

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.

## **Purification**

The purgation of the soul is one of the most necessary steps on the Path. All mystics speak about it and all religions have purificatory rites of some kind. The ancient Greeks chewed cascara leaves at the Thesmophoria which was a purification festival and the Hebrews used hyssop. The importance of this can also be seen in the fact that all religions have prescribed lustration in some form, both inner and outer. And Lent, the fast of Ramadan and the Passover were all for this purpose. In fact purification can be considered from three standpoints, the purification of the body, of the mind, and of the heart.

### **Purification of the Body**

The purification of the body is of two kinds, inward and outward and has two purposes, actual and symbolic. Thus cleansing was used not only to prepare the body as a fitting instrument but also to signify the cleansing of the self. This can be seen in baptism which was originally a form of bathing, and in circumcision which both served a physical purpose and symbolized the circumcision of the heart. The Bible again and again refers to these matters.

All the great religions have insisted upon the use of water. The ancient Scriptures of the Hindus and Persians are filled with references to ablutions and lustrations. Mohammed did a very great service in making washing an integral part of his religion, for he came to the world at a period when the bath and the cleaning of the body were considered taboo, having been ancient heathen and idolatrous practices. This was strange as baptism had once been very wide spread and generally consisted in bathing in sacred streams and pools of water.

The use of water internally and purgation were also important. Fasting served a double purpose, both to cleanse the body and as a symbolic rite. The real fast was held to be the attunement of the soul to God as is still seen in the Jewish Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The Mohammedans have a saying that the devil has three doors to the human body: food, the tongue and sleep. It is upon these that the Nufs feeds. In fact the quantity and quality of our food greatly determine our condition while sleeping. In order to restrain Nufs the great religious Teachers have forbidden the partaking of certain foods and urged the consumption of others. People will seldom eat proper foods unless there is a very strong urge. If they believe there is a curse on the food or if they can be persuaded that certain foods are harmful, they will refrain from eating them. The Lenten practices and the abstinence of the early Christians from meat on certain days, considered as part of their religion, were excellent means of restraining the appetites. In India each caste was supposed to eat and to refrain from eating certain foods and this practice which has been kept in great part to this day has served many useful purposes. The Buddhist Bhikkus are not supposed to partake of food after the noon hour, which is not only very beneficial to the body but materially aids inner development.

Each system of dietetics given by the great Teachers and law-givers served its purpose in its place. Naturally the climatic conditions, the occupations, the stage of culture and the natural re-

## Purification

sources have determined the foods best fitted for each people. The Arab could hardly live if he were entirely prohibited—as was the Hebrew—from eating the camel. In times of drought and famine he would be faced with the problem of the preservation of the camel or himself. He would naturally be loathe to sacrifice the animal, but a just law-giver hardly had any other recourse than to permit it. In each case where Mohammed changed the Mosaic procedure, he did so only because there was a most potent need. So also the Hebrews included certain insects such as the locust and katydid among their permissible foods. This made it possible to take advantage of the great plagues of these insects when they could kill them and preserve them for future use or for reserves. On the other hand the abstinence from meat was most necessary for the Yogi and Bhikku living in warm countries and spending much of their time in meditation. But the main purpose behind all these systems was the purification and restraint of the Nufs. Incidentally they have afforded very fine systems for everyday life, for the preservation of the health of the body and the prevention of disease.

The purification of the body was first needed. The education of the body was of prime importance and schools like that of Pythagoras began by building up the body which was to be a temple of God. To accomplish this the education included the use of silences, the controlling of the passions, the right use of foods, rhythm in all activities such as proper periods for sleep, physical activity, study, recreation, meals and rest.

Besides the daily use of water and food for the cleansing of the body, there was a seasonal purification. This always came in the spring. More food is needed in winter than at other seasons, and in cold climates it may be a hardship to wash too frequently. But with the coming of warmer weather, there is a change which is seen in all the manifestations of Nature. It is a period of activity and growth. Providence has provided for this, for at the very season when water is most needed the snows melt and the rains fall. This is reflected in the green color of Nature at this season, showing the predominance of the Water element. If man wishes to follow the way of Nature, he should also use much water at this period. It is Nature's cleansing time and should be his. Change of diet, eating of green vegetables, restraint from heavy meats and plenty of fresh air are helpful.

Another means of purifying the body is through the control of the tongue. When one actually analyses it, one finds that the Nufs as a result of the feeding of the body with foods which produce poisons, rouses itself to greater activity and this weakens the control of the Will over the tongue. Therefore food control is helpful. But food control alone does not suffice and for this reason prayer, silences and meditation are necessary. The Sufis and the Catholics have occasions wherein people refrain from talking except when absolutely necessary, but mystics of all schools go into retirement at times and during these periods not a word is spoken. The Lenten or pre-spring season is the best time of the year for this purpose.

