. We may distinguish between “good” meditations and “poor” meditations. “Many of us,” says Eido Roshi, “have the mistaken idea that some kind of material body does some kind of spiritual practice. But this idea is a great impediment to practice. . . . It is the spirit that fills the body, not the body that does spiritual practice.” “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Corinthians 15:50). “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail” (John 6:63). You may remember also that St. Augustine discovered that the body is in the soul rather than the soul in the body.

But most important is that it is the Holy Spirit that prays in us (cf. Romans 8 :26). “We,” as ego-entity, dissolve. That

indefinable Something that we noted earlier, "constantly active," which was there before this body-personality and will be hereafter, and yet is Right Here, in, as, this body-personality-appearance—that is praying, meditating, doing spiritual practice. So, really, you should not say "I am Marion and I am doing sitting practice to realize that Something." Rather you should say, "That Something is doing Marion-practice!"<sup>9</sup> Those of you who have read *Zen in the Art of Archery* will remember that "It shoots"; the archer must abandon the perception, the feeling, the idea that the archer shoots. When that notion is released, then It shoots and hits the mark.

Now I want to share with you a couple of stories of people who have had the experience of realizing the Something. The first is from the account of the Chinese Master Han Shan—I don't know of what century. He had been living as a hermit, in silence, with his mind fixed on a single thought, in the context of the teaching: All feelings and sensations arise from one's own mind; they do not come from outside. "One day," he says in his *Autobiography*, "I took a walk." He continues:

Suddenly I stood still, filled with the realization that I had no body and no mind. All I could see was one great illuminating Whole, omnipresent, perfect, lucid, and serene. It was like an all-embracing mirror from which the mountains and rivers of the earth were projected as reflections. When I awoke from this experience, I felt as "clear-and-transparent" as though my body and mind did not exist at all, whereupon I composed the following stanza:

In a flash, the violent mind stood still;  
 Within, without are both transparent and clear.  
 After the great somersault  
 The great Void is broken through.  
 Oh, how freely come and go  
 The myriad forms of things!

From then on, both the inward and the outward experience became lucidly clear. Sounds, voices, visions, scenes, forms,

and objects were no longer hindrances. All my former doubts dissolved into nothing. When I returned to my kitchen, I found the cauldron covered with dust. Many days had passed during my experience, of which I, being alone, was unaware.<sup>10</sup>

Let us read an account by another Zen monk, from the *Autobiography of Master Hsüeh Yen*:

