



Gatha with Commentary

Etekad, Rasm U Ravaj:
Superstitions, Customs and Beliefs

Series I

of

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by

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Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
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Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 1

Belief and Superstition

GATHA: Every country seems to have certain beliefs which are called beliefs by the believers and superstitions by those who do not believe. They are beliefs which arise from some subtle experience of life, and some spring from intuition, and they are believed by some who are inclined to believe and mocked at by some who cannot understand their meaning, and often by those who do not wish to trouble themselves to discover the truth in them.

TASAWWUF: If we consider the invocation as above, we must take into account a multitude of beings and also One Being who is the Creator of everything and Who at the same time is trying to express Himself fully or not so fully through everything and everyone. According to Qur'an it is accepted that God made man in his image, but also that He had His representatives on earth. Also that every Nation has had its guidance, and often its prophets and messengers. The difference here between Sufism and Orthodox Islam is that the Orthodox accept only the surface meaning of the words and do not think deeply that this is so, and that this being so, there are various shades of Divine Guidance and Light in and through all peoples.

It is overlooked that there are subtle experiences and that these experiences happen among all peoples of various grades of evolution and express themselves in various institutions, showing varying effectiveness of the activity of the several grades of Light in and through all beings. This is particularly true of those who either resort to trance (or subconscious activity) or those who naturally have some subtle sense operating through the physical organisms. This is not yet studied by Science but there are glimmerings of it and when the subtle and psychic sciences are more fully developed much will be made clear.

The rise of the psychic and psychedelic experiences show the existence of more subtle faculties. Even if these are dangerous (and they are not always dangerous) we must understand what they are. And there are whole races and groups which rely more on subtle or dream or visionary experience than on the sense-data and impressions.

And when we come to the intuitive aspects, they are beyond the analytical reason. Yet if we study the discoveries and inventions of men we must admit that there is something more than reason that leads man into new avenues of expression, activity and research.

GATHA: It is easy to laugh at things and it takes patience to endure and tolerate things that cannot appeal to one's reason. And it is difficult to investigate the truth of such beliefs, for something more than reason is required to probe the depths of life.

TASAWWUF: In the years since the presentation of the teachings there has been the rise and expansion of scientific investigation in several directions. For instance the more Anthropologists have lived among people of different cultures, especially lesser cultures, the more they have come to appreciate the points of view of literate and non-literate peoples of different outlooks and development.

There is also the slow recognition of the subtle and psychic aspects of life. As curiosity is a tool of the scientists, it often leads to a conflict between what is called “reason” and the experiences of curiosity. No doubt this was the beginning of the so-called war “between science and religion,” that the scientists were moved by intuition and curiosity and the religionists, or rather the orthodox, were moved by tradition and reason. Each was right according to its stand and both stands are limitations.

GATHA: Those from whom the beliefs come naturally could not give the explanation of those beliefs to everybody, for the man who is capable of believing a thing is not necessarily capable of understanding it by an analytical explanation.

TASAWWUF: Reason has often been identified with analysis. There are many philosophies, all conflicting because the analysts are like the six blind men who, examining the elephant, each in his own manner, came to very different conclusions. The conclusions were right if analysis alone were permitted, but they are no conclusions at all; they lead to conflicts. The analytical method always leads to conflict and misunderstanding; each assumes that his own point of view is right and each ignores his limitations.

If we come from different cultures we find a logic which is consistent and firm but which does not explain the ways of strangers. Even plants, taken to different environments and having changes of food, weather and other factors, change. Unity is not uniformity.

GATHA: There are natures which would be willing to believe a thing if it is for their good, if it comes from someone whom they trust, but it is for them too much trouble to go deeply into the matter.

TASAWWUF: The evolution in communication has brought many to accept some universal point of view. When we are universal, we do not readily accept that any group is necessarily wrong; each group may be conditioned, and the rational scientist will study the conditioning.

The traditional people assume a point of view from which they measure all else. This is found in all ages and places. But it is a limitation. A point of view may be necessary to bring stability, but it also leads to the establishment of many points of view, all necessarily different. Something must be done to bring them together.

It is not only time and place, but there are differences in depth; there are different stages and states of consciousness. Some of these may be very common among some people, some may be rare and some may be wholly absent. Thus among the chemical elements there are varying degrees of radioactivity, magnetism, electrical conductivity, etc. The same may be applied to the subtle and psychic aspects of life.

GATHA: For some among them it is better that they should not have an analytical knowledge of a belief, for to some the belief is helpful but the explanation confusing. It is a certain grade of evolution that enables man to understand a certain belief, and a man must not be told what he is incapable of understanding, for then, instead of helping him, it puts him off.

TASAWWUF: The difficulty is in the analytical outlook. It has taken possession of Western man and is also his limitation. Thus the Roman Catholic Church has taken a stand against too much analysis and has substituted instead ritual, institutions, and sometimes a blind faith. No doubt a blind faith is

a limitation but an analysis is also a limitation. It frees one from the blind faith but it does not lead to the knowledge which is desired.

When one is freed from the blind faith it may be, as in the case of the French Revolution, that there is a removal of restraint. With restraint removed there is lack of consideration not only for institutions but for other people. It may be wrong for institutions to impose their beliefs on people but it is even worse when a small group of persons impose beliefs and requirements on others.

GATHA: There is great deal of psychic law which can be traced in such beliefs, and in time such beliefs turn into customs.

TASAWWUF: The Teaching was brought at the time the psychic sciences in the West were just beginning to develop. All the great religions teach in some way the existence of three vehicles (sometimes more). But the teaching stops at that point. As no teaching limits the faculties of man, those who have some kinds of dreams, visions, extraordinary or extrasensory faculties find they cannot conform to the customs around them. And these limiting customs are also superstitions and not only superstitions but negative and privative. And being negative or privative, they may be much worse than the strange and unusual customs and habits of those who are different and therefore called "exotic."

The rise of scientific Anthropology came when men looked into the customs of Totem and Exogamy and then to other customs. They found a rationale in each and this led to increased human consideration though points of view were often very different.

GATHA: There is a vast field of knowledge in the customs of Indians. India is a country where beliefs have existed for thousands of years unchanged, and some beliefs have become customs.

TASAWWUF: This is to some degree true of all peoples. But India has both a literature and a fairly stable geography which means we can trace the traditions much more easily. Besides the Indians being a philosophical people, they have records, written and unwritten about them.

Thus in 1896 a man named Rose, connected with the Royal Asiatic Society, wrote on *The Customs and Superstitions of the Castes and Tribes of Punjab and N. W. India*. These not only put many items on record but included a vast amount of material on the effect of Sufism on these people.

GATHA: At first sight an intellectual person who cannot see any further than the surface of things is apt to think that people in India are full of superstitions. Their whole life seems based on them; not only in religion do they have beliefs, but even in their domestic affairs. In their everyday life every move they make, every word they say, is in accordance with some underlying belief.

TASAWWUF: The first step is in the examination of customs. And we can see also in the Island of Bali which retains a great many ancient Indian traditions, that every aspect of life is based on some interpretation of Dharma. It is not always the same as we find in parts of India but there is the same general rationale behind it. And when we look into it, not only does there seem to be some system, some harmony, but even certain types of joy not always common to other people on earth. So it may have been that to maintain and increase Joy, which is to say Ananda, that these institutions were given to humanity.

Once we recognize any sort of rationale among these peoples, the Indians, we might go further and find also there is a certain rationale among many or among all peoples.

GATHA: No doubt a tendency of taking interest in superstition should always be avoided, for the more thought one gives to superstitions the more he seems to be drowned in the ghosts of superstitions.

TASAWWUF: This is true for the ordinary person. There are those who are curious and there are those who always look for something new and there are those who wish to be free from the binding customs of their own culture, so they look elsewhere. But this looking without guidance can often lead to difficulties, even to mental illnesses.

GATHA: Wherever the superstitious man looks he gets an impression of some fear, some doubt, some suspicion, which generally leads to confusion.

TASAWWUF: Superstitions may be called the shadow side of the subtle and psychic. Thus Mohammed has said that visions are given by God and dreams by the devil. They appear superficially to be alike. But in the visions the background is light and in the dreams, the light is thrown on darkness.

Impressions which strike the lower centers are still valid as impressions. But these impressions are secondary, they are the effects of shadows not of light. So often we have predictions which many accept and along with them fears and turmoil. And hardly one of these negative impressions ever seems to carry truth with it. So there have been many predictions of earthquakes, terror, war. Indeed when World War II started, a certain well-known prognosticator committed suicide because what happened was so entirely different from what he had been saying that he could no longer face the world.

It generally happens from the negative psychics, who use the trances negatively without any higher guidance that they make all sorts of predictions, saying they come from spirits or guides. What brings fear, what brings turmoil, trouble, can often itself be worse than the fear, or turmoil or trouble. For it muddles the minds of men. Even if predictions turn out correctly, muddling itself is dangerous.

GATHA: But for the wise a disregard of superstitions is not satisfactory, for by wisdom one becomes capable of understanding them, and to understand them is better than to mock at them and even to believe them.

TASAWWUF: In 1962 there was a confluence of many planets in one sign and the story came out in the western part of the world that multitudes of people in India were thoroughly upset. But it never occurred that the story of the Indians being upset had more negative impression on the people of distant lands than on the majority of Indians who paid no attention to it. And there is some question as to whether the superstitious outlook was not greater among the non-Indian people who accepted without any corroborating evidence the supposed influences on the Indians. Yes, some Indians reacted but that may be true among all peoples.

No doubt there were subtle and psychic results connected in some way with the confluence of planets and the forces involved. But to understand them we should have to study them dispassionately.

GATHA: For the one who believes in superstitions is, so to speak, in the water, and knows he is in the water; but who mocks at them is in the water, but does not know that he is in the water.

TASAWWUF: We all live on three planes. Our awareness of each of them may be different. We easily recognize physical blindness; we sometimes recognize mental blindness; but there are forms of blindness which persist because we do not know about them at all. When the celebrated H.G. Wells was a young man he wrote a novel about the misadventures of a mountain climber who found himself in a country of the blind. They could not understand him, and he could not understand them.

The same is true about faculties and customs which have bases we do not understand. It is also true that many peoples have institutions, beliefs, and customs which seem so clear to them, but which foreigners do not understand, sometimes cannot comprehend.

GATHA: By understanding them man is capable of swimming in the water, and by mastering them he walks on the water. The man who knows all things and acts according to his knowledge becomes the master of life.

TASAWWUF: The Sufi never derides anybody. He accepts all things as natural. A rose might be very unhappy in a garden of violets, and a mushroom may not flourish in bright sunlight. It is doubtful whether any race of people can be called insane; they merely live very differently from some others. All persons and people alike are the beloved ones of God.

It is fortunate now that scientists are both more tolerant and more understanding. Actually tolerance brings understanding and understanding brings tolerance.

