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OCCUPATION WITH SELF -- RIGHT AND WRONG FAITH

Greetings in the Name of the Lord. I bring blessings for all of you; blessed is this hour.

Many good, kind and even spiritual people say, when hearing these lectures, that it is not good to think so much about the self. They feel it would be better to think more about other people. They say, occupation with the self leads to selfishness. Of course, it depends entirely on how the occupation with the self is done or in what way one thinks about other people. It is wrong to think about yourself in a destructive way filled with self-pity, complaining about your fate, and brooding unproductively about things you may have missed in life and about things you cannot control and therefore cannot change. Whoever leans toward this sort of preoccupation should not only heed the advice of shifting the emphasis from the self to others, but should also learn to channel the self-occupation into a different direction, namely a productive one.

For those who cannot do the latter, it is infinitely healthier to think of other people by helping them, by giving up some selfishness, and by sacrificing something in order to help those who may need you. Those, however, who are ready for the proper kind of self-occupation, should of course also think of others in the right way and practice it at all times. One does not exclude the other. When you do something helpful and forget your own worries and difficulties, you are doing something worthwhile all around, for others as well as for yourself.

Occupation with others can also be practiced the wrong way, and unfortunately it very often is. Constantly thinking of other people's affairs, criticizing them, and judging them certainly does not help you to become less selfish. The mere fact that you are thinking about others instead of yourself is no guarantee that you act spiritually; just as the mere fact that thinking of yourself -- if done in the right way -- is no proof of your selfishness. It all depends on how it is done. People so often deceive themselves when they are in either of these extremes. If they think about others destructively, judgmentally, they are apt to believe that they are doing something good; at the same time they are holding on to the second-hand opinion that occupation with the self is harmful. They misuse this truth to rationalize their wrong attitude. An unproductive and weakening kind of self-occupation also does exist and is often hidden under the mask, "I must get to know myself; I must analyze my feelings"; but nothing of the sort is ever done. So be careful in what way you think about yourself -- and of others. Test yourself in this respect too, my dear friends.

Spiritually highly developed people may use all their efforts in self-sacrifice for others, helping them to the best of their ability and thus doing a great deal of good. However, even more is expected of just such people because their spiritual development would warrant it. And this is the purification of motives, the deep self-knowledge that is an indispensable requirement for spiritual development. Some people may neglect this part of their task and escape the issue by their strong emphasis on helping others. Again, the help given to others need not, and must not, be neglected

merely because you know yourself better. On the contrary. Please try to find out whether you may not perhaps belong in this category.

All of you who hear or read these words, my friends, are ready for the right kind of self-analysis. You may already do the right actions and even have the right thoughts in many respects, but as development proceeds, this is not enough, as you well know. It is necessary that your emotions be pure and without deceit. In order to accomplish this, it is imperative that you occupy yourself with self-probing and testing, severe self-criticism and analysis of your deeds, thoughts, and emotions as compared to spiritual truth and law.

For people who do not know themselves cannot know others; the person who does not understand himself cannot understand others, and he who does not love himself cannot love others. Again, the objection may be made that to love oneself means selfishness. Again, I say that this is only true if self-love is practiced by self-indulgently shirking the necessary pain of life. This is the small self that should not be loved, that must be severely treated by yourself. But if you have no healthy self-respect and do not love your greater being, which is the divine being you are, you can never truly love others. The right kind of self-respect and self-love can only come forth if you pursue and accomplish the spiritual development you have planned in spirit for this earth. If this is neglected, no matter how much you cover it with subterfuges and self-delusions, deep in your unconscious the fact remains that you are not developing as you should; that you are breaking a number of spiritual laws in your emotions, if not in your thoughts and actions; that you are escaping yourself in some way. All this leads to self-despise which is the true cause of inferiority complexes, no matter how well they may be rationalized. Therefore, you can only respect yourself if you do the utmost in developing spiritually, in sacrificing for others. And only when this well-founded self-respect is present can you truly respect others. So you see, my friends, how the circle must close here, too.

The more you practice the right kind of self-occupation, the more unselfish you must become, and therefore the better you will be able to help others and do good works for them. Think critically about yourself and be compassionate with others. But how many people, even spiritual people, do just the opposite! They ignore so many of their own faults, their sick trends, even those quite noticeable to anyone else and are always ready to condemn others, if not in words, then in their emotions and thoughts.

My friends, learn to accept other people's shortcomings, as you must learn to accept your own. Here, too, the right way to do so is all-important. I have discussed this subject often enough, so I will not go into it again. To accept one's own faults properly means neither self-abusing despair and discouragement because you discover yourself to be more imperfect than you thought you were; nor does it mean to want to remain as you are. You will find two entirely wrong extremes as well as the one most difficult right middle path concerning every individual human trend. Therefore, perhaps you will come to a better understanding that nothing in itself is ever good or bad, right or wrong. How it is done, whether the middle path between the two wrong extremes is found determines whether you are on the right track or not.