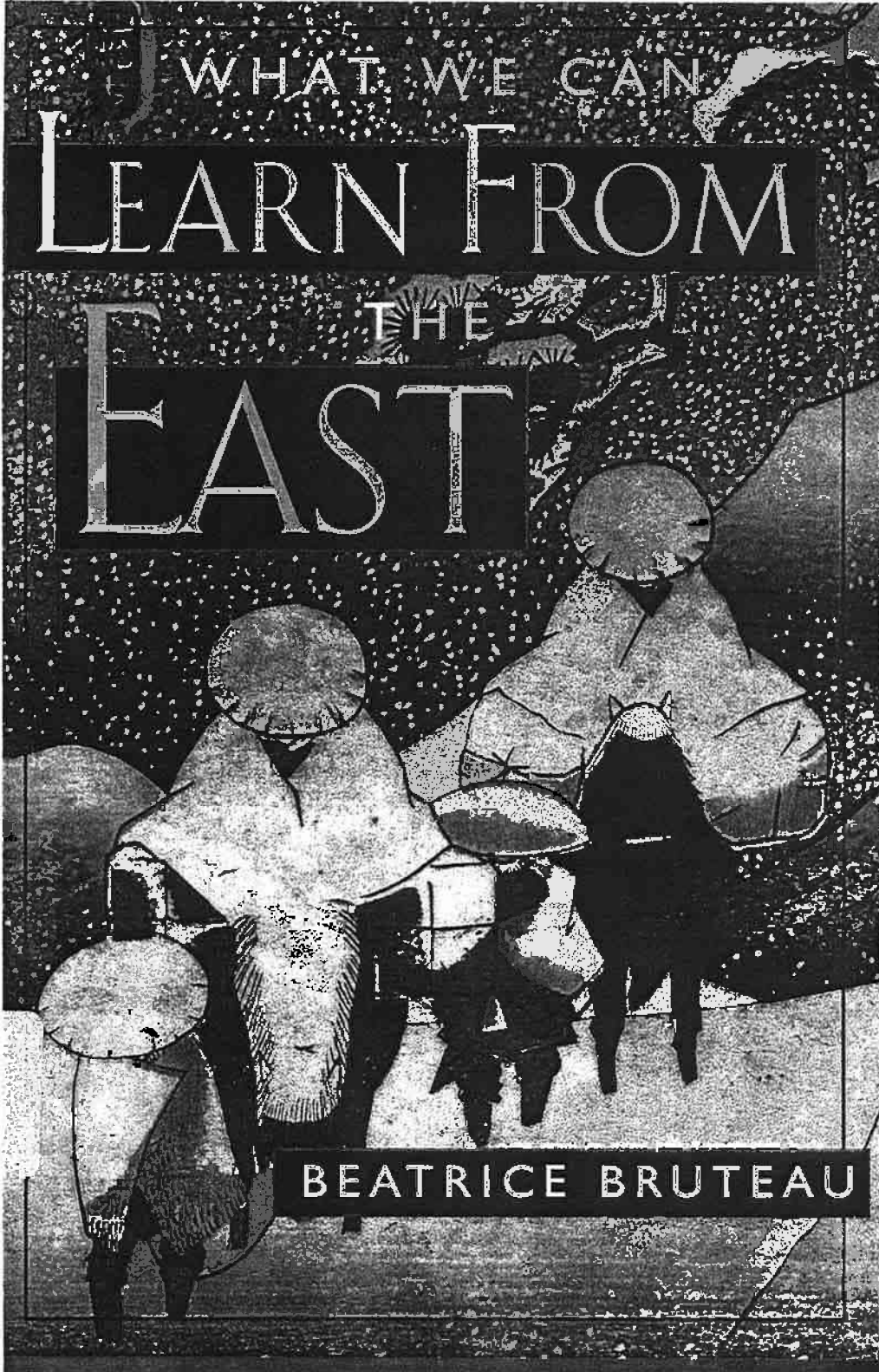
[The chief monk, Hsiu said to me], "You should sit erect on your seat, keep your spine straight, make your whole body and mind become one [Hua Tou, or focal point], and pay no attention to drowsiness or wild thoughts." Working in accord with his instructions, I unknowingly forgot both my body and mind—even their very existence. For three days and three nights my mind stayed so serene and clear that I never closed my eyes for a single moment. On the afternoon of the third day I walked through the three gates of the monastery as if I were sitting. Again I came across Hsiu. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "Working on the Tao," I answered. He then said, "What is this you call the Tao?" Not able to answer him, I became more confused and perplexed. With the intention of meditating further I turned back toward the meditation hall. But accidentally I met Hsiu again. He said, "Just open your eyes and see what it is!" After this admonishment I was even more anxious to return to the meditation hall than before. As I was just going to sit down, something broke through abruptly before my face as if the ground were sinking away. I wanted to tell how I felt, but I could not express it. Nothing in this world can be used as a simile to describe it. Immediately I went to find Hsiu. As soon as he saw me he said, "Congratulations!" Holding my hand, he led me out of the monastery. We walked along the river dike, which was full of willow trees. I looked up at the sky and down at the earth. I actually felt that all phenomena and manifestations, the things I saw with my eyes and heard with my ears, the things that disgusted me—including the passion-desires and the blindness—all flowed out from my own bright, true, and marvelous Mind. During the next fortnight no moving phenomena appeared in my mind.<sup>11</sup>



WHAT WE CAN  
LEARN FROM

THE  
EAST

BEATRICE BRUTEAU



VI  
Gospel Zen

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“WHAT IS YOUR PRACTICE?” That’s a Zen question. You don’t hear Christians ask that kind of question very often. They’re more apt to say, “What do you believe?” or even just, “What church do you go to?”

Typical answers to the Zen question are: “My practice is just sitting.” “I am counting my breaths.” “My koan is *Mu*.” “I am giving full attention to each thing I do.” “I am intensely asking myself, ‘What is my real nature?’”

How would we answer such a question on “practice” from the Gospel? It might be interesting to try. Traditional Christian teaching has told us what to believe (or “hold”) about doctrine, what to do in the way of receiving sacraments, how to live a moral life and follow the customs of the church. But we haven’t usually been offered a *method* for self-realization, for reaching illumination, for attaining salvation, comparable to those suggested above. Perhaps we think that the Gospel doesn’t deal in “methods” but instead demands faith. But even the *faith* of the Gospel is a kind of method and can be cultivated, as we shall see. I think there may indeed be quite a lot of advice about “practice” in the Gospel, and if we look for it with this in mind, we may be surprised at what we find.

I propose to make a small raid on this rich treasury by

looking in the New Testament for instructions on what to do, interwoven with comments on “how things are” and “what to expect.” I ignore the usual or even the obvious meaning, but I hope I can plead that I am using the New Testament in an “accommodated” sense. Along the way I will also drop in an occasional remark from a Buddhist source to help highlight the interpretation I am suggesting.