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Series I: Number 2

Belief

GATHA: The term “belief” is used for an idea that one believes and for which one cannot give a reason. Such ideas, when of an ordinary nature, are termed superstitions, and when they are of a sacred nature they are called beliefs.

TASAWWUF: The subject of “belief” is discussed in the literature and also in the Gathas. One way of distinguishing between superstition and belief is that in a sense the superstition comes from a shadow of reality. Superstitious people do not live in pure knowledge. They often accept blindly. Therefore others also call them “prejudiced.”

The Sufi does not try to break down religious views of anybody, although he may feel it his duty to turn all hearts toward the living God. Even less does he try to change customs. The result is that in some parts of the world people’s customs have been retained along with the pursuit of what are called the Five Pillars. The orthodox are not always so tolerant, but those who go into strange lands to propagate religion see no reason to alter anything if it does not conflict with belief in God, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and donations of alms. Indeed, Sufism teaches that uniformity is not unity.

GATHA: Often man confuses belief with truth. Many people, without understanding their belief, hold it is not a truth, but is the truth, and thereby ignore every other belief which seems to them different from the truth they possess.

TASAWWUF: It is only in recent times that some scientists and other more enlightened persons, feeling that large masses of people may not have been misled, are merely looking at life from other points of view. It is not always necessary or even proper to change them; it is always valuable to adjust oneself to a more sympathetic outlook.

Words are not truth, nor are facts truth. The rise of the branch of studies called “semantics” has resulted in a form of a science of meaning which presumably places experience above vocabulary. While this is so, the persistence of the ego outlook precludes a world of universal understanding, tolerance, and compassion.

GATHA: In reality, belief is not the truth, nor is truth a belief. When a person has risen to the understanding of the truth it is no more a belief for him, it is a conviction.

TASAWWUF: The ancient Greeks used to divide people into the ignorant who lived in darkness, they said; the believers who lived half in the light and half in the darkness; and the wise who lived in the light. No doubt much has been said of belief and believers. Little has been said about the Gnostics and the wise. People who live in the light can understand those who live half in the darkness. People who live half in the darkness can see they are better off than those who are totally in darkness, that is, the ignorant.

Mystical knowledge is the result of the experience of those who live in the light. The heart-light is penetrating. But although the wise see, they also tolerate.

GATHA: The beliefs of a sacred nature, which come in the realm of religion, are as steps towards the goal which is called truth; and when a man stops at a belief, the belief holds him and he holds the belief. Neither can the belief push him onward nor can he advance. In many cases belief, which should serve as wings on which to soar toward the height, becomes as nails fixing man onto the earth.

TASAWWUF: This is the position of the orthodox of all faiths, and also of some who have orthodoxy but no faith. It is this which has limited spiritual evolution and often causes dissatisfaction, especially among the young. With the advance of education and beyond education into science and technology, a binding belief may become a limitation worse than ignorance. Both the Gathas and Gathekas explain this, and it is also a theme in *The Unity of Religious Ideals*.

With the great advances in communication enabling all people to contact all other people, it is necessary both to tolerate and to understand all customs, superstitions and beliefs.

GATHA: Every belief in the beginning is a step in the dark, but as man approaches the goal then every step is more and more illuminated. Therefore there is hope for the believer, but the case of the unbeliever is hopeless.

TASAWWUF: By unbeliever here is meant the skeptic rather than the ignorant. The skeptic ties himself down. And very often when the skeptic is converted or transformed, in the beginning he may be more intolerant of those who retain his earlier fixed point of view.

Mohammed has taught "Everyone is born a believer." So we find in children of all races and cultures a trustful nature. If this had not been so there would not have been any family institutions. The child has a natural trust for its parents—we see this even in some animals. This trust is a wonderful thing.

The unbeliever is generally unaware of the heart side of life. If we look into his nature we find often that he is more bound than various classes of so-called superstitious believers.

GATHA: There are souls who are capable of believing, even capable of understanding belief, who yet for some reason or other are not trying to believe, and reject a belief before the understanding comes. The wise course in life would be to try to become a pupil, a pupil of one teacher as well as a pupil of all beings; it is then that one will become the pupil of God.

TASAWWUF: Some can see this in the absence of light in the eyes. Others can see this in the lack of radiance in the aura or in some other manner. Those who cannot see may often feel it. It is not necessary to change such persons. It merely shows their time has not yet come.

Those who think they are ready for the spiritual path only show their readiness when they are ready to accept a single teacher. This is the first step. If they are not ready to have a single teacher they usually prove to be unready.

But the question also comes how to tell a true teacher. The false teacher will instruct so that the pupils learn as if through himself alone. He is intolerant, consciously or unconsciously. The true

teacher may seem to bind the pupil, but really he is trying to liberate the pupil. Therefore in Sufism one is taught to learn from everyone and everything, for everyone and everything is a manifestation of Allah.

In Sufism disciples are led to the stage called *fana-fi-Sheikh*; that is to say, the pupil learns to find the teacher in all things and in all experiences. He may imitate the teacher, or he may feel the teacher, or he may devote himself to the disciplines offered by the teacher, all have the same result.

Another aspect of this is reverence. Reverence shares with belief the pious attitude. But in belief there is the egocentric outlook and in reverence the ego is removed. Therefore it is said in Salat "Thy light is in all forms, Thy love in all beings." Salat offers the means of the fulfillment of this teaching.

GATHA: Then the wise course would be to investigate the truth of belief instead of giving up one's belief, also to be patiently tolerant of another until one sees from his point of view the truth of his belief.

TASAWWUF: Lord Buddha has given the teaching that no one must accept anything unless it is clear to himself. It is unfortunate that many who call themselves Buddhists pride themselves because Lord Buddha said it. They do not put it into practice. They establish and accept an orthodoxy the same as others. This has resulted in the establishment of various religions, schools, and sects dividing mankind. The wise test their teaching.

The other aspect often comes through patience, to be tolerant of others whether there is agreement or not. This tolerance often proves to be the way to greater understanding.

TASAWWUF: If a man were in charge of an art class, he would have the students draw from a model. Each would sit in a different place, have a different view and because of this, even if the styles were similar, the drawing might not be so similar because of the forced acceptance of a different place from which to draw. Thus differences and distinctions would be natural and normal.

Then the eyes might be different, some might be near-sighted and some far-sighted and there might be other differences. And perhaps there might be a jinn-soul in the class whose sensorium was different and whose abilities were different. All of these and other factors would bring out differences; there may be many reasons for differences. And their normalities are based on differences.

Therefore the wise man tries to understand others just as the art teacher would, and then he can understand them. He does not have to agree with them, but he comes to comprehend them.

GATHA: When man sees only from his own point of view, he sees with one eye and the other eye is closed. The complete view is in seeing from both points of view, however contrary they may be.

TASAWWUF: It is not always easy to see from another's point of view. Man has become used to a certain outlook, his own outlook. Age and experience may fixate that outlook; there is nothing wrong about it. It is natural. The natural and social sciences have the term "environment," that people become influenced by outer surroundings and thus are different. The same applies to plants and animals. It was noticed much by Darwin and all the evolutionists.

One of the differences between much of science and much of religion has come because there is more scope in these sciences than in some religions to account for differences. The same is true when we examine the more progressed sciences as against those which do not change. It is as Jesus has said, "In my Father's abode are many mansions, therefore I go to provide a place for you." The spiritual person has a place for everybody, saint, and sinner. It may not always be the same place, but it is some place. This is also a theme found in folklore and so it is not always the sinner who goes to hell or the saint that goes only to heaven. There is a place in God for everybody.

The wise also see a place for everybody. The learned are also beginning to comprehend this. And in the developed criminology, crime-lawyers see from the points of view of even the most despicable (assumedly) human beings.

GATHA: It is this tendency which will balance things and will give the right idea of things. In order to view a building one must stand in the street and view it, instead of standing inside it and wanting to see the outside.

TASAWWUF: The subject of tolerance is also taught in the Gathas. It is only the beginning when one can appreciate the tolerance. That is the first step. One must grow until there is more attunement. Each religion has this teaching and each religion has ignored it. The clergy teach that they alone have the tolerance, the broad view, that others are narrow. And when this system of finding differences becomes part of a person's consciousness, he also does the same with everybody. This is the cause not only of differences, but of hostilities, politics, and war.

GATHA: In understanding beliefs one must be able to neutralize one's spirit, and to the extent to which it is neutralized man becomes capable of seeing the belief in its right sense. When man says on hearing something from another, "That is not what I believe," he shows his weakness, he shows his incapacity to view the belief of the other from the point of view of that other.

TASAWWUF: Sufism has been called the religion of love, harmony, and beauty. Religions teach that they have inherited tolerance or love or human consideration but the intellectual consideration, the motifs themselves are not love or harmony nor beauty. No doubt man begins by identifying words with things; sometimes he finds that the words are not the things they represent. But he is still not free. If he identifies his thoughts with realities he is still under delusion and limitation. He is not free.

GATHA: Knowledge comes by readiness to learn it, and when we refuse it in life it is by lack of readiness. No matter from what source knowledge may seem to come, it is from one source in reality, and when the mind becomes a free receptacle, knowledge flows freely into the heart.

TASAWWUF: The tendency of the generality is to centralize on one's point of view. Knowledge of names and forms is part of learning; it is not all of learning. It does not explain why there are so many cults, religions, philosophies, ideas. Yes, when knowledge is limited to names and forms, there may be agreement. But this is only the part of mind concerned with memory. There are also imagination and thought; they belong to mental operations.

But beyond that there is the free flowing and this comes with the development of the intuitive factor (Kashf) which transcends without contradicting the operations of mind.

GATHA: There is some truth hidden in every religious belief, and often is it of greater value than it may seem to be.

TASAWWUF: It is hardly possible for any religion to grasp hold of the hearts of men unless there were some truth in it. The basis of nearly all religions has been some form of human consideration and harmony. True, it is also concerned with the relation between the seen and unseen. But the fact is that the religions accept the unseen and sometimes have more in common concerning the unseen than the leaders wish to impart.

The Universal worship accepts each religion as if it were the vehicle for some aspect of truth. When the Scriptures are read, very often one finds the same or similar lessons in one or more of them. And the end may be as in Sir Richard Burton's "Kasidah" that all are right and all are wrong. They are right in what they proclaim; they are wrong in what they deny to others.

GATHA: And believing in a thing without understanding is a first step forward to knowledge, and refusing to believe when a belief is presented means taking a step backward.

TASAWWUF: We can see the first in the young, that if it were impossible to present a belief it would be impossible to develop understanding. Consciously or unconsciously all people all over the world know this.

But there are also those who develop minds of stone and hearts of iron. They even verbally would accept such a teaching, it seems right and yet they do not incorporate it in their lives. They may expect others to conform but they call it "liberty" when it assumes that they do not have to conform.