Through the control of the tongue one's forces are preserved, one's nervous system is set in order and the Will can be attuned more readily. It is then much easier to control the passions, especially temper and pride. One sees ignorant and foolish people often talking incessantly without any thought and this often becomes a mania; certain types of insane people are afflicted with this habit. This is the condition when the Nufs, unrestrained, has full sway.

Another means of purification is through the Breath. The science of the breath is the most important of all sciences, but it is first necessary to learn to breath properly to permit the body to function properly as a whole and in each part or organ and to preserve health.

## Purification

Prayer always helps, not only in restraining the control of Nufs over the tongue, but in refreshing the nervous system, calming the activities of the mind and emotions and often, especially in the Islamic system, it provides an excellent system of exercises. The use of postures rests muscles and organs which are not affected enough by merely sitting or lying down, and the actions strengthen parts of the body better than other forms of exercise.

Behind all these is the one general purpose of making the body the Temple of God. Through the control of the passions, the restraint of Nufs, the attunement of the Will, the purification of the organs, the Inner Sense is awakened and as Christ said, "When thy eye shall be single, thy body will be full of light."

### Purification of the Mind

In *The Soul, Whence and Whither*, the Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan speaks of the Mind as an Akasha and he also speaks of the sky as an Akasha. In the sky with its day and night we can see something of the mind in its ordinary and in its purified state. The sky at night is filled with stars, many luminous bodies, all trying to shine forth and yet combined giving little light. Then there are times when the clouds are out and everything is obscured to a certain degree. But in the daytime when the sun shines, there is one great light and everything is clear. So the mind has its phases when it is beclouded and cannot function properly, when it functions outwardly and thinks its myriad thoughts and has its multitude of imaginings. But there is also a condition when the mind, properly purified and working inwardly, beholds the One Great Light and is able to shine forth as a full moon.

This idea is seen in the prayer Salaat, used in the Universal Worship and other ceremonies of the Sufi Movement where it says, "And speakest the word that is put into thy mouth as the light filleth the crescent moon;" and "Let the star of the Divine Light shining in Thy heart be reflected in the heart of Thy devotees."

Purification of the body is necessary for purification of the mind for if the body is not in order, the mind is more apt to turn its attention toward it. So long as this is the case the mind cannot concentrate properly and will function outwardly rather than inwardly. Even among thinkers and artists it is most necessary to prepare the body first for the proper functioning of the mind, but if man only knew it, this is most necessary in every walk of life.

Another way in which the body affects the mind is that if the centers and organs are not all working properly, the light of one's consciousness, of one's soul, is shut up and has not the proper means of egress. It is then forced upon the mind when that is not in perfect order and brings about inharmonious conditions. It is for this reason that there is disease, dissatisfaction, disharmony, and indeed every evil in the world.

The mind can be partially purified by the right usage of food. Different food is needed for a body doing physical work or artistic work or mental work. Food that steadies the nerves naturally greatly aids the mind in its functions.

The mind is also aided by the control over the tongue, the passions and instincts and the ability to detach itself. For this reason practices are needed. Prayer gives the mind a peaceful atmosphere; it is like stilling the waves around and the noise of activity. Meditation is an exercise of the mind,

## Purification

to bring peace within which corresponds to the clearing of clouds from the sky, and concentration serves to give it strength. The importance of detachment can be seen in the lives of great scientists whose sincerity and devotion to their labors have brought about great discoveries.

The use of the breath is also important for it serves to bring about unity and balance and direction for the mind. During sleep, during rest, meditation, and outward or inward activity of the mind, the breath works differently. But most important is it for the clearing of the passages which open the mind to the heart, to the Light within, so the intuition and higher functions of the heart can work properly through it.

The science of the mystics is only a natural science. If man did not think it was so necessary and important to depend upon the world without—which is his own idea and not inborn—he could hear the Voice from within. Possibly all people did this at one time, but when they organized into communities and there was a division of activities, some serving their time in hunting or going to war, some working in the fields, some at trades, it was left for others, generally women or older men, to continue the function of listening to the Voice within. They were given special offices and this led to the institution of oracles and the seership. The rest of the community depended upon them for advice in all matters. Often the government was in the hands of those who performed this function as with the Druids, the Voluspas in northern Europe, the Pythoness at Delphi in Greece or the priests and priestesses of Jupiter, Apollo and Aescalaepius, and the seers among Semitic nations. Later this developed into priesthoods who established schools for the education of the Inner Sense, which were the forerunners of the Sufi schools. In India a whole caste, the Brahmans, were set aside for this work, although all men and women were expected to lead the inner life, and especially when they were too old, were to devote all their energies in that direction.