Where does practice begin? The moral life is, of course, absolutely prerequisite. Both Buddhism and Christianity recognize this. Mahayana’s ten cardinal precepts prohibit: (1) the taking of life, (2) theft, (3) unchastity, (4) lying, (5) drinking or encouraging others to drink alcoholic liquor, (6) speaking of the misdeeds of others, (7) praising oneself and reviling others, (8) giving spiritual or material aid grudgingly, (9) anger, and (10) blaspheming the Three Treasures (the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Community, as One, as Manifested, and as Preserved). Other lists add using immoral language, gossiping, coveting, holding wrong views, and destroying the harmony of the community.<sup>1</sup>

But there is a sense in which these are preliminary to the direct assault on the mystery of life, as is also evident in the New Testament story of the rich young man who asks Jesus what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments and, when pressed, enumerated them for him: You shall not kill, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness. You shall honor your parents and love your neighbor as yourself. The young man replied that he had been observing all these and inquired what he still lacked. At that point the serious commitment was broached: Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me” (Matthew 19:20–21). Follow me into the heart of the mystery.

If the rich young man had followed Jesus, what would he have been instructed to do next? Two verses occur to me, Mark 6:31 and Matthew 6:6:



Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.  
(For many were coming and going and they had no leisure.)

When you pray, go into your room and shut the door, and pray to your Father in private.

Our lives are usually characterized by "many comings and goings" and "no leisure." So the first thing we have to do is "come away by ourselves to a place where we can be alone." The fact that many people find even this first step almost impossible to take is a fearful commentary on our culture, its values, and its lifestyle. It is ironic that if I wish to practice meditation to gain self-knowledge, strength of character, and insight into reality, I must have, to begin with, sufficient insight, self-knowledge, and strength to realize that meditation is important, that I myself need it, and want it enough to make me contend against all the forces in my environment that would impede me. This is why people resort to going to special places to practice meditation. Institutionalizing it seems to make it acceptable in a way that just doing it at home by oneself isn't.

Having reached a lonely place, the first thing most of us have to do is, literally, "rest a while." Catch our breath. Shift gears. Let go the concerns of the busy place. Turn our attention toward the great questions of life: What is this life of ours all about? Why are we here? What kind of being are we? Can we cease to exist? What is the meaning and value of our life? What is the vast cosmos? How is it that we can know it? What is consciousness? What is it in me that knows, and knows that it knows that it knows? What is my deepest nature?

Asking these questions is "going into your private room." We have to turn the mind inward, away from particular problems and issues of the moment. *Really asking* such questions is "praying." We ask them "in secret." This means that they are personal, private questions, not public or social

questions. The question is not, What does my culture, tradition, church, family, believe about this? Rather, What do I believe, in secret. And not just, What do I believe? but *What is true?*

Whom do we ask? The Gospel says to ask "your Father." I propose that we interpret this as meaning "seek your Source," the Source of your being. And this helps us understand why we have to go apart, go into the private room, and ask in secret—because the Source of my being is to be found only in my inmost self.

In earlier translations of the New Testament, this verse read, "Go into your closet." This used to call up puzzling images for children, who were used to "closets" as small compartments for hanging clothes. I had this image myself, and I remember noticing with interest that Amy, in *Little Women*, had thought the same thing; she had taken it literally, removed the clothes, and made a tiny prayer room of her closet. More recently, an adult friend who was living in cramped quarters did the same thing. In this sophisticated age, when so many people are talking about coming *out* of one closet or another, here are some of us trying to get *into* the closet.

So, "Go into your closet." But what is my closet? This brings us to the first problem, which is also the last problem: What is my inmost self, my true nature, and how do I enter it?

Another name for the "inmost self" is "heart." in the Sermon on the Mount, we read, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). So a clue to finding the inmost self, or heart, is to look for the treasure. This means, look for what we value. To value something with your consciousness means to pay attention to it, to have a lot of thoughts and feelings about it. Attention, thoughts, and feelings are the money, the currency, of consciousness.

Something that is worth a lot of attention, thought, and feeling is a consciousness-treasure.

That doesn't mean that the "treasure" is necessarily something we like, something we find pleasant or desirable. It may be quite the contrary. There is another verse that says, "Where the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together" (Luke 17:37). Our attention, thoughts, and feelings may be clustered around something painful. A lot of our consciousness-energy may be invested in suffering. Nevertheless, this is still a clue to where our "heart" is. "Where you experience suffering, you can also find freedom from suffering," says Achaan Chah.<sup>2</sup>

We often try to dull our suffering or divert ourselves from it. If we persist in this practice, we will remain blind, and the suffering won't go away, either (cf. Matthew 13:14-15). If, instead, we go *into* it, we will begin to ask the great questions. What is it in me that is suffering? Why is it suffering? Where does this suffering come from? Such questions lead us into our "heart," into our "closet."

What is our consciousness? How does it work? What produces the effect of suffering?