GATHA: When a person is content with his belief that is a comfortable state of being, but it is the understanding of the belief which is ideal.

TASAWWUF: That is why the mystic accepts disciplinary exercises, to awaken his understanding. As the heart grows soft, so to speak, it also obtains the sympathy which enables it to see from the point of view of others. This does not mean the giving up of another; it means the increase of outlook, attitude and growth.

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Series I: Number 3

Customs—Part 1

GATHA: There are many customs that have existed in different countries for ages which have psychological significance, and yet scarcely anybody knows about it. Customs in the form of greeting one another, and asking after one another's health, even such habits as that of talking about the weather, arise from a psychological basis.

TASAWWUF: The psychological sciences have often been limited to an investigation of unusual sense habits and strange abilities. These may be said to manifest the jinn or gandharva aspects of life. But it is also true that much in man's nature is hidden from the sense, and yet it manifests with or without explanation.

The British anthropologist, Sir James Frazier, made a very complete study of the customs both of ancients and moderns in different cultures. These appeared in the monumental *The Golden Bough*. It awakened scientists to the fact that they did not always know much about other people; that there are many cultures and points of view and perhaps each has some strong rationale behind it. Then the science of Anthropology developed and it brought tolerance where none had existed before.

Thus the subject of shaking hands; the tipping of the hat to others; bowing; keeping quiet; and many other customs may have long histories behind them and also quite vivid explanations.

GATHA: This shows that the ancient people, in the East or in the West, had more magic in their lives than the man of today. The world has lost the magical charm, so to speak, which was the inheritance of the human race, owing to the ever-increasing material life and the ignorance of things that are beyond matter. It is of late that science is discovering some psychological truths in human life.

TASAWWUF: Magic, like science, is based upon human experience. It may have its own rationale and sometimes the rationale is excellent. It all depends upon the point of view. Much magic is based on sympathy and there are some aspects of sympathy that even the scientists themselves call "sympathetic vibrations."

As the science of Anthropology has grown, curious seekers have found that there are many phenomena that can not be explained by a particular tradition. When they have investigated further they often find such a logic that they had not deemed possible. Yet the phenomena corroborate the beliefs and superstitions of peoples of other cultures. Even Christianity started that way; it seemed to manifest a superior magic and by that superior magic won many adherents even when its devotees were cruelly persecuted.

We can find some magic among all peoples once called primitive. It is part of the nature of man, and of the universe which man inhabits.

GATHA: The process that science follows in discovering these truths is contrary to that of the mystic. The scientist wishes to climb the mountain from the level ground. The mystic, by way of meditation, tries to reach to summit of the mountain and from there he sees the whole beauty of the mountain. Therefore, naturally, the horizon before the eyes of the mystic is incomparably wider than the horizon before the scientist.

TASAWWUF: Nevertheless the scientist wishes to climb; perhaps his very profession impels or compels him to climb. There are other branches of human culture which do not assist in widening any horizon. Many wish to keep things and outlooks as they are. Only while the scientist is sure of the instruments he uses in the world without, the mystic also becomes sure of his mind and consciousness and his inner faculties.

In another sense it seems that the scientists follow an Aristotelian approach, although this is not necessarily so. And it would seem that the mystics follow more what the West calls a Platonic approach. And certainly in the meditations and esoteric exercises it is the universal that is placed before the individual. And when one has reached a universal point of view he is better able to understand all particular points of view. But the particularists, so to speak, are not always capable of understanding one another.

GATHA: Yes, the scientist may see things clearly, distinctly, and in detail, whereas the mystic has a general idea of things. Often the vision of the mystic is vague in comparison with the analytical examination of a scientist. And yet, while the mystic sees through objects, the scientist can reach as far as their surface.

TASAWWUF: There is now a growing acceptance of the limitations of analysis. There are points of view involving synthesis, integration and wholeness. All these in a sense belong to philosophy. Yet they can become and often do become the tools of science. For man is beginning to understand his limitations and is working knowing he has these limitations. And this helps him to broaden the horizon. So too meditation and intuition are becoming more and more the tools of science and of the general culture of the western world.

GATHA: Owing to the greater activity in Western life all things change more quickly in the West, while in the East changes come very slowly. Therefore, one finds many customs of ancient origin in the East which show the development of Eastern people in psychical things.

TASAWWUF: It may come as a surprise that the two oldest and most literate of all cultures have the most complete compendium of psychic traditions; that is, the Chinese and Hindus. With all the differences the Western world has some empathy with the Hindus, and it takes a long time even to examine many of the customs and habits of the Chinese, covering all phases of life.

As the literary people do not live much among those of quite different outlooks on life and as they also include largely fiction writers who have great influence on readers, it is often that false impressions are given on the folk "mores" of peoples far away. At the same time when a subject such as mysticism is discussed, often prowess is given only to people far away. The result is that a conflict goes on in the minds of men and with that, ignorance.

The Christian Bible also refers to the psychic body but the translators have erred, owing to their ignorance of things unseen. So each religion has failed to give the full import of its own teachings and this in turn has stimulated the growth of materialism.

GATHA: Even the ordinary customs, such as that of shaking hands, or rising from one's seat to receive someone, bowing, bending, waving the hands, or clapping the hands, have a psychical significance.

TASAWWUF: The explanations of these are given in the psychic science which will be added to the other sciences as man becomes aware both of open and latent explanations. There is nothing that has not a meaning. Man has two nervous systems, in a sense, a conscious and an unconscious one. The psyche of man is just as much under laws on its levels as the physical body is on its levels.

GATHA: When two people shake hands with one another magnetism is exchanged between them and a balance of life force is made between them. The one who lacks strength, energy or magnetic power gains, and through the one from whom they overflow they are used for a better purpose.

TASAWWUF: All practices given by a teacher to a pupil help build up the psychic energy, sometimes in a latent or potential sense, sometimes in an active sense. This is very true for those who go on the path of healing and a great deal of knowledge along this line is contained in the volume on *Health*. But the very first exercises given to a talib help him to increase energy and through the rays of the sun, the waves of the air, and the all-pervading power in space, this is so.

It is a pity when people confine the significance of prayer and esotericism to the mental aspects of it only. The Sufi prayers and all exercises have meanings, not only esoteric, but even in the simplest sense. And when man can draw from the all-pervading power in the space both he and everyone he meets benefits.

There is a law of entropy wherein heat-energy always flows from a warm body to a colder one. This is one law which cannot be reversed on the physical plane, scientists teach. But in the psychic world it is not always so, and there are people who take advantage of the magnetisms of others to draw from them. In the worst form this is known as "black magic" but often consciously or unconsciously people try to benefit from the magnetisms of others.

In the physical world we can see the linking of electrical batteries and magnets and how they work in chains. There is a law here also as in gravitation that movement is always toward balance and equilibrium as if to restore a level.

Spiritual teachers always try to increase the forms of magnetism in disciples. This is done sometimes according to certain practices. The philosophy of it also appears in the literature and behind each statement there is a method. The teacher may impart these methods to the disciples but not to the average person. So while the philosophies drawn from literature are valuable the real value comes when each item becomes a reality to the student.

Now also this is being done in the Dervish dancing that magnetism is imparted and sometimes from the teacher, and sometimes teacher and pupil working together draw from the space; and sometimes it is as Jesus Christ has said, "When two or three are gathered together in my Shem (meaning Light,

Power, Magnetism, etc., and not just ‘name’) there am I in their midst.” So everybody benefits from the right use of psychic power.

GATHA: By rising to show respect to a person, and by walking a few steps to receive a person, a man makes himself ready to withstand the forces of the one who is coming. By standing up and walking a step or two, he makes his pulsation regular, and puts his circulation in order, thus making himself psychically ready to defend himself, if the one who is coming should happen to be a foe, and ready to meet him harmoniously on the same level, physically, mentally, and morally, if he happens to be a friend.

TASAWWUF: The unconscious operation of psychic law manifests in the folk customs. Moving face to face is as a movement toward union and harmony, but if one turns the body, that is already a divergent step, whether it is a habit, or a step toward drawing a sword or use a pistol or any weapon. In such cases the harmonious balance is broken. So also in the greeting to embrace in various ways, each little movement has a significance.

The conscious side may be seen in the physical arts such as Tai Chi, Judo, etc., found among the peoples of the Far East. While strange to the Western World, they should not be regarded as spiritual. They help in both physical and psychic development and naturally broaden the outlook of the participant, just as the outlook of the Asian is broadened by joining in western games and sports.

Spiritual teachers, particularly in Sufism, avail themselves of the spiritual laws in various ways of greeting and blessing. The blessing itself is above the psychic but benefits from the psychic as it does from the physical. The blessing is one of the highest forms of the transmission of cosmic and psychic energy.

We can also see this in the prayers, that each movement is associated with the words and thoughts. If we look further the same principles are found in the prayers of all nations.

When the disciple rises before the teacher, that involves psychic force. When the teacher lifts the pupil, that also, only more. When we pray, “Draw us closer to Thee every moment of our lives” it also signifies that everything has meaning.

GATHA: Bending the head in a bow quickens not only the circulation in the head but also the magnetic current in it, for the head is the chief moral and spiritual factor in man.

TASAWWUF: The prayers of all religions have this principle and not always just in words but also in actions. Those people who say and do not do what they say lose a great opportunity. But when speech, thought, and action are united there is great benefit.

In Zikr in particular the head is moved in various ways. The teacher may not explain the meaning. If he did so the disciple would be caught in the mental aspect. It is by moving the head, sometimes up and down or the reverse, sometimes from right to left and the reverse; sometimes in a circle and in combination of these movements that the devotee benefits in both the seen and unseen aspects of his personality. Then when the certain thoughts or concentrations are given by the teacher the benefit is increased as is taught in the lessons on Esotericism.

GATHA: You will always find that a person with a tendency to bow is thoughtful, and it often happens that the one who keeps his head erect and avoids bowing is foolish.

TASAWWUF: Therefore bowing is involved in many forms of prayer, and not only for the sake of devotion, but for humility and self-abnegation. Some people make a great art of bowing and they benefit from it. Thus the Japanese who delight in bowing can hardly be said not to be a thoughtful people; indeed they have contributed much to the universe of thought.

The subject of bowing is also discussed in lessons on Esotericism and Devotion. Man naturally bows when he listens with the intent of learning but when he wishes to be skeptical he may hold his head firm. Also if one does not wish to be influenced by a speaker he may hold his head firm.

Therefore the teacher imparts practices to the disciple as he needs them. Besides when the magnetic qualities of the teacher or speaker become evident, by their very nature they cause the listener to bow. And if a pupil is hard to reach, the wise man does not preach or tell him anything. He just gives him a psychic exercise which will produce the result desired, and generally this also involves moral benefit.

