

My Initiations into the Overself

Editor's Note: This essay is a rare autobiographical document describing – as the title states – some elements of PB's mystical journey up to his 50th year or thereabouts. We know this had to be written in the late 1940s or early 1950s because PB himself refers to being "half a century old." Of course he went on to live another 30 years, and he certainly went on deepening his spiritual consciousness through a variety of means. Although he did not update this essay later in his life, a conversation I had with him holds one probable reason for this. When I was working for him in 1980 he asked me to go through all of Plotinus and pull out his mystical experiences, pairing them with the seven stages of samadhi described by Patanjali. When I told PB that I couldn't find personalized references to the highest three realizations (savikalpa, nirvikalpa and sahaja), PB observed that since there is nothing personal present in these very exalted states we would only see their presence in Plotinus' descriptions of Nous and the One. In my opinion, PB's later attainments were similar in their impersonality and thus are to be found in his descriptions of Mind, World-Mind and the World-Idea. He himself was quite impersonal; it was as though there wasn't much in the way of a person present at all – which is one reason it was easy to refer to this individual by a pair of initials.

For more information about the people and texts PB quotes or references here, please see the file titled "Wiki Standard Info for Comments." For more information about the editorial standards, spelling changes, and formatting that we have implemented – including page and para numbering – please see the file titled "Introductory Readers' Guide." We have introduced minimal changes to the text; our changes deal with inconsistencies of spelling, educated guesses at illegible words, and the rare modification of grammar for clarity's sake. Whenever there is any question as to whether what is typed is what PB wrote, please consult the associated scan of the original pages, currently to be found in a PDF of the same name. – Timothy Smith (TJS), 2020

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(1-1) After years of hesitation and reluctance, I include this chapter of a chronicle of personal mystical experience. The first intention had been to write it in old age and to publish it anonymously or perhaps posthumously. But I find that old age keeps on being before me, that instead of being more than half a century old I have simply lived for more than half a century, and that this task might as well be done now as later. There are still other chapters of this kind which will have to be written one day, but their concern is chiefly with cosmic mysteries rather than with personal experience, although the unveiling of those mysteries could not have happened except as a direct result of such experience. But since those subjects do not pertain to the present book, for they are on a plane that is more ethereal and less material, I have omitted them.

The reluctance to put in the present chapter arises partly because it touches private, intimate, and sacred moments, and partly because it will necessarily be so prolific in first-person pronouns that it will sound far too egotistic. Its very virtue may appear as its vanity. But I know from wide experience that such a narration will help

¹ PB himself inserted "by PB" in the upper right margin by hand.

those who are already seeking the Overself to recognise certain important signs on their own way, to learn where the correct path should lead them, and, above all, to confirm them in the necessity of hope. I believe, too, that it may give those who are not questers but ordinary people more faith that God does exist and more trust in the ultimate

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(continued from the previous page) beneficence of God's World-Idea. If it serves also in such ways, it can only do a little good to write and release this record.

Although a writer never really knows how much good or how much harm his work does (for the reports of its results are few and far between) if his aim is to serve he need not be concerned about those results. He would do his best and find peace in the thought that man and fate will take care of them. So I follow the practice and counsel of an old Greek monk, Callistus Telicudes, who wrote: "One ought not to keep what is learned by Meditation, but one should make notes of it and circulate the writings for the use of others." This is why I communicate these inner experiences to those who might be helped, to those who might receive more vision of and more belief in life itself.

Before I reached the threshold of manhood and after six months of unwavering daily practice of meditation and eighteen months of burning aspiration for the Spiritual Self, I underwent a series of mystical ecstasies. During them I attained a kind of elementary consciousness of it.

If anyone could imagine a consciousness which does not objectify anything but remains in its own native purity, a happiness beyond which it is impossible to go, and a self which is unvaryingly one and the same, he would have the correct idea of the Overself.

There are not a few persons who have known infrequent occasions when their ordinary mentality seems to lapse, when their feeling for beauty and goodness seems to expand enormously, and when their worldly cynicism falls away into

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(continued from the previous page) abeyance for a short time. The place may seem perfect for this experience, but it may also seem quite the opposite - such as a noisy metropolitan street. There are many other persons who have known the beauty of a great musical symphony and felt its power to draw the emotions into a vortex of delight or grandeur. Such persons can more easily imagine what this rapturous emotional mystical experience is like. But they may not know that under the ordinary human consciousness there is a hidden region whence these aesthetic feelings are drawn.