Only when you accept yourself in the proper way will you be able to accept others as they are and to live according to the spiritual law that demands that you direct your efforts where they can bring true results: toward yourself. You are the only person over whom you have the power of

bringing about change. You can never change another; therefore, your efforts are lost in this direction. You can, however, help to influence another person by your change; he or she may then decide to change too. Your influence can only be truly productive if you set the example first. When other people's faults bring you disharmony of any sort, it indicates that deep down you resent even more the fact that you cannot change them. Your resentment means that you are breaking a spiritual law. It should be the best indication for you to determine where you stand in accepting yourself as you really are and doing so in all humility. The more serene you remain in the face of other people's faults, the more you have accepted yourself as you are. Thus you will have a healthy basis in your soul no matter how many imperfections still remain in you. However, the more you fight inwardly against other people as they are right now, the more you refuse to accept yourself. Think of that too, my dear friends!

So learn to accept people as they are and become tolerant of faults you yourself may not have. Often you must go even further than that, however. You especially condemn in another person the very faults you yourself possess. You are not aware of this, of course, yet it is so. Only by getting to know yourself thoroughly can you accept other people better, understand them better, and love them better. You do not have to be blind to be tolerant. A basically intolerant person often does not want to see another person's faults when there is strong love or sympathy present. Not wanting to see the faults in this case indicates the deep fear that noticing the faults would mean to stop loving the other. This, of course, is nothing less than intolerance. If you could accept the imperfections of the loved one, you would not need to close your eyes. In addition to this wrong reaction, such a person will also be convinced that he is extremely tolerant because he never sees the faults in those he loves. This is another of the masks people so often put on. Real tolerance and real acceptance means to clearly see another's faults and not be afraid to love and respect that person any less because of them. With such an attitude, you not only help others around you, but you help yourself.

My dear friends, I beg all of you to think carefully about this subject. In your next meditation, ask yourself whether you are too critical about others; whether you actually condemn them, even if you do not consciously think so. Your emotional reactions to other people may amount to that. Test yourself in this respect, and ask if you are not blind to some of your own mistakes, while so busily fighting those of others. I can assure you that if you do that and react in the right way toward your findings, you will gain a great new peace by this change of attitude. For what robs you of your peace and inner harmony is never what others do, but always and solely your own wrong attitudes and inner fights against conditions you cannot change, and what is more, you are not supposed to change. You are supposed to change yourself. Once you have done that you will be free and will feel a new independence from other people's behavior or reactions and know that in the last analysis they can never bring you any harm.

Now I should like to discuss two aspects of faith. Many people are sincere in their endeavors to pursue spiritual development, yet their faith is not whole. Somewhere there is always the hidden doubt: "Is it really true? Is it not imagination? Am I not being deluded about all this?" I should like to talk about what to do with such a tendency, my friends.

In the first place, it is not advisable to push the sneaking doubt aside. You do this so often in sincere good will, for part of you does not want to have these doubts. And somehow you think that by hiding them they will disappear. But as you know, nothing can really be successfully dealt with

that is pushed into the unconscious. You are afraid to let the doubts rise to the surface because you assume that they might change your course; you might then fail in your spiritual endeavors.

However, this need not be so. Once you clearly understand that your doubting part is not the whole of your personality and notwithstanding its existence, there is another part of you that does believe, you will not fear that the recognition of your doubts may lead you to give up your spiritual strivings. The human soul is full of contradictory currents in all respects. The sooner you understand this and do not despair when you encounter the negative part that you do not want to recognize, the better it will be for you. The trouble connected to doing so arises from your mistaken notion that either one or the other trend is true. Yet both have their reality in your soul and fight with one another. This fight can never be won as long as you lack the courage to acknowledge the side in you which you do not like to own. It will be easier to do that, as I said, if you understood in principle that you can, and in fact do, consist of two contradictory currents simultaneously. Whether this concerns the issue of faith versus doubt, or any other inner problem makes no difference. Once you have acknowledged in yourself the doubting part, follow this advice: Know that it is God's grace when this complete knowledge to which I do not even give the name of faith and the experience of God's existence is given to a person. Develop your own humility about your lack of complete faith. Say to yourself: "I have not yet deserved this grace. I am not the judge of what I deserve or not. I have to fight my way through with my half-faith; the willing part in my being wants to develop and become a better and emotionally more mature person, so as to handle life better and love and help others more effectively. In this endeavor I will patiently and humbly wait until the grace of God is given to me."

If you cultivate these thoughts and feelings, continuing to battle with your lower self that always wants to obscure the way and obstruct your path, one day, I can promise you, this complete faith must be yours. Then you will have experienced God in such a way that you will be utterly convinced. However, just as other people's experiences and grace cannot be convincing for you regardless of how hard they may try to tell you, so will it be when you experience God's truth and existence in your life. You will not be able to transmit this to others who are still battling for the attainment of this divine grace -- complete faith. Each individual has to gain this major experience and fundamental change in soul development by his or her own efforts.