GATHA: Man's life depends upon rhythm, rhythm in his breath, in the pulsation, in the beats of the heart and head, and it is irregularity of the rhythm of his heart on his pulse that shows disorder in his health. It is regularity of rhythm that keeps man in a fit state to go on through life.

TASAWWUF: This theme is considered in the lessons on breath and also the teaching on spiritual music such as is found in *The Mysticism of Sound*. It has been said, "Breath is the first lesson and the last." This shows the difference between metaphysics and mysticism; the metaphysician will hold the truism that breath is the first lesson and the last and the mystic will learn how to breathe and also how to advance along the line of breath and the evident and subtle energies in the breath itself.

GATHA: And when people applaud a speaker, a singer, a player, it is a suggestion for him to continue his rhythm, physical, mental or moral.

TASAWWUF: For such rhythms produce intoxications and these intoxications often bring relief: in many instances diseases have been cured by such simple methods. For as the breath changes, so do the energies change and as the energies change one may pass from ill health to good health. But the same applies to the psyche, so to speak, as well as to the physical body.

RYAZAT: One may practice the clapping of hands to ascertain the effects and often by changing a rhythm in this manner one will feel better, be the disturbances physical, emotional, or mental.

GATHA: Even the waving of the hand in parting from a friend suggests the same meaning: continue to be in a fit state to live and enjoy life.

TASAWWUF: In shaking hands the magnetism may be directly felt. But magnetism is not limited to the physical; subtle magnetism does not depend on touch. It depends on the atmosphere and the waving of the hand can convey more subtle magnetism for there is more feeling in it and less depends on the physical.

There are, of course, other means, such as raising the right hand in greeting or departing. The right hand signifies power (Jelal) and in wishing health and strength this is also a sign.

GATHA: There is a custom in the East that when a person is yawning a friend by his side claps his hands or snaps his fingers. Yawning naturally makes the rhythm slow, it is going down, so to speak, and the clapping of the hands and snapping of the fingers on the part of the friend is suggestive of continuing the same rhythm as before.

TASAWWUF: Audiences in the East do not applaud as in the West. They feel such applause itself induces change in rhythm. Besides a player or dancer has introduced his own rhythm with his own magnetism.

In the opposite direction the person who is yawning has either failed to respond to the constructive rhythm of the moment or there is no such constructive rhythm. Then the friend can produce it.

GATHA: Different peoples have different customs, and customs that one is not in the habit of seeing seem not only strange and meaningless but often also ridiculous. It is the work of the seer to see into things and it is this way of viewing which is called insight.

TASAWWUF: The instructions in Kashf, insight, are imparted to the disciple as soon as he is able to receive them. Actually, as Lord Buddha has said, all of us have the latent enlightenment, the ability to see and understand. Only the soul is, so to speak, asleep, and it is necessary to waken it. It becomes awakened by its own exercising, which is beyond the function of mind. And when the soul is active, with or without the mental covering, it perceives the reason and the reasoning behind every custom. And now Science also is becoming interested and the scientists involved develop both empathy and insight.

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Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 4

Customs—part 2

GATHA: There are different customs in greeting, and in every custom there is some suggestion that explains the meaning behind it. The Hindus greet by joining the palms of the hands, which has the significance of perfection, since the right hand represents the positive power and the left hand the negative power, and when the positive and negative are joined together this sums up in perfection.

TASAWWUF: In Sufism there is more consideration of the positive and negative forces and how they operate through the body than in most other schools. Besides in Sufism there is no particular advantage in knowing the philosophy or theory of it. It does not help much to have just the mental view. And if we go further into such arts as Tantra Yoga or indeed many kinds of Yoga, and also into the science and art of the Mudras, we see examples of it. But actually these latent forces are in operation all the time, only in Yoga is man aware and in the daily life not so aware.

For the palms joining bring a unity out of duality and a movement of them also sets the magnetic forces into operation. For if we look more deeply and regarded the human body as an instrument of electricity and magnetism or both, we could see movements similar to those investigated by the scientists. Indeed it is the same laws working.

The union of currents, whether by breathing or movement, is always operational.

GATHA: The idol of Buddha, which is worshipped by millions of people in the world, signifies perfection—sitting cross-legged with the two palms joining, the eyes closed—all of which shows that the negative and positive powers are united and made into one.

TASAWWUF: When they are made into one, meditation becomes easier. There are two aspects here, the aspect of the devotee before his Lord; and the lesson to be learned by imitating or being merged into the Lord, so to speak. In that way the wonderful atmosphere of the idol becomes the wonderful atmosphere of the devotee.

GATHA: The greeting of the Chinese is the clasping of the hands, either touching the clasped hands of the other, which means that the perfection of power from both should meet.

TASAWWUF: This is one illustration of the psychic lore of the Chinese also. The Hindu brings his hands together vertically and the Chinese horizontally. The significance is the same but when the Chinese touch the pairs of clasped hands it involves action and action is much more important with the Chinese than with the Hindus. This is one of the differences in their cultures.

GATHA: And for the same reason the Arabs shake hands with both hands, for giving one hand is like giving half of one's magnetism, but by giving both hands you show that you keep nothing back.

TASAWWUF: The Arabs are also more strict about keeping the hands clean, so they wash them before prayers and even at other times. But the clasping of both hands is sometimes seen among other peoples too. And when this is done not only hostility but even misunderstanding tend to disappear.

GATHA: The Persians touch the heart, which suggests the friendly feeling expressed from the bottom of the heart, that the greeting is not merely superficial, that it comes from the very depth of feeling.

TASAWWUF: This suggests also that a tender person may do the same. We introduce hand-shaking into other lands but we do not think always of acting their customs. But now is coming a time when many peoples will adopt customs of each other. In this way brotherhood will come. Brotherhood does not come when some groups intellectually proclaim brotherhood; that is nothing. It is by sharing, whether in eating together or in prayer or by respecting each other's customs and showing willingness to adopt them or at least understand them.

GATHA: Among a great many people belonging to different parts of the world there is a custom of greeting by embracing one another, and no doubt there is a great psychical meaning in this. The two arms are the two directions of magnetic power, positive and negative, and in the breast is the center of these powers. And the custom is that they embrace twice, distinctly on the right and left sides. This is also the exchange of Prana, the very life, the centre of which is in the breast.

TASAWWUF: This custom is found in particular among the Islamic people who also say, "As-salaam aleikum," peace be with you. Sometimes in Europe we see the kissing of both cheeks but not always the embrace and not always the greeting of peace. Among the Hebrew people and some Christians there is the greeting of peace without the touching of bodies. In this instance there is not so much psychic exchange.

No doubt the world would be better off if more people did this. Those who greet with an embrace or kiss are less likely to go to war, and are more likely to wish to have peace. There is a delusion that if the mind only considers the world "peace" enough or discusses subjects which are supposed to bring peace, there will be benefit. Yes, but it is a limited benefit. But when people act, when they use the senses and the touch to promote good-will they are adding psychic power to otherwise empty thought.

GATHA: There is a custom in Persia and in India when a younger person greets an older one, he bows his head, bringing it closer to his breast, and the older person, taking his arms, raises him up, as if the younger person wanted from the elder love, light, and life, and the elder person gives it to him and raises him with it. It also suggests a sentiment of modesty and humility on the part of the one, and help and encouragement on the part of the other.

TASAWWUF: We are now seeing that there is such a need, that the young people want that love which is love and not just a modification of animal instinct. They want the love that flows from the depths of personality. They do not get it from empty words or empty customs. There has to be some living act.

The sense of touch can be used both as a means of magnetism and of love beyond physical and subtle magnetism. And when actions are from heart the heart magnetism enters the procedures, then love become effective.

GATHA: Customs have sometimes been much exaggerated, and yet, if the sentiment is a true one, no external expression can ever be an exaggeration.

TASAWWUF: We see at the one end all sorts of folk customs have been incorporated into the Dharma of India and little insignificant things have been confused with the great moral and spiritual teachings. In this way superstitions abound because the emphasis is wrongly placed. Spirituality does not exclude anything but it sees a place and a value for all things.

As the world gets closer together the wise of all nations will examine and adopt the most expressive customs, one from another.

GATHA: Among people of religion and culture in all periods of civilization, there has been a custom of kissing the hand. The custom has originated from a natural instinct in life. What smells good the animal wants to bite first and everything that interests the infant it puts in its mouth first. That shows that the lips are the most sensitive part in man, and they are capable of giving and taking that life which may be called magnetism. Therefore the greatest fondness that one man shows to another in greeting can be shown by kissing the hands; this custom can be seen all over the world, in the East and in the West.

TASAWWUF: Psychic energy is involved with the breath. In *Nayaz* breath is also taken in and out of the mouth. A variation is to blow using the lips. This shows that the lips also are instruments of psychic activity, as are the hands and sometimes the sense of touch. Some people express affection by rubbing noses; others by putting the lips on the cheeks and breathing in instead of out. All these show affection.

Of course, the lips are also involved in speech and poetry. Power, affection, beauty, love, and other beneficent qualities are involved in the breath.

The kissing of the hand has usually been involved with reverence, thus the bowing before royalty and even more so in bending to kiss the Pope's toe.

GATHA: If a skeleton plan of man's spirit be drawn one can draw it as a sun in the midst, and five rays shooting out all around; one straight upwards, two at the sides rising upwards, and two downwards, and it is this which makes the five-pointed star; Man's head, two arms and two legs are the outward expressions of these rays.

RYAZAT: In the beginning the five-pointed star is used in concentration. When the mureed advances further, he can stand as the star, he can move as the star, he can feel the star's radiance go through his whole body. This will be effective in increasing the light which is seen in the aura. This also means a further development in psychic power and radiance.

TASAWWUF: These lines collect and disperse psychic power. This is also a symbol of the divine light. This light in its highest form has been called *Nuri Mohammed*.

Mystics take advantage of these channels to replenish power. The above practice may be used when ennui follows inspiration; it thus restores and furthers inspiration.

GATHA: The idea of the Hindus in touching the holy feet of the Saint, is to reach first the rays that can first be reached, and one reaches these first two rays, the other three rays naturally fall over his head, when the saint puts his arms over his head and bends his head while blessing, looking at the center of the head of the one who is blessed.

TASAWWUF: Arms, legs, head, eyes, and breath are avenues of magnetism which may be used in blessing. When a devotee bows before the teacher he not only expresses humility, but prevents his own light or shadows thereof from falling upon the teacher. This both protects the teacher and also enables the devotee to get the full benefit of the teacher's blessing.

Among the Hindus there was a custom that the Brahmins would not permit the shadow of a Sudra to fall upon them. Sudras had to stand at a distance. But even at that sudras were sometimes used to prevent untouchables (harijans) from coming anywhere near those of higher caste. No doubt this involved psychic law, but it is contrary to the whole spirit of divine creation and human brotherhood. When a devotee bows, his hands and head touch the ground, he thus receives magnetism and blessing from the earth itself. That is why the earth has been known also as the divine mother.