Any suffering is a perception of a threat to our life on some level. The level may be biological life or emotional life. It may be a threat to our health, or a threat to our dignity. Basically, the threat is against whatever we consider to be our "self." We naturally try to preserve our "self" in the face of such threats. But the Gospel says that it is precisely such attempts at preservation that make the threats even worse: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Luke 17:33; this appears in each of the Gospels, in some of them twice). *There is a Zen koan for you! What is the meaning of this saying? What is meant by "his life" in each case? What is "gain"? "lose"? "preserve"? What is really the life? Whose is it?*

Struggling with these questions, we are led back into self-

search. What is my true life? Here in my heart, in my private world, where the suffering is, is where some kind of mistake is being made. Perhaps the life I'm trying to save isn't my true life at all, and all my efforts to shore it up only cause me to go further away (in realization) from my true life. Whereas, if I could let go of this apparent life, I might find my true life. Jesus warned, "Don't judge by appearances, but render a true judgment" (John 7:24).

Stimulated by our question and encouraged by the words of the Teacher, we throw ourselves wholly into the search for the true self. We "leave everything" (Mark 10:28) in the sense that this search for the true self now receives top priority in our life, and we "follow" the track pointed out by the Teacher. The true self becomes to us a hoard of gold buried in a field, or a single pearl of inestimable value, for whose sake we are willing to "sell" everything else (Matthew 13:44-45). That is, we organize and evaluate everything else in our life in terms of whether and how it helps us in our *practice*, in our quest for the true self. If we have a job to do, we do it in such a way as to help us with our quest. If we have a family to care for, we put our heart into it as a way to find our true self. We "seek first the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 6:33).

Singleness of purpose now characterizes us. We have been "busy and troubled about many things." Now we see that "only one thing is really necessary" (Luke 10:41-42). We must focus ourselves onto one overwhelming purpose and seek enlightenment: "If your eye is single, your whole body will be filled with light" (Matthew 6:22). This singleness is an important clue. The Greek word is *haplous*; it means "one-fold, single, all in one way, not compound or double, absolute." Not only the purpose of our life should be single, the mind itself, the "eye" must become single, not double. The look, the attending, the thinking and feeling, must not double themselves.

But usually, of course, we do double our minds, just as we

usually seek to save our lives. The lives that we seek to save are relative lives, in commerce with the rest of the earthly environment or in social relations with the community. These are realities, and healthful properties in them are desirable on their own levels, but mistaking them for the true self is what causes the suffering, because these relational processes are by nature, and inevitably, changeable.

In fact, they are constantly changing. They are processes, simply a flow of changes. The chemicals of which the cells of our bodies are made do not remain the same for long but are broken down and eliminated, their places being taken by new molecules. And in many tissues, the cells themselves live for only a few days and are then replaced. So living consists of a continuous death and rebirth.<sup>3</sup>

It is the same with our thoughts and feelings. Trying to arrest this flow of life and cling to some particular arrangement, or ward off some unfavorable arrangement, is contrary to the nature of this level of reality, in which all things change and pass and come again. We have to understand that "the form of this world is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). Not only does the form pass, but "passing away" is what the "form" is: *change* is the name of the game.

Therefore, we cannot hold this world or any particular experience, cannot cling to it. Setting our will against this fact of reality is what causes our suffering. When we see this, really *see* it for ourselves, as it applies to every concrete instance in our own personal life, then we will be "close to the Kingdom of Heaven." We must reconcile ourselves to this fact and turn ourselves to what does endure. "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" (John 6:27).

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourself treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19-20)

Now, the doubling of the mind—of the attention, thoughts, and feelings—is similar to this mistake of clinging to the changing. What changes is necessarily relational, relative, not absolute. The world of the relative *has* to be multiple (so that there can always be *others* to which one can "relate"), therefore, not single. The doubling of the mind is also relational. It consists of comparisons, contrasts, criticisms, and comments. There is one mind, so to speak, that is actually engaging the world, doing things, and then there is a second mind, sitting on the sidelines, making remarks. It is with this second mind that we usually talk to ourselves, inside our heads. We tell ourselves what to do, comment on how well we're doing it, wonder what other people think of how we're doing it, how our behavior compares with the norms of our culture, and so on. It is this second mind that, in this way, builds up what we call our self-image. And, of course, it is in this self-image that a great deal of our suffering is located.

The second mind is very relational in its operations. It never actually unites itself with an object; in fact, by acting as a kind of middleman between the genuine agent and the object, it impedes the action and is a barrier between the subject and the object. It deflects attention, drains off energy, and frequently sets up conflicting thoughts and feelings about what is going on.

It constantly talks about whatever is going on, and passes judgment on it by comparing it with other examples, either other people or some ideal standard. It wants approval, honor, respect, and praise from these relational sources, from other people, and from the second mind's own judgment. All this causes suffering and prevents us from finding our true self. Jesus says, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only [one, single] God?" (John 5:44).