Another aspect of faith is this: There are people who have complete faith, as complete as can be possible for the individual in question. For every impurity of the soul somehow influences also the completeness of faith. Perfect faith would mean no disharmony in your life whatever and no fear in any respect. But none of you have gone that far. However, there are some in whom faith is stronger than it is in others. In people of this kind there often is an unrecognized feeling that he or she is something special to God, a favorite child; he holds a very particular position in his relationship to the Father; he is something quite unique and thinks he can possess God for himself. This is a harmful feeling -- and also a dangerous one. Dangerous because there is so much pride contained in it and also because it is so very easy to deceive oneself. The self-justification is always ready at hand that this belief is wonderful and an expression of one's devotion and spirituality.

Here we have one of those cases where good and pure motives -- the desire to come near to God, the love for the Creator -- mingle with the bad and impure ones -- spiritual pride and separateness from one's fellow-creatures. Since you will be utterly unaware in your intellect that such feelings exist in your relationship with God, it is your task to test yourself if and how strongly

this may apply to you. When you have discovered such feelings -- even to a small extent -- think that you are not rated any higher or any more than anyone else in the eyes of God. The feeling that you are something special to God can be considered as a transitory state in your development. Your longing and love of God is awakening before your pride and self-will have left you. The two opposite trends combine in a temporary state. But you must be aware of it and not believe for one instant that this is right and good. It is part of the growing process that has to be finely sifted and purified by yourself.

I invite those of you to whom this may apply to test your feelings when you think about God, when you feel God, and when you strive to get nearer to Him. Though you feel that all is as it should be, is there not somewhere a hidden feeling you have never acknowledged in which you believe yourself nearer and dearer to God than other people? The root of this feeling may even exist in people whose faith is not real as yet. But it will come out stronger once faith becomes whole and the transitory process unfolds. And if you find that the feeling of being special may apply to you at least in some small degree, begin to work very conscientiously concentrating on your relationship with your fellow-creatures.

You will often find a particular intolerance in people who feel themselves specially loved by God. There is often even a kind of arrogance toward others; perhaps not always in their outward behavior, but in their inner attitude. Try in your meditations to choose a person whom you do not respect particularly, or perhaps even one whom you like least of all the people you know; or one who particularly irritates you. Then think how very much God also loves this particular person, just as much as He loves you. Even if the other person happens to be spiritually less developed, he or she is still loved by God. This will be a wonderful exercise, exactly the medicine you need, my friends.

The human soul is a very complicated piece of "machinery," if I may use this expression. Purification does not lie in simply overcoming your faults. That is not so easy and it takes a long time. It is only possible after you have deeply understood many of your trends and reactions of which you are still unaware. So your immediate goal cannot be perfection, even though it is the ultimate goal. Know this ultimate goal but work first toward the immediate one, which is knowing and accepting yourself as you are: This implies having no illusions about yourself; attaining a healthy attitude toward your shortcomings, and learning to live according to life's rules and not shirking from the sometimes necessary difficulties. It encompasses all that you are learning here. Only after this is accomplished will you gradually begin to alter some of your wrong trends and begin to react differently. Clarify your motives first and purify them. Separate the wrong motives from the good ones in one and the same action/reaction pattern. That is your task now.

Do not stop your striving when your faith is lacking. For you are a good person, and as a good person you want to become better, more whole, purer, more loving, so as to do more good wherever you are. Even if you cannot undertake this hard work at all times for the sake of God because you are not always sure that He really exists, do it for the love of others that is a basic part of you. Often a person whose faith is still weak has a greater love for other human beings than someone else whose faith is strong and who feels, as mentioned before, that she holds a special position in God's eye. Both are transitory states and will one day even out and harmonize in perfection.

Moreover, when tests befall you, as they must, pray that your thinking capacity should not be paralyzed. That is what usually happens to a person in a difficult situation. Just hold on to this thought: "Father, give me a clear outlook, even though I find myself confused and unhappy and mixed up at this moment. Help me not to forget that which I otherwise know. Let me see Thy truth in this situation, not as it appears to me at present in my very limited outlook."

We often observe that when you are undergoing a test your view of things is completely distorted. When you are convinced that your negative outlook is the only truth, you so easily despair. You even forget in such moments that which you otherwise know perfectly well. You become so paralyzed by the forces of evil you have drawn toward you that you cannot think and see what you would ordinarily see quite clearly. It does not occur to you to ask for the truth of God, because even for that your thoughts are too encased in darkness. Only after you come out of the darkness will you be aghast at your having been so blind.

You can save yourself many a difficult hour by turning to God at once and by realizing what I am explaining to you. Fight the temporary blindness by training your thoughts to delve into the unconscious, the part of your soul where the "forgotten" truth may be found. Train yourself for future tests so that you will meet them with better mental equipment.

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