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Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 5

Hanuman

GATHA: There is a custom in the East of offering oil to Hanuman, the idol that is pictured in the image of a monkey, and that idol is worshipped by pouring oil upon it. This custom can be seen also at Indian weddings; maidens anoint with oil, the head, the shoulders, arms, hands, knees, and feet of the bride, and bridegroom. One sees this custom in some churches, for instance, in the Catholic Church. In Russia there was a custom of anointing the Tsar's forehead with oil on the day of his coronation.

TASAWWUF: The oil customs are very ancient. We find them also among the Jews and oil was used for many purposes. This was generally olive oil which comes from the living plant, which is the fruit of the plant. The word "anointed" in a sense means "oiled" and it was also used in a ceremony for those who might be called "god's elect." The words Christ and Messiah also mean "anointed" or "oiled."

The oil has the property of protecting the emanations which pour from the body and thus it preserves the magnetism. Oil is not only a non-conductor or insulator for the physical electricity; it is also an insulator for the subtle electricity and magnetism.

GATHA: Oil has the significance of softening. Leather, iron, or steel is made softer and smoother by putting oil on it. Anointing, as it is done in India, is a psychological suggestion to the bride and bridegroom that the hands and feet of each are ready to serve the other, and that they shall not show themselves stiff one to the other, that if there were any hardness in their nature it should be softened, since harmony is the blessing of a home.

TASAWWUF: Ceremonies are generally offered without explanation. It is the unexplained which may be called "superstitions." And sometimes the ceremonies are used for their own sake; in this case they become magical. To say that something is magical does not mean to say it is good or bad, merely that it is effective.

Usually the explanation is lost; only the ritual remains. So there are many customs that have lost their rationale. But in the beginning no doubt they made sense. After a while the customs and the elements thereof become folk symbols which also does not mean they are good or bad, only their origin has disappeared from the minds of men.

There are many articles which can be softened by oil and also in this sense characters maybe softened. And in softening a Hanuman it means to change the animal nature in us to human nature.

GATHA: It teaches that forgiveness is required for becoming friends and keeping friendship; as one's mate is not so flexible and docile as one's own imagination conceives.

TASAWWUF: Throughout history marriages have been arranged and there are all kinds of institutions. Often bride and groom do not know each other at all. When those who are acquainted become married, there is a different basis for promoting harmony. But when two strangers marry, it is necessary to soften and harmonize them. Even in the fields of chemistry and metallurgy there is something like that operation. Alchemy includes the subtle side of chemistry but it also applies to all forms and beings in the universe.

GATHA: The idol of Hanuman is suggestive of primitive nature in man, and in the pouring of oil in the service of Hanuman there is a lesson for the worshipper to learn. However great your evolution may be, regard and consideration for the primitive nature is necessary, for all adjusts itself in the wider scheme of nature.

TASAWWUF: It is first necessary not to confuse the ceremony for the truth behind it. Many people are charmed by ritual and some think that the ritual is the goal in itself—there is a whole school in India that has this outlook. It is a limited one. And the word “nature” includes all the beings of the mineral, vegetable, and animal worlds and perhaps more. A ceremony based on nature in this sense, is symbolic until man becomes consciously aware of its deeper meanings. When the ritual is used for its own sake, it is a superstition.

Hanuman is pictured as a king of monkeys in the Ramayana. He also symbolizes the divine attributes in the lower aspects of manifestation. Yet in another sense he partook of the nature of the Jinn or Gandharva in his character, prowess and success.

GATHA: When man stands with his hands folded in humility before the image of a monkey, there is in this some lesson for him to learn: that life is such that with all your evolution you lack something if you have no regard to the primitive nature that is in man.

TASAWWUF: This is often misunderstood. Some people say that compassion begins with man’s attitudes toward animals. It is not wrong; it is however, a short view. Man must first learn to have regard for his own animal nature. It is not necessary to regard all the activities of alimentary and reproductive organs as evil. One must have regard for them and use them in accord with spiritual law. As Mohammed has said, “There is no monkey in Islam.”

When a man stands with folded hands in humility he is repressing his own ego. However he so stands, this is of value to the devotee. Many say they surrender only to God; this is not surrender at all. This may promote great pride and selfishness. It is when man actually bows and becomes attentive to and listens to others that he benefits from humility.

Outside of religion we may find many instances of people waiting before royalty, before judges, before those of importance with such an attitude. When that attitude is also taken towards one’s fellow man in general it is of real benefit. If man can bow before a statue of a monkey, he ought to learn even more to stand before his fellow man who is more alive in a sense than a monkey. Besides a living being is always more alive than a statue.

GATHA: Christ has taught, “Resist not evil” and “If one sue Thee for thy coat, give him thy cloak also.” This teaches the same lesson, that life becomes difficult without regard and consideration for the primitive nature. By resentment one partakes of it, by rebelling against it one

gives fuel to that fire. One should soften it in oneself and in another by wisdom, patience and gentleness.

TASAWWUF: This teaching which is also found in many Scriptures has not become important in religion. One of the differences between Sufism and Orthodoxy is that in Sufism the ego must be overcome and mastered but not destroyed. Religion has the tendency either to bolster the ego or to blanket it out entirely. Asceticism no doubt served its purpose and there are aspects of restraint and Brahmacharya which can be most helpful. But the whole of the body is the temple of the divine spirit. There is no part of it that did not manifest excepting because of divine wisdom.

Man has to learn the middle path between the sensual life and one of absolute restraint. As Buddha taught, both of these lead to exaggerated egotism. Each part of the body has its purpose. And in one sense all the attention paid to the beautification and adornment of the feminine body are aspects of the same attitude shown in this pouring oil before Hanuman.

The softening of the ego is the main topic of *Moral Culture* before mureeds and non-mureeds. This has not yet become part of the general culture and that is why there is constant turmoil.

GATHA: The anointing of the forehead of the king signifies that he should have an easy expression, not frowning brows and a puckered face, but a smiling forehead, as the Persian phrase is.

TASAWWUF: It is easy enough to tell people that they should have a smiling forehead and not frowning brows; but how can man be changed? He only can be changed if someone set the example. Therefore the teacher tries to show all tenderness and mercy toward the disciples and if he cannot do it himself, he gives them the instruction, which, if followed, can lead toward the desired goal.

When one considers Christ or Mohammed or Buddha, for instance, he also considers their natures. As he considers their natures he may become more like them. The practices of Sufism both by teacher and pupil help to raise the mortal part of man to immortality by attuning him to the chain of perfect teachers and also to help the devotee to himself become an instruction of the divine faculties.

GATHA: Poor and rich, all must come to the king in their troubles and difficulties, and his glance must comfort them and bring ease.

RYAZAT: The Tawajjeh is a practice by which the Murshid, with his glance, helps to bring out the perfections in the depths of the personalities of disciples. It is also a means of attunement whereby the mureed may obtain the blessing and the qualities of the Murshid insofar as they benefit him. But no literature about glance, no discussion is of any value. It must be an operation, not a metaphysic.

TASAWWUF: There are people who are poor and rich in worldly goods and intellectual attainments but in the spiritual development all grow as if little children who have yet to attain to maturity.

GATHA: The great lesson one can learn from this custom is that the great education in life is to soften one's feelings, one's thoughts, words, and actions, that they may give ease to ourselves and that we may create an atmosphere of ease that may benefit all who come in contact with us.

TASAWWUF: The first aspect of this is philosophy. Then there is the practice and if the teacher is unable to guide the pupils in this direction he is not a good teacher. And if the pupils harden them-

selves so that they do not respond they are not good pupils. So the process of softening, given in a ritual or symbolically or becoming a custom is only the crystallization of a great teaching. As man becomes soft before God the Divine Light finds accommodation in his personality.

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Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 6

Bells and Gongs

GATHA: The secret of the religious custom of having gongs and bells in temples and churches lies in the great science of the Hindus, which is Mantra Yoga. In the first place, this custom unites several religions, since bells are rung in Christian churches, in the temples of the Hindus, and in Buddhist pagodas.

TASAWWUF: The deep secret of this value is a subject of *The Mysticism of Sound and Music* and related studies. Actually there is something in the nature of music itself which produces a sort of intoxication. There are various forms of intoxication and they all take one from the denseness of the earth. However they lead in many directions and it is in accord with the types of sound and music that the effects are obtained.

Gongs and bells have different natures from the ordinary string and wind instruments in that there is not always a clear sound involved and their tones are like harmonies in themselves. Because of their size gongs often give out low notes and bells high notes. They have extensive series of over-tones and echoes and the resonance continues long after they have been struck. These resounding chords have a strange effect, often very beneficial, that the mind, charmed, is unable to carry on its discursive thinking. That is why there are so many stories of people being enchanted.

As gongs and bells and other instruments do clear the atmosphere this is of great benefit to devotional ceremonies.

GATHA: Many think that it is a call to prayer, but from a mystical point of view it is something more than that. The idea of the mystic is to make his heart capable of resonance, that every voice that rises on earth or descends from heaven may have its re-echo in his heart.

TASAWWUF: Anybody who listens attentively to gongs or bells will find they induce the spirits of thoughtfulness, devotion, quietude, and even peace or joy. They stop the earthly vibrations. They take the mind away from selfishness. They imbue the consciousness with the presence of something more than the immediacy. This facilitates prayer and meditation and worship in general.

GATHA: The Sufi prepares himself by his exercise of Zikr and Fikr to make his heart capable of producing that resonance which may be caused on earth or descend from heaven. When the centers of the body and the faculties of the mind are prepared to produce that resonance, then they respond to every sound, and every time the bell is rung it has its re-echo in the heart of the mystic, and every center of his being begins to think of God and to feel God.

TASAWWUF: This can come by Nature and it also comes in development. That music does something to the consciousness can be seen in the study of peoples who live closer to nature, who are part of nature. No doubt they have more rhythms and also more dancing. And sometimes their worship, so to speak, is in the form of singing and dancing and also poetry.

But it is also true as the heart becomes more tender it also becomes more sensitive. And one can feel this even from a distance, hearing the church bell or the temple gong, a resonance goes on in the heart. Also in the esoteric development each center comes to life and also responds.

The Islamic worship generally precluded music. In the times of the Prophet music was mostly used for sensual purposes only by the Arabs. This had to be stopped. But there is a whole art of Qur'anic recitation and one can feel its effect. Resonance is often the way to spiritual enlightenment.

GATHA: Vibration is a greater stimulant than wine. Wine gives intoxication to the brain, but vibration produces ecstasy in the heart. Therefore Sufis have called it wine.

TASAWWUF: One can see in the circles of the Sufis, that when they chant Zikr many enter the state of ecstasy or Wujud. This helps raise the consciousness above the denseness of the earth. Those who have not had this experience often look down upon it. But it is good to make the young especially aware of a universe beyond the immediate world, and once they have this awareness they begin to see the values in the spiritual sciences. They have had an experience and this is of inestimable value.