"How can you believe?" he asks. We don't believe. We do the opposite: we doubt. To *doubt* is to *double* the mind. Since

this is the "way that leads to destruction," Jesus is urgent in exhorting us to cease doubting. "Have faith in God," he says (Mark 11:22); "Don't be faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). "Where is your faith?" he asks (Luke 8:25); "Why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31).

Unfortunately, we have a very narrow view of what is meant by "believing" and "doubting." We think of them both in the context of accepting someone's word for something of which we do not have direct knowledge. Or we think of them in the context of reposing trust and confidence in someone. But perhaps these are not their deepest meanings nor the most helpful in our quest for the true self. I suggest that "doubting" means *doubling the mind*, and "believing" means *keeping the mind single*.

Believing means keeping the mind single. What a strange idea. Yet Matthew 21:21 says: "Have faith and do not doubt." The Greek word for "doubt" here is *diakrithete*. It means, literally, "divide (*krino*) in two (*dia*)." From this literal meaning we derive "distinguish" and "judge," and finally "doubt." But if we are not to divide in two, then we must remain one, maintain unity, wholeness. Remaining one is not doubling, not doubting, but believing. And the singleness of "believing" is tied to the singleness of "the only God" (John 5:44), as we saw above.

At this point I think we should introduce the fundamental law of this (Judeo-Christian) practice, which is "The Lord your God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole soul, and your whole strength" (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30, 33; Luke 10:27). These four faculties, or four aspects of human being, can be interpreted in various ways. I have, for instance, called them intellect (mind), will (strength), imagination (soul), and affectivity (heart). But we could also take them as referring to the source of motivation and action (heart); the way we perceive the world (mind); our vital

energies, sensitivities, instincts and feelings (soul); and our will to persevere with force of character (strength). And no doubt there are other ways.

Keeping the mind—or, more generally now, the consciousness—single, means keeping our heart whole, keeping our mind whole, our soul and our strength, not letting any of them divide in two. So when we pray, we enter into our private chamber, our own secret consciousness, and we try to find our truest self by unifying and keeping whole our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This unification of the consciousness is what is usually called "concentration": centering together. It is basic to spiritual practice.

How do you do this concentration? You just *be* what you're actually doing at the moment, without thinking/feeling *about* the fact that you're doing it. When you set your hand to the plow, you just concentrate on plowing and go straight ahead without looking back to see what you plowed, or how well you plowed (Luke 9:62).

You put your whole mind onto plowing, the *activity*, in the moment in which you are actually doing it. You don't allow the mind to divide into two, half on *plowing* and half on *plowed*. You notice the plow, the field, whatever you have to attend to in order to plow straight, and merge your whole mind into the objective reality of these things in order that the plowing may be done correctly. And in fact, if you can put your whole mind on the activity, not dividing some part to look back and see what you *have plowed*, you will cut a beautiful furrow.

You put your whole will into plowing. You do not divide your will in two by partly consenting to plow, and partly resenting and resisting it and wishing you were doing something else. You "give yourself to" this activity totally, *as* you do it. The act of plowing and the act of willing to plow become the same thing.

Similarly, you do not allow your imagination to conjure up

some other scene for you to enjoy in daydreaming while you plod behind your plow. The imagination must coincide with the perception of present reality and "be here now." This is where you actually are, this is reality. Don't create a fantasy and divide your consciousness between where you really are and where you aren't. Know who you are and where you are and what you are doing and really *be* there.

Finally, put all your feelings into this plowing because this is where your life is at this moment. You have no other life here and now except this plowing. Therefore feel this plowing thoroughly, feel it in every way you can. Feel it through your body with all your senses, with your emotions, your aesthetic sense, your sense of satisfaction with work—whatever feelings are appropriate, unify them here and merge them into the act of plowing. *Become plowing*. This is *you* at this moment. This is where you really are and what you are really doing.

That's how you center yourself, how you "concentrate." All those perceptions, feelings, thoughts, wills, energies, all of them center in the present act, in the center of *you*. You are the actor, you are the one who is plowing. If you practice this, you will "center" in the center of yourself. You will be in your "inner chamber," and you will be aware that life is gushing up in you at that point (John 7:38), that your being is being sustained from moment to moment. You are in immediate contact with your Source. How intense is this act of living! How vibrant and full! This is not-doubting, keeping the consciousness single. And sure enough, when this "eye" is single, the whole body is filled with light.

Another way of putting this is that we have to stop judging. "Don't divide (your mind) in two" also means "don't judge." And another scripture says explicitly, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). The whole issue of judging is a very interesting one and can be developed at greater length, especially in connection with theories about

original sin. In this context, nourishing ourselves on the good/evil dichotomy is the original or fundamental mistake on which all other faults and sufferings are based.