Right breathing, right meditation, correct poise and posture enable the mind to be thrown in the proper direction and for the Will to act. The thinking of clean thoughts, the elevation of the ideal, the control of the passions clear the clouds from the sky. As soon as the Will can act and Willing takes the place of "Thinking," the Nufs or false ego is restrained and the way is opened for the true Self to function. Then the light of the intuition plays upon the mind, the Light and Power from within are then able to perform wonders.

The mind is much like a mirror which must be cleaned, polished and properly focused. There is a saying, "clear the cobwebs from the sky," which symbolizes the cleaning and polishing of the mind. We know that behind the clouds the sun is shining and so through the purification of the mind it can be made into a most useful and wonderful instrument.

### **Purification of the Heart**

Behind all purification is that of the heart. The word Sufism has been derived from "saf" meaning "purity" and by this purity of the heart is meant, for Sufis were called "men of the heart."

In reality the heart is very much more than the physical heart. The mind is greater than the brain and all the nervous system but the heart of man is even very much greater than the physical heart. Man whose consciousness has been centered on the world without knows little about his own heart. Every organ in this body, the temple of God, is there for a purpose and it is part of the purpose of our life to realize this. But the heart is the central and most important of all.

## Purification

If one were to see the sun only through reflections as in pools of water, the sun would everywhere appear different. If one looked in a stagnant pool it would have one appearance. In a muddy pool it would look different. If there were vegetable growths, or waves, or currents, these would affect the reflection. If it were a running stream one looked into, it would be different, and again the sun would appear quite clear in the clear body of water. At that, the position of the sun in the sky, the situation of the water and the place from which one looked would all give different results. Each of these reflections would be of the sun, but even the best would give only a limited idea.

So it is with the love nature of man, which is centered in the heart, when thrown outwardly gives only reflections of its true nature. To look up and see the sun does not need to affect the reflection. So to find the true meaning of Love does not mean giving up of particular loves. This is the idea of attachment and detachment. One who looks forever at a pool may see the pool dry up, or see disturbances and changes, but the sun constantly gives forth its steady stream of energy.

The purification of the body and mind prepare the way for the purification of the heart. The light would not shine if there were not the channels for it. A great powerhouse would not have particular value for the world unless it were connected up by wires. The same is true of the energy of the heart, the Love of God which is always ready to shine forth if man only would let it.

When the intuition begins to act, this current moves forward and it is now necessary to keep the whole system in order and to open the door so the light will shine forth. This is what Christ meant, "Let men see your good works so they will glorify the Father in Heaven." When this light comes and men see it, they truly know there is a God. This step is most difficult and most important for should any imperfection creep in anywhere, which the Sufis call the perturbations of Nufs, it impedes the spiritual development. A similar process is witnessed in the polishing of the reflective mirror for telescopes; the telescope must be made as perfect as possible. It must be focused as accurately as possible. But the mirror must not only have the right size and curvature, its glass must be of the finest and the greatest care is taken in polishing for if there is the smallest imperfection it cannot be used.

The sun shines on the just and the unjust, on rich and poor, on low and high. So now the heart must become steadfast and impartial, must know neither good nor evil, becoming free from qualities and reflect only the Light from the Only Being, so that through God-realization, man realizes himself. In the purification of the body man learns to overcome the evil in his acts; in the purification of his mind he ceases to think evil; but through the purification of the heart he learns the real nature of evil and becomes free from "the distinctions and differences which divide men."

Now all one's practices are united in the purpose of realizing the Unity in all things. This is what the Buddha meant by the use of right breathing, right thinking and right meditation. Complete rhythm in one's life, becoming an empty cup, freed from every passion and attachment—one can become the instrument for God, and to this end has the Message of all Teachers been given. Here the nature of Love is revealed, and the whole purpose of the journey on the Path is realized—this occurs when the heart of man is opened.

Whatever may be our opinions or feelings, we long for self-expression and self-expression can only come through realization. This can only be accomplished through the attunement and the surrender of the Will to God. But we shall find we have lost nothing—in surrender we have conquered. The pleasures of life, the joy in the companionship of our fellow men, the love of beauty in objects

## Purification

which may have been laid aside, we find after realizing true Happiness that they do not have to be laid aside. Learning that true happiness does not belong to things or attributes comes from, indeed is the One Alone. Keeping this forever in our heart and in our consciousness and in our mind, we can live even in the outward world a fuller life than ever before, knowing the place of the outer world in its relation to the Universe and to God.