Now also the dance is being used to build up the same effect. Singing, chanting and dancing the Name of God or the epithets of Allah are of the greatest value in awakening the soul from sleep, so to speak.

GATHA: The custom of having flowers in the house of prayer and the custom of burning incense in the place of worship also exists in almost all the religions and has existed in almost all periods. Color and beauty also have a power, an influence upon the mind and body, and those who can enjoy the beauty of color and the delicacy of the flower receive help by way of the eyes. Its effect opens the heart, which then responds to the blessing from above. This shows that the beauty of the earth can best be used to obtain the blessing from heaven.

TASAWWUF: There is a Hadith that Mohammed said he was very fond of perfumes. One can understand this of a man who lived mostly in the desert where there are not many flowers. There is no question that this sort of person would have enjoyed the flowers, both those that look beautiful and have pleasant odors. Besides the teaching is that God is beautiful. If we make it an empty theology, there is not much sense in it. The word "beauty" without any context has no value of itself.

We find that flowers and garlands are used in many holy shrines and places of worship all over the world. In general the devotee is moved by beauty and in turn becomes a patron of the arts. The greatest arts have often been associated with the purest forms of religion.

GATHA: The perfume of flowers or incense has a deeper effect still, because color or beauty are only reflected upon the heart through the eyes, but perfume and incense, rising through the breath, touch the heart, making it capable of spiritual exaltation.

TASAWWUF: In the Upanishads it is taught that the devas, the angelic beings, live upon the odors and perfumes, in other words, upon the smells. And it is easily seen that many people who are highly emotional otherwise, suddenly calm in the presence of both flowers and incense. There is something in the soul of man that responds and this response is more vivid than any philosophy on the subject.

RYAZAT: Bring in fragrant flowers and have the disciples meditate. Or if there are no flowers around use incense for this purpose. This operates so easily it is often overlooked, yet people readily recognize the truth of it. Also if there is any disharmony this sort of meditation can work wonders.

TASAWWUF: As the student advances on the Path he is given concentrations on the colours and on things that emit odors, and thus becomes more sensitive to them. As he becomes more sensitive his advancement in all directions is made easier.

GATHA: But nothing has a greater influence on the human soul than sound. Therefore hymns are sung in all churches, prayers are offered, and chants are recited, all in order to wake the spirit within to life, which enables the soul to respond to the perfection of God.

TASAWWUF: There is an Indian traditional science called Tattva Vada which deals with the cycles of colours and forms. And it is said that Sound is conveyed by the Akasha, the Ether, from which all other emanations come and to which they return. And in the deep devotions also one can realize the Saute Surmad which is the origin and goal of all sounds and which has been called the “soundless sound” because it is not dependent upon sensorium for man to become aware of it.

We can summarize that every sense has a power of intoxication and that this intoxication has the contrary effects of drawing many deeper into matter, and also elevating man above matter. The problems of sex and gluttony are due to man’s being more immersed and being unable to control his appetites. But at the same time the very senses which are often blamed for man’s fall, can be also the means of raising him.

People who have never experienced spiritual intoxication are often the most critical about it. They see that man can become the slave of intoxication but they are usually unaware that man can become the slave of his own nufs, the ego.

The very word “Allah” may prove to be the most elevating of sounds. This can only be known by those who recite, and never by those who are critical or abstain.

We can see the effects of dancing, marching, and other movements of the body under the influence of sound and music. If these can result from the music of certain levels, how much benefit can come when the master of the music is able to raise the consciousness of others; or the forms of music are able to raise the consciousness of others. The first step no doubt is in the gongs and bells used for devotion, but there is no end to attainment along this line.

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Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 7

The Custom of Drinking to the Health of Friends

GATHA: This custom has a psychological meaning. Wine has an influence that takes away the worries and anxieties of life and makes one unconscious of one's environment, and this only may be called the proper condition for concentration.

TASAWWUF: The symbolic and mystical significance of wine is discussed in the studies on "Naqshibandi, Symbology." And there is not always the agreement, whether it is wine that is meant or the state of Intoxication. This is called Sukr by the Sufis and this word is no doubt of the same origin as the word Shikoh in the Hebrew. But the Hebrews and other peoples have come to restrict its meaning to a particular form of intoxication which usually lowers the level of consciousness instead of raising it; and restricts the world of emotional expression.

Nevertheless, the term "intoxication" has been used to apply to all states wherein man is no longer bound by his immediacy. Among the ancient Greeks there was the Bacchic worship and the Dionysian rites. As ordinarily pictured it showed people under the influence of alcohol which is the potent agency in wine. But it was also used to depict the state of consciousness needed for the initiation in the Mysteries, Lesser and Greater, and for advancement along that line. Unless one could enter into some state of trance, he was not considered worthy for entrance into what might be called the "kingdom of heaven."

GATHA: Those who cannot concentrate will realize by studying the condition of their mind that they are either worried or anxious about something or they are conscious of the environment of their life; it is that which keeps them back from concentration.

TASAWWUF: Concentration, especially in the form practiced by the Sufis, raises the consciousness of devotees until they are masters of all names and form. This is called Murakkabah and is the special concern of disciples at many stages of growth and is also one of the means by which they arrive at the God-consciousness. But it is not a mental or abstract consideration of the subject; it is the direct experience which is needed by all.

Concentration is often difficult because one is disturbed by noises and sights outside oneself. But it is even more difficult because man is unable to control his thoughts and emotions. Thought and emotions may be controlled by rising above them to peacefulness which is called Sobriety or by finding the greater vitality in a super-ego life and this is called intoxication.

GATHA: All those who have become great in the worldly, artistic, or spiritual aspects of life, have arrived at their destination by the power of concentration.

TASAWWUF: There is no doubt some difference between the artistic and spiritual concentration. In both instances some area of the unseen part of personality comes to the fore. It is awakened. But ordinarily after the artistic creativity has run its course the person is tired, he is worn out and that is

why so many artists also resort to drugs or alcohol. On the other hand the devotee experiences no such set-backs. When he practices concentration it expands his consciousness and when the consciousness is expanded there are no set-backs, there is no reaction to the state reached.

In fact as the art and science of Murakkabah are taught they can be of most use to the artist, no matter what his field of endeavor is. And we can still see this in some Islamic countries where the practice of spiritual concentration has retained the folk-arts to this day. Most intellectuals go to the philosophers and clergy, but as those who sought the teachers of Gurdjieff found out, it was the humble artisan who often was the best instrument for the divine inheritance.

GATHA: It is by concentration that a person from being poor becomes wealthy, it is by concentration that one invents things the world has never known, it is by concentration that one arrives at a desired position in life, and it is by the power of the concentration that man enters the world unseen.

TASAWWUF: It is here also that there is a difference between ordinary philosophy and metaphysics and mysticism. The metaphysical person will see the words and accept them but cannot always practice them. And if we study the lives of those who accumulated (material) fortunes we see that they have not only practiced forms of concentration, they have been very one-pointed, they have used patience, endurance, and many virtues. And in this respect some of the wealthy are better equipped to become mureeds than some of the poor. They already have some of the equipment.

The repetition of Wazifas and other disciplines help one in the external pursuit but Murakkabah helps both in the internal and external pursuit. It no doubt requires considerable patience to reach the state of conscious perception and activity wherein the worlds unseen are as important as the visible world.

GATHA: The custom of drinking somebody's health therefore proves to be based on a psychological idea, the idea that one holds a wish in one's mind at a time when one's mind will is in a state of concentration, so that during the time that the mind is in that state the thought of the friend's health will be predominant.

TASAWWUF: Drinking to someone's health is a wish. Wishes can become true by the exercise of will-power. Also by the constant repetition which is a form of concentration. The repetitive method is suggestive and it has an effect on the mind.

We can find that ever since the institution of Agriculture became important that the people found the use of intoxicants derived from grapes and grains and there was always the tendency to drink together. Social drinking is in some respects superior to individual sobriety when man keeps himself apart from his fellows. It is out of this that communion came. Besides in the preliterate peoples there was a sense of reality of the unseen spiritual existence and this came to the fore through many folk customs.

GATHA: There is a custom of touching glasses, which is supposed to be a promise of friendship. It can be defined symbolically in this way that the cup is the symbol of the heart, for in the heart there is the capacity of holding the divine love, which is the sacred wine.

TASAWWUF: When the mind of man is caught in symbols while he is aware of something more than materiality he is still bound by the ego. He has not become that which his mind is examining.

And this is true also of the Tarot studies that the Cup is a symbol and it remains a symbol and often an empty symbol.

The cup has become an important symbol. There are folk-stories about the Chalice of Antioch and the Cup of Jamshyd, and they were no doubt based on the existence of real cups and real ceremonies. But even more this is true of Lord Buddha's begging bowl.

But as the intellectual people are stuck there and do not so easily identify the symbol with the living heart, it is necessary to awaken the world to the existence of the heart-life and the heart-sciences. We may thus start with a symbol or an institution. When we come to the depths of meaning of it, we come to the spiritual realities.

RYAZAT: Concentrate on the Heart-symbol but use it now as the Cup of Glory from which each can drink and each can share.

GATHA: So the cup touching the cup means heart united with heart. According to the mystical view it is two becoming one.

TASAWWUF: We find this in many marriage customs in different parts of the world. Often the bride and groom drink from the same vessel. This means partaking of the same life. In the Hebrew marriage the groom crushes the glass under his feet. It really means he is crushing his own ego under the spell of love. As people do not go into the depths of customs and superstitions after a while they give up the ceremonies. But in the depths marriage means that two hearts are to be drawn as one and this occurs best when the ego is crushed.

No doubt the ideal is an angelic love. But human capacity is much greater. And when the hearts of humans are united they can accomplish what the angels cannot. Therefore in all this one learns to feel the impulses of the heart and the hidden life which is in the heart comes to manifestation. In this is the fulfillment of human destiny and the purpose of life. In this also one rises above his dissatisfaction which came from his own limitations.

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Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 8

The Origin of the Custom of the Seclusion of Women

GATHA: The custom of the seclusion of woman has its source in mystical thought. There used to be mystical orders of people in the East who contemplated in solitude and lived in seclusion. The magnetism and power of the influence that they developed by seclusion was in itself a marvel.

TASAWWUF: We can find this in the history particularly of the Hindus and Beni Israel. The prophets of the latter are outstanding. They were a special class who lived apart from society. Their later successors were even called "holy men," but while the words remain, the relation of holiness to seclusion has not so been studied.

In the case of India we can find it specially in the life of Rama and of the very great sages of whom we have historical and literary records. It is not always explained clearly why they went into solitude. And there are many stories both in India and in the Islamic lands of the great prowess of those who have lived in seclusion. Although Mohammed was opposed to asceticism we see in Fariduddin Attar's work on the lives of saints, how they all benefited from seclusion.