There are, of course, many kinds of judging; in fact, most of life is made up of acts of selection, or choice, or judging.<sup>4</sup> We are not being told not to judge whether it's going to rain today, or whether this vegetable is fresh, or which dentist to employ, or what career to take up, or what candidate to vote for, or what verdict to render in a court of law. Obviously, life is full of judgments of these types.

It's not only human beings who make judgments. All creation does it. What holds the finite universe in existence and enables it to evolve is constant distinction and preference. Symmetry-breaking, it is called, abolishing reversibility and ambiguity by electing one possibility out of a field of possibilities.<sup>5</sup>

But the ground of finitude is the nonfinite. And since finitude is made by distinction and contrast, by mutually limited beings, the nonfinite is precisely that in which there is no distinction or contrast or limitation (John 1:17). It is this nonfinite or noncontrasting ground that is indicated when we speak of the true self.

What we are trying to do in meditation (Zen) is to realize that we are this ground, as well as the finite expressions of it with which we are more familiar. God is the Ground of the whole universe and, as such, is impartial (Deuteronomy 10:27), perfectly symmetrical. And there is something in us that is the image of this Ground, if indeed we are not rooted in that one Ground itself (Matthew 5:48). That is what we are trying to find, and that is why, when we are trying to find it, *we must leave off judging*. Once we have found it and thoroughly realized our root in it, centered ourselves in it, then we can freely express ourselves in the finite in creative ways, "enter the city with helping hands."<sup>6</sup>

When we stop judging, we become complete or perfect.



This means unified or symmetrical. It is practiced by being impartial. Jesus points to this when he says that God sends rain and sunshine on everyone equally, regardless of whether they're good or evil, and we should be like that (Matthew 5:43–48). We can apply this not only to moral relations with other people in daily life but to meditation practice and what goes on in our own heads, in our private chamber when we are trying to reach our Source.

When we sit in meditation, we see that all our internal or emotional life consists of making judgments. We are always evaluating our subjective experiences with respect to whether they are pleasant or painful. We distinguish what happens to us according to whether it is advantageous or disadvantageous. We look at everything in terms of our desires and aversions, our hopes and fears. We're not content just to *have* the experience, we also have to pass judgment on whether it was a good experience or an evil experience.

The trouble with this kind of judgment is that it goes beyond its data. The data will indicate whether an event was advantageous or the reverse for some particular being in some particular context with respect to some particular standard of judgment—all completely *relative*. But when we make our emotional judgment on our experience, we absolutize the value. It becomes totally, or without qualification, good or evil. And it's good or evil not for the body or the career or the emotions or the situation, but, again, without qualifications, for me as a whole. This means that I am *identifying myself* with what happens to the relative aspects of myself, as though these were all there is to me. This is the mistake, this is why such judging prevents us from centering ourselves in our *complete* self.

All these things that can be good or evil for us in one respect or another are changeable things. If we set our hearts on them, we will have no security (Matthew 6:19–20). That is to say, further, we will have *no reality*; for the changing, the

contrasting, the partial, the particular, have to be rooted in a ground that sustains all particulars and therefore *is not any particular self*. All forms depend on the formless. If we want to find our true self, find our Source, we must find this formless Ground, the impartial, the complete.

If I say of anything I experience, "This is good," it is equivalent to saying, "Give it to me; let me keep it." If I say, "This is evil," it is equivalent to saying, "Take it away." But "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord." That was the attitude of Job (see Job 1:21), and it is the only realistic attitude to take. To believe that we—the real we, the complete we, not just this or that particular and relative aspect of ourselves—*have to* avoid certain things is to fail to know the truth about ourselves.

The better thing to do is to be neutral about the experiences, not to judge them in an absolute way, but to call them correctly in their own relative contexts and take appropriate action with respect to them in those contexts. If it is pleasant, I thoroughly recognize it as pleasant. If it is distasteful, I thoroughly admit it is distasteful. Then I forget about its being pleasant or distasteful and just go straight ahead.

This is what we learn how to do in the secret place of meditation. As we withdraw from judging our experiences and simply observe them, noting objectively how they relate in their relative ways to their particular contexts, we also realize that *we* who are doing the observing are not dependent on these experiences. *We* are not helped or hindered by them. We are quite impartial with respect to them. Not only are we not dependent on them; *they* are dependent on *us*. All these experiences "live and move and have their being" in us. *We ourselves are the ground of their relative reality.*

So if we can let go of evaluating and taking sides, simply accepting our experiences impartially, our consciousness will gradually center itself in this ground of completeness and wholeness, "a state of pure 'Beingness' without any differen-



tiation; that is, one is no longer this or that (i.e., anything in particular), neither a body nor a mind. . . . One is that in which all these things have their being."<sup>7</sup>

When I am sitting in meditation, therefore, I keep asking myself, "Who am I?" "What is my Source?" "Where is the Ground of my being?" And when any merely relative aspect of my life appears and suggests that it is I, I notice that I have taken a step back from it, toward my center, and I am looking at it neutrally. *It*, therefore, is not I; I, who am looking, am I.

We need a very alert consciousness to do this practice. We have to focus our consciousness inwardly, ever more and more inwardly and centrally, into the very heart and Source of our being. The partial aspects of being will try to break our con-centering and distract our attention to themselves. The Chinese meditation teachers call these distractions the thieves of the mind.<sup>8</sup> Jesus used this imagery too, saying: "But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into" (Matthew 24:43).

Watching means staying awake. *Buddha* means being awake. Jesus says, "What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:37). Stay awake. Be Buddha. Don't let the thieves of your mind catch you napping and steal away your consciousness by deceiving you into believing that you are no more than some partial aspect of yourself.

Living inattentively is another form of doubt. Not giving full attention results from having a divided mind, only part of it is given to the matter at hand, whether it is work or meditation. Again, it is a question of giving ourselves with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength to whatever it is that we are doing at the moment. That is, doing it wholeheartedly, whole-mindedly. When we can do that, root our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength in our God, our Source, our Center, our Ground, at the very core and most secret place in

ourselves, then the Source, "who sees in secret, will reward us openly" (Matthew 6:6). That is to say, we will not only know who we really are, but we will be able to do whatever is at hand with skill and success.

A Japanese Zen practitioner tells a story of his student days when he engaged in intercollegiate fencing matches. When he thought out his strategy, he lost; when he acted intuitively without thinking, he won. He says that in the winning bouts, he "experienced moments I call the naked expression of enlightenment, in which I acted in response to my direct feeling and deepest mind, without considering victory or defeat, opponent or myself, and with no awareness of even engaging in a match . . . free from illusion or discrimination. . . . It is a matter of training oneself, through the principles of Zen, to act wholeheartedly in every circumstance."<sup>9</sup>

The story of St. Peter walking on the water points the same moral. When Peter first got out of the boat and began to walk on water, he was in a state of perfect concentration. His whole heart, soul, mind, and strength were fixed on Jesus, who was calling him, saying, "Come!" But he allowed the thieves of the mind to attack him. He noticed the wind and the waves—his imagination was distracted. He grew frightened—his emotions were distracted. Then he thought it was impossible for a man to walk on water—his intellect was distracted. He lost his resolution to continue—his will was distracted. He began to sink. Jesus, fortunately, caught him, but he reproached him: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:28–30).

Inattentiveness, not being wholehearted, is doubt, is not believing. Chogyam Trungpa says, "Whenever doubt arises, one should cut through it; doing that, one finds behind it a state of brilliant wakefulness. The doubt which must be cut through is not so much intellectual uncertainty, but general slothfulness"<sup>10</sup>

The same Japanese practitioner quoted above goes on to

say, "When we live inattentively we are apt to fall into partial discrimination. This is a state of mind in which egocentricity is fostered and human suffering enhanced. Therefore, whenever I become aware that I am relapsing, I remind myself that heaven and earth have the same root. Everything is One. . . . Nowadays, whatever I do, I am completely at one with it."<sup>11</sup>

All this can be summed up in the words of St. Paul: "Be watchful (wakeful, attentive), stand firm in your faith (do not doubt or divide your mind), be courageous (whole-hearted), be strong (exert yourself to the utmost)" (1 Corinthians 16:13). It is necessary to put forth effort, to apply oneself strenuously. Paul uses the example of an athlete, and he urges that we also go into training as if we were going to compete in the Olympics. People discipline themselves severely for the sake of a "perishable wreath," he says, why can't we make at least an equal effort to seek so great a good as self-realization, the only good really worth having? Furthermore, it's no use merely talking about it. One may talk a good game, but doing is the only thing that counts (see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27). As Chogyam Trungpa says, "It is very soothing to talk about these things; however, if there is no exertion and wakefulness we are not even fingerpainting, but deceiving ourselves. . . . The practice tradition is the only hope."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus concluded his Sermon on the Mount with the warning that those who hear his words and *do* them will hold fast under storm, whereas those who hear but do not do, will fall (Matthew 7:24-27). Persevere in practice, he urges, and do not give up. Be like the man who importuned his neighbor for food to set before an unexpected guest (Luke 18:5-8). Be like the widow who relentlessly demanded from a judge a settlement in her case (Luke 18:1-5). Be like the shepherd who sought a lost sheep until he found it. Be like the woman

who cleaned her whole house and searched everywhere to find the money she had lost (Luke 15:3-9). It will work.

Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10)

This is, however, a costly and arduous enterprise. Jesus does not conceal this fact, and he advises people to think twice before they take it up. All familiar relations and habits must be forsaken; everything that we considered as constituting our life must be renounced. He's not taking any half-hearted disciples (see Luke 14:26-33). But "he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25; Mark 10:30). For "you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

If we are faithful in our practice, we will break through to our enlightenment, or, in the New Testament figure, the eschatological Son of Man will come. He comes suddenly, without warning, you don't know when. But when it happens, you'll know it. It will be like lightning that covers the whole sky from east to west (Matthew 24:27, 39, 42, 44).