GATHA: This gave power to their gaze, power in their word and influence in their atmosphere. This custom of seclusion was then imitated by the kings and people of high rank.

TASAWWUF: This also brings out the difference between the metaphysician and the mystic. Information is not knowledge; knowledge depends upon participation.

Murshids and Pirs as well as all advanced mystics use the Glance, they have the knowledge of the Power of the Word, and they carry their own atmosphere. All of these are used in spiritual training with or without the interposition of speech.

Disciples are often sent into seclusion (Khilvat) to develop the innate faculties. But in general seclusion is used by all people on the spiritual path at some time or another.

In Khilvat, one is protected both by being excluded from gaze and from gazing. Usually one is not only in silence but in seclusion. This helps to protect the magnetism. We lose most magnetism through speech but also through gaze as well as touch and all sense-activities. Meditation helps restore vitality. So do breathing exercises and other disciplines. But the best help of all comes when one can go into seclusion.

GATHA: They had two ways of veiling themselves when away from home. One was to put a covering over the back of the head, which was made to hang down in front, so that the eyes could be half covered; and the other was to put a veil over the face. It is a sort of mantle that they put on their head. Every prophet of Beni Israel had this. In the ancient pictures of the prophets of the Semitic race one will always see the head covered with a mantle. In the Hindu race also many orders of Buddhists and Yogis wore a mantle over the head.

TASAWWUF: Examples of this have been preserved in many lands. In China the veil is put over the bride's face, while in Europe it is thrown backwards. Sometimes both bride and groom are veiled. Often they are veiled only in the sense that they are kept from each other. This not only made marriage a sort of sacred mystery, it gave even more importance to the glance so that the first glance both from and to both bride and groom might be very magnetic.

GATHA: The veil which the kings also used, which was called **Makna**, later became customary in the East and ladies of high rank wore what is called in Turkish the **Yashmak**. For thousands of years it has been the custom among the Parsis that during their religious services the priest covers his head with a turban together with a mantle, and the Parsi women have kept the custom of covering the head with a white cloth, though it is less observed at the present time.

TASAWWUF: It is very usual that when a monarch adopts a custom first the people of high rank and then others adopt this custom. But more customs have come from the religions than otherwise and more have psychic import. And even when the reasons are not known or explicit, there is something instinctive which produces customs and keeps them observed for centuries. It is only with the disappearance of the monarch and nobility, the movements from ritual in religion, and the change of the generality at large which has caused many of these customs to disappear, or if retained, people no longer know the reasons.

GATHA: In India, among Hindus as well as among Musselmans, there is a custom at weddings of veiling the faces of bride and bridegroom with a veil of jasmine flowers.

TASAWWUF: This indicates that beauty is veiling and beauty is revealing. And in the West the Christian brides and later the non-Christian brides also carried flowers. And the including of the beautiful helps to make the marriage become more beautiful.

Although Islam started out in the desert as a religion of simplicity and in India there are a multitude of traditions, when the two faiths came together each adopted a number of elements of the other. And while it would seem that the former desert-dwelling Muslims adopted the use of flowers from the Hindus, it is also true that the Hindus adopted many of the forms of clothing from their Musselman invaders. It is often hard to distinguish origins and it is not always important.

GATHA: Under all these different customs of veiling the head and face, one finds a mystical significance. Man's form is considered by Sufis as consisting of two parts, the head and the body, the body for action and the head for thought.

TASAWWUF: Psychic power manifests more through the head because of the expressive eyes, lips and tongue, as well as from the effect of radiance itself. People who have paid more attention to the whole figure have not always gotten the pleasure of looking at the nude body as one would expect. It does not always have radiance and sometimes otherwise. But it is easy to stimulate the radiance of the head and face and this is one of the factors in many forms of mysticism.

GATHA: Since the head is for thought its radiance is incomparably greater than that of the body, and the hairs are as rays of that radiance in the physical form. It is a constant outpouring of light that one observes in man's life.

TASAWWUF: There have been many customs about hair, that usually it is the woman who has the long hair and the man who has the short hair. This is partly due to the natural fact that women's hair is usually longer. Also there have been occupations of the men in which long hair interfered. But sometimes it is otherwise and in the continent of Africa there are tribes in which the women's hair is always shorn and sometimes men wear their hair at varying length.

Then there has been a revolt of womankind, to go out into the world and no longer be secluded in the household. But this change was followed by women wearing their hair short and also dressing as men. This movement has no sound basis for it, although to interfere would be to limit man's liberty. Nevertheless it produced a counter-movement in which men began to wear their hair longer. And sometimes this has gone to ridiculous lengths that some people whose ancestors wore their hair long object to the restoring of this custom.

It is not necessarily important and the Sufi discourages arguments over it as he discourages arguments over whether people should be vegetarians or not. Nevertheless, there is the sound fact that the hair possesses radiance and many of the messengers of God (Buddha excepted) wore longer hair than we find as a custom and even Buddha did prior to his departure from the palace.

GATHA: Every action of looking, or breathing or speaking, robs so much of the radiance out of man's life. By preserving this radiance the mystic develops within him that influence, power, and magnetism which in the average person are wasted.

TASAWWUF: If one were protected so as not to look, and if one kept quiet so as not to speak, he would find that in a short time his whole psyche would be replenished. Every breath man takes brings in the essence of revitalization. If the breathing is done with concentration on God, or better yet, if one learns to breathe as if the body were the temple of God, then the dividing line between the ego-self and the universe would gradually disappear and each breath would bring in both vitality and revitalization. And if no words come out, then the magnetism of the breath is retained. And if nothing is lost in sense-activity or thought-activity the whole personality may be transformed.

GATHA: For instance, closing the eyes, which is a custom among mystics, not only helps in concentration and repose of mind, but during the moment when the eyes are closed, it preserves the radiance from flowing out. These customs were helpful to the kings and commanders for developing their power and influence, and they were valued for ladies of rank for preserving their beauty and charm.

RYAZAT: Therefore in the Sufi meditation the eyes are kept closed, and so long as one can do exercises without falling into sleep, the closed eyes, preserving magnetism, are most valuable, and profitable.

TASAWWUF: If the body were studied as an instrument of a form of cosmic electricity, it would be wise to find out where the energy- activity is and also where the leaks and losses are. Light, in a sense, is a form of electricity and magnetism, and electricity and magnetism are, in a sense, forms of light. And if the breath be used to draw in energy by doing this while the mind is free from thought, then the whole personality becomes unified and acts as if an instrument of God.

The custom for generals and kings is that of Jelalic preservation; and for ladies that of Jemalic preservation. There is a difference owing to the relation of the Jelal to the Sun and the Jemal to the Moon, that there are different rhythms and different factors.

GATHA: We learn by this that a life but little exposed to the outer world, whether through seclusion, or silence, or a perfect state of repose, with closed eyes, clasped hands and crossed legs has a great influence.

TASAWWUF: Each of these elements should be considered by itself. The practice of seclusion prevents one from exposure to inimical persons or forces or ideas and also prevents the unnecessary loss of psychic power. Silence also preserves energy, and what is more, breathing with the divine breath while being in silence can produce a revitalization and even a resurrection.

The state of repose is found in Meditation and Concentration and other forms of esoteric training. And when it is done with closed eyes, and the proper breath, we have the restoration of strength to body, mind, and heart.

Clasping of hands and crossing of legs produces the balance. Then there can be neither too much Jelal nor Jemal (nor Yin nor Yang, etc.) and this balance makes it possible for the forces of perfection from Kemal to exercise influence through the body and personality.

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Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 9

The Custom of the Seclusion of Women—part 2

GATHA: The custom of the seclusion of the mystics remains only in the mystical orders, but one finds the seclusion of women prevalent only in the East.

TASAWWUF: Mystical orders have temples and shrines but also in many of them the devotees go into caves. In Tibet sometimes a special structure is built for this purpose. And if we pass from the study of one group to another we find often similar institutions, although this is not always admitted. For there is one single truth behind all things.

But this truth, so to speak, has been misapplied in part in extending it too far to half the human race, that is, the womankind. And often small reasons are offered based on selfishness or egocentricity, and not on the cosmic outlook. Still we find that even in Christianity there has been a form of this institution of the seclusion of women from time to time.

GATHA: When a custom takes root in a section of society, certainly it can be used and abused as people may choose.

TASAWWUF: It is not only seclusion but sometimes we have what many would consider a very horrible institution, the binding of women's feet as in China. Each group has its own, often very selfish reasons for its customs, but at the same time there is often a sound reason in the beginning.

GATHA: No doubt jealousy, which is in human nature, is a proof of love, but jealousy can be the source of a great many crimes.

TASAWWUF: In *Gayan* it says: "It is one thing to love and another thing to own." When the individualistic point of view is stressed, this gives unlimited scope for nufs, the ego. The ego can always find some justification. So in the studies in "TASAWWUF: Series 1," there is a sharp criticism of the misapplication of Logic and Reason with which the ego disguises itself.

GATHA: Man has always guarded the treasures that he values most in all sorts of coverings, and since that which man can love most is woman he has often ignorantly tried to guard her in the same way as all things of value and importance. And the custom of seclusion has been in his hands a means that has enabled him to control his household in the manner he likes.

TASAWWUF: There a few passages in Qur'an that justify some of the factors which later lead to the seclusion of women in Islam. And although Mohammed, as a Messenger of God, did not claim royal prerogatives he either requested or God requested through him that special provisions be made concerning his family. In his time this referred only to his family and not to the women as a whole.

Besides, not a very careful study has been made of the place of womankind in the various societies. Each age is likely to look back and presume its own institutions existing in earlier times.

The Bible teaches that God made man and woman and both in His Image. But the part that women could play in the Hebraic religion was very small. It was only after many centuries, too, that women were given much consideration in Christianity. And no doubt the teachings of the Christian Paul on this subject have ample justification behind them.

We cannot evaluate a particular set of customs unless we look at the whole world. This is a modern undertaking and conclusions are often reached without considering all facts and factors.

GATHA: However, it is not true that this custom was the outcome of the teachings of the prophet. There are only two places in the records where an utterance of the Prophet on the subject is to be found. In one place it is told that when some coarse dances were going on among the peasants of his land, he said that women must be clad properly.

TASAWWUF: The wearing of proper clothing is an entirely different subject. But excuses from one source are often used to justify man's actions in quite different directions. The growth of the Islamic state was very rapid. Peoples of all kinds of customs were readily conquered or accepted Islam without being conquered. Customs and traditions not contrary to the Five Pillars were preserved and often integrated into Islamic Society. Then as in turn the Omayyeds and Abbasides set up their monarchical states, the simple institutions of earlier times were changed and in the efforts toward uniformities, gradually many changes entered and became customs which did not originate with the Prophet.

Besides, he was a man of great simplicity and democracy. He even cooked meals for the women of the household and took on many responsibilities which his successors, becoming monarchs, stopped or dropped.

The condition of womankind in the whole Mediterranean area was not always far removed from slavery. There were castes and classes and many kinds of customs. Some of their elements were preserved as also earlier institutions of the Arabs as they lived before their introduction into Islam.

The whole institution of religion, on the whole, has placed womankind either in second place, or in a different category. In one sense men are solar characters and women lunar characters and even their ways of receptivity of the divine light are different. There have been different paths for the spiritual development of men and women.

GATHA: In the other place that when the ladies of the Prophet's household were returning home after taking care of the Prophet and his army during a battle, they were disinclined to look at the battlefield and show themselves to their enemies; and the only thing that could be advised by the Prophet was that now that peace had been made if they did not like to show themselves, they might veil their faces.

TASAWWUF: This was an elective act. The prophet taught: "There is no compulsion in Islam" and "the Merciful inclines to the side of Mercy." But religion, becoming concealed and fixed in its theology, often disregards the teachings of the Founder. This is not only true of Islam but of all the religions and is one of the basic factors in the revolt against religion. The revolt may often be a protest of the deepest part of man's consciousness.

The orthodox often imitate some of the patterns in the life of the Prophet externally without examining the deepest reasons. And as orthodoxy became more entrenched it became degraded. Then folk habits and other elements of behavior enter in the name of religion and remain while the spirit of **Rahmat** subsides. This is the same as decay of Dharma.

GATHA: In India one sees the custom that an aged woman covers her face, a widow covers her face and a bride veils her face.

TASAWWUF: There are many good reasons for coverings, for particular periods. When these become universal, the spirit of Love, Mercy, and Compassion subsides. Man attributes Perfection to God but in such a way it has little meaning or effectiveness. The attributes of Allah are there to become also the living attributes of mankind, to manifest in his everyday life.

We can find all kinds of customs in the Dharma Shastras and these Shastras have overshadowed the Sutras, just as in Islam the Hadith overshadow the Qur'an: the legal codes overshadow the Hadith and folk-practices overshadow the legal codes.

GATHA: There is some little psychological meaning in it. It is the nature of every soul to wish to hide its sorrow, and by veiling her face the widow veils her sorrow from others.

TASAWWUF: Everything begins with a justifiable base. Sorrow is something which should be confined; joy is something which should be shared. Often there is the extreme that there are paid mourners. And again it has been inherited even from ancient Egypt, to beware of the possible immance of death and keep in mind that whatever we have from and of this world is only temporary.

GATHA: And the veil one sees on the face of the aged woman is there for the reason that in age the emotions become more visible and one has little control so as to hide them from others, and when the heart has become softened, at every little touch, however gentle, it is easily moved, and the covering is as a shield over it.

TASAWWUF: In ancient times in many lands women and men alike spent more of the latter part of their lives in the spiritual quest. They had partial or total seclusion and sometimes it took the form of living in the woods, the desert and the uninhabited places which are called "jungles." Many customs remain in the literature but we do not always see them in practice. Many other customs are in practice that we do not always find in the literature.

GATHA: On the face of a bride the veil is for the preservation of her charm, of magnetism; at the same time the finest beauty in human nature is modesty, in whatever form it appears.

TASAWWUF: The subject of the preservation of charm has been given little study. And when selfish man is moved by outer considerations he puts a certain price on it as if for himself. He is not always considerate of the young woman.

In many religions there is no social intercourse between man and women unrelated by marriage or blood excepting sometimes in business dealings and not always too much then. And in many parts of the land, especially in the Latin countries, there is the institution of the duenna, an older woman who looks after the young women, married or unmarried, to protect their modesty.

When we read the “Thousand and One Nights” and other Oriental tales we get some idea about seclusion, its benefits, its abuses, and the type of woman involved. By keeping away from society young women do preserve and even increase the magnetism of charm, and this is a great gift to bring to a wedding, much greater than a dowry. However, there are certain limitations here due to the existence of castes and classes and it is not so readily recognized that all people, rich and poor, high and low, male and female, are alike the beloved ones of God.

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Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Gatha with Commentary

Series I: Number 10

The Custom of the Seclusion of Women—part 2

GATHA: From the physical as well as the occult point of view, woman is more impressionable than man.

TASAWWUF: The word for woman in Hebrew originally meant the responsive one. The body of the woman tends to be curvilinear and of the man to be rectilinear. But when we look more deeply, man, the male is more connected with solar currents and woman, the female, with lunar currents.

In modern times there have been movements toward freedom, rather than toward perfection. There is no doubt that many men should become more responsive and women more direct, but the responsiveness of the male should not interfere with his positive nature, nor the affirmations of the woman with her faculty of impressionability.

GATHA: The task of woman as a mother is more important than that of man in any position. Woman molds the character of the child with her thought and feeling, and as she is susceptible to outward impressions, her impressions always have their influence on her child.

TASAWWUF: The movement toward female liberation should add to their horizons without detracting from her basic function. Many women become executives in commerce, finance and other fields, and in so doing lose their tenderness and responsiveness. With that they usually become less happy, often miserable, even when most successful and famous.

There is nothing to prevent wives and especially widows from obtaining commanding positions after their basic functions have had suitable outlets. The grandmother is considered as a special person in the traditions of many lands.

GATHA: During the period before motherhood very great care must be taken, for any word spoken to a woman then goes to the depth of her being and re-echoes in the soul of the child. If a word makes her bitter for a time or cross for a moment, it can create bitterness or crossness in the child.

TASAWWUF: While this applies to women on the way toward motherhood, it also applies to some extent to all women. Among some Islamic people, for instance, it is considered very wrong to speak to women in a strong or loud positive voice. King Louis XIV of France, despite his being a despot, often spoke only tenderly to all women regardless of rank or function.

GATHA: Especially during that period woman is more sensitive and susceptible to all impressions, beautiful or ugly. Anything striking impresses her soul deeply. A color, the lightning, thunder, a storm, all make impressions upon her. The conditions of life, misery or joy, tell on her more than on others. In consideration of this the custom of seclusion has been kept in the East, and it still exists among certain communities.

TASAWWUF: The custom of keeping expectant mothers in seclusion has scientific, psychological, and occult reasons for it. But it has been used to keep many women in seclusion and sometimes in such a way that they cannot become mothers at all. In other words it has supported tyranny rather than tenderness. Our work is to utilize the custom and practice of seclusion to protect womankind and more than that to help guide souls coming toward manifestation.

The abuse has been seen in Islamic countries where wives have been kept entirely shut up. And in India with the practice of child marriage. The whole spiritual purpose of life is aborted by such customs.

While *Khilvat* is the Sufi term for seclusion generally the word *Purdah* means a “curtain” and in some sense women have been kept behind curtains. In some places the curtains are still used so that the voices of the women are heard by the men and the voices of the men by the women without their seeing each other. This gives scope to the minds of womankind without any harm done. When the *Purdah*-curtain is abolished at first it causes emotional disturbances. But ultimately this need not be so. There is an innate purity in all of us and when it is given its opportunity it expresses itself more.

GATHA: No doubt there is another side to consider: that home and state are not two separate things. Home is the miniature of the state; and if woman performs a part equally important at home, why must she not perform an equally important part in the outer life? No doubt these ancient customs, even with their psychological importance, often make an iron bar before the progress of the generality.

TASAWWUF: Thus there are two extremes to be avoided. One is that woman should be excluded from playing any leading role outside the home. The other is that women are even superior to men in certain fields of endeavor because of their very natures. There have been civilizations in which women actually took on the leading roles, as among some Berbers. There are other cultures in which they have been excluded from playing any important role in life at all. Both of these do not take into consideration all aspects of life. And no doubt a balance can be found giving women full freedom without turning them into warped males.

GATHA: In the East, for the maid and mistress both, there are days set apart for rest in every month, in all different religions, among Hindus, Parsis and Mohammedans. The life in the world is a continual battle, and a hard battle one has to fight, if one has any fineness of feeling, any decency of manner. The position of woman in this battle is worse than that of man. It greatly robs her of her womanly fineness and delicacy of sentiment.

TASAWWUF: In some lands the differences between men and women have been ignored. The danger is this robs womankind of charm and grace and otherwise alters her nature. Of course sometimes this turns humankind into a sort of glorified animal. But mostly the harm is psychological; psychological problems arise, and there is a general absence of joy and bliss.

It is not always that women lose their balance by increased creative activity, especially as scientists and artists. But there has been a marked change as to the value of purity and virginity. Often they count for so little and when this happens also there is a depletion of charm and grace. For human beings are much more than social animals or mere material entities.

GATHA: Man is more dependent upon woman than woman upon man. From the first moment any

child, whether boy or girl, opens his eyes in the world, he seeks the protection of woman. Woman, as his mother, sister, daughter or wife, is the source of his happiness, comfort, and peace.

TASAWWUF: This is even true among some animals. And logical and psychological reasons and excuses do not provide substitutes for the hard facts of life. For every woman was created for a certain purpose and when she is taken away from her purpose in life, though there may be some ego-satisfaction, there is not that ebullieny of joy which comes to everyone who is working out his true destiny in life.

Social and psychological philosophies are not substitutes. Reasons and excuses do not bring joy. And arguments against what is not practiced are of no avail. While many social experiments are tried in many directions, the western world has not even tested the practices of seclusion to ascertain whether they are valuable or not.

GATHA: In whatever way man may express it, whether by a crude custom such as the seclusion in the East or in many different ways, to shield her from the hard knocks which fall on every soul living in this world of selfishness, is the first duty of a thoughtful man.

TASAWWUF: There was once an age of chivalry in which the first duty of man was to protect womankind. Many often traveled many miles on this sort of mission. It became important historically. Indeed that age has been looked upon as ideal. It was not thoroughly ideal for it held some women in idealization and others in contempt. Yet it also helped to break down the barriers between the sexes which had been made artificially in Christianity as in all religions. Indeed religion has been used as an excuse to keep womankind in subjection.

No doubt there are many reasons for it and some appear in Scriptures and some in traditions. Nor are there many ways by which women can and have become the instruments of God as men have. For all the Messengers of God have been males, but there have been women prophets and saints.

Meditation as an institution, and not just a daily or general practice, has many benefits. It is the balm of the soul far more than sleep may be. And very often industrial organizations have provided rest rooms for women which is very good for them and results in increased productivity and also emotional balance.

It is not necessary that men and women be alike. It is even worse if they are strangers, one to the other. There is something more than a middle path between the two, when we adopt the wide view, fitting different persons and groups into their proper functional places but leaving room for all.

In Sufism and other mystical philosophies, the existence of several planes and bodies, and the instructions to make both men and women aware of these different planes and bodies will result ultimately in the solution of problems and complexes considered in this discussion.

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