It is interesting that many people who have had the enlightenment experience describe it in just such terms. Enlightenment is not merely a metaphor. According to reports, people actually have an experience in which their whole visual field is a pure brilliant light, or in which everything seems to turn into light, or is surrounded by an aureole of light.<sup>13</sup> One feels released or freed, as if let out of prison or returned home after being held hostage (redeemed), or as if "risen from the dead," according to the fourteenth-century Zen master Bassui.<sup>14</sup> Bassui also said, "The radiance of this Mind will light up every corner of a universe freed of every single blemish. You will be liberated at last from all entanglements. . . . The joy of this moment cannot be put into words."<sup>15</sup>

Yasutani Roshi (died 1973) has remarked, "The ecstasy is genuine enough, but your state of mind cannot be called natural until you have fully disabused yourself of the notion, 'I have become enlightened.' Mark this point well, for it is often misunderstood."<sup>16</sup> Phillip Kapleau explains: "The object . . . is the cultivation first of mindfulness and eventually mindlessness. These are two different degrees of absorption. Mindfulness is a state wherein one is totally aware in any situation and so always able to respond appropriately. Yet one is aware that he is aware. Mindlessness, on the other hand, or 'no-mindness' . . . , is a condition of such complete absorption that there is no vestige of self-awareness."<sup>17</sup>

Two effects arise from this realization. One is meritless work. The other is universal compassion. "All labor we entered into with such a mind is valued for itself, apart from what it may lead to. . . . Every act is an expression of the Buddha-mind."<sup>18</sup>

This is, of course, the nonattachment to the fruits of the work spoken of in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In the New Testament it seems to be indicated in the simile of the servants who are not thanked for properly performing this service. We are told that we also, when we have done all that is commanded, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Luke 17:10). Detachment from reward for action is also taught in the parable of the vineyard. Workers who have put in different amounts of time all receive the same wage (Matthew 20:1-16). Distinctions, divisions, comparisons have all disappeared.

Enlightenment is never for oneself alone but for the sake of all.<sup>19</sup> Jesus says, "For their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth" (John 17:19). Seeing others, one sees oneself. It is "imperative . . . to abandon the idea of a 'myself' standing in opposition to others," says Yasutani Roshi.<sup>20</sup> It will become quite natural and obvious to us to say "whatever you have done to the least of these my

brethren, you have done it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Jesus describes himself as "the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (John 10:11). He comes "not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). This is echoed in the Bodhisattva vow: "Sentient beings are countless—I vow to save them all."<sup>21</sup>

The world is one interdependent Whole, and each one of us is that One Whole.<sup>22</sup> Each of us must realize with respect to every "other" that "I am in you and you are in me" (John 14:20), and that all together we constitute a single body: "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:5; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12ff.). "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). This is why the Zen monk Shojun Bando says, "Unless everybody else attains Enlightenment, I cannot truly attain Enlightenment, so my destiny and everybody's destiny are one."<sup>23</sup>

Each of us who realizes this union of all must carry the sins of the world (John 1:29). The enlightened person, explains Morimoto Roshi, may have no problems of his own, "But there are many beings around him, and all these people still have all their own problems with them, and now all problems are his own. He is enlarged to cover everybody else, or everybody comes into his being. There is no distinction between his 'I' and the 'others.'"<sup>24</sup> One's practice at this point concerns how to utilize the characteristics of one's particular being so as to contribute to the salvation of all. This practice is endless.

The Enlightenment quest has now come full circle. We have con-centered ourselves by undivided attention to what we are doing, identified ourselves with the Ground of our being and not with our finite and particular expressions. We have become purified and unself-conscious instruments of the divine and realized our union with and presence in every

being. This means that the infinite self, the Ground, is realized as perfectly present in every finite act.

"To realize the undifferentiated is a necessary first step," declares Yasutani Roshi. "But the realization is incomplete if it goes no further." It is a weak enlightenment if the formless ground is still seen as somehow separate, or other than, the world of particular forms.<sup>25</sup> It is the Ground of the forms and expresses itself in forms. "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:32) and must be seen as vividly present in each of them.

Thus, if one asks, "What is the true self?" we can answer, "I, who speak to you, am he" (John 4:26). "The world of discrimination and the world of undifferentiation are not two. . . . They are two aspects of the One."<sup>26</sup>

"I am in the Father, and the Father is in me." (John 14:10).

When the sun shines, its rays spread throughout the earth; when there is rain, the earth becomes wet.<sup>27</sup>

Be children of your Father in heaven: For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust. . . . Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:45, 48).

*Practice to become whole.*