It was certainly the most blissful time I had ever had until then. I saw how transient and how shallow was earthly pleasure by comparison with the real happiness to be found in this deeper Self. Before my illumination the solitary scenes of Nature's grandeur usually served as my greatest form of inspiration. I could become so absorbed in admiring such beauty that I would feel swallowed up in it for a period of time and fall into a tranquil state. After my illumination I no longer became totally

absorbed in such scenes. They remained something separate from me: I was detached from them. The emotional exaltation they aroused was less or lower than the peace and joy I felt in the Overself. Yet this spatial detachment did not prevent me from enjoying nature, art, and music to an even greater and more satisfying extent than previously. The detachment gave me freedom, release from some personal limitations, and enabled me to feel and understand beauty in a larger and deeper way. I even became more attentive to detail.

The glamour and the freshness of those mystical

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(continued from the previous page) ecstasies subsided within three or four weeks and vanished. But the awareness kindled by them remained for three years. I then met an advanced mystic - an expatriate American living in Europe - who told me that I was near the point where I could advance to the next and higher degree of illumination and that, at such a period, most aspirants undergo certain tests before they succeed in gaining the degree.

He was right. I underwent the tests very soon after and failed in them - failed so miserably that I fell headlong down and lost even the spiritual consciousness which I had previously possessed. The period which followed was a terrible one, a veritable "dark night of the soul" through which I had to struggle slowly and painfully for another three years. During all that period there was neither time nor capacity to practise meditation, nor was I inclined to sustain aspiration.

It is at times necessary to give a man a shock to show him what he is really like. This is usually done by friends, sometimes by enemies, and occasionally by the Master. It is always done by life itself. The experience is painful, but, if its lessons are sufficiently taken to heart, the debt owed to it is a large one. It arouses the man to do what will save him from avoidable sufferings in the future by stimulating him to remove their causes within himself. One day I was faced with an unexpected event which gave me a tremendous shock. The emergency called for all the wisdom and strength and determination I could muster in order to deal with it. I succeeded in doing so and was drastically aroused in the process. In this way I shook

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(continued from the previous page) myself out of the spiritual depression and, in a somewhat desultory manner, took up again the practice of meditation as well as occasional attempts at self-improvement. This transition period was succeeded by another when I acted more resolutely and worked more diligently. I laid down a program for regular daily meditation, practised even more intensively, and tried harder to improve myself than I had done for years. There suddenly came a feeling of impending momentous discovery. Six weeks later, I found myself plunged for two hours one evening (which was twice as long as the period allotted each day to the practice) in the deepest mental withdrawnness for me at the time. I felt I had come

home after an all-too-long and dishonourable absence like a prodigal son. During that memorable session, I recovered once more the degree of consciousness which I had enjoyed in the earlier period of my Quest, although there was more knowledge and understanding this time. I could see more clearly that there was a definite preordained pattern in my life and in the lives of others: all the chief events had some kind of inner meaning in them; all could teach some lesson which if learned would lead to spiritual growth. To discern these lessons, we have to develop a more mature emotional attitude in our relations with others and also a stronger character. We have to get ourselves out of our own selves and look at each situation, momentarily at least, the way the other person involved in it looks at it. Then we have to seek true justice for all and not be selfish.

In the course of that evening's inner work, I found that my thoughts were being definitely directed along a certain

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(continued from the previous page) course by some impulsion which was not altogether my own. It led me to retrace briefly the past history of my spiritual career and, especially, to examine carefully the point where I missed my step and lost my path. I analysed the reasons for this mishap until they were perfectly clear and taken deeply to heart. Then I was led to build up imaginatively a picture of what might have happened had I successfully passed the tests. I was also led to see that each man or woman who had been brought by life into short or long association with me had borne a silent message or embodied a hidden test, or else was someone to be helped or served in a way which would reveal itself in time. That Presence which was and yet was not told me inwardly how, through all the frustration and confusion which had filled the second cycle of my spiritual career, it had never left me but had remained beside me waiting for the time when my own efforts to find my way back would unite with its magnetic drawing power to liberate me. I was told that there was in this a great lesson - the necessity of hope - which I ought to communicate to the aspirants I would meet later who were spending fruitless barren years of spiritual seeking, and who were becoming discouraged at the lack of results. Inexperienced travellers on this path often find that their early enthusiasm wanes and then the journey becomes tedious. For working upon themselves, changing improving and developing the moral mental and emotional material they must use is so slow an affair, so poor in visible results, that it tends to stifle buoyancy and enfeeble determination. Perhaps there will also be periods of harsh testing when resentment doubt or rebellion against the Quest will appear within themselves. So I had

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(continued from the previous page) to instil the lesson of never abandoning the belief that the struggle was worthwhile, of always trusting in the eventuality of Grace, and of living in the memory of their past uplifted moments. Those who are intimidated by the

Quest's difficulties ought to be stimulated by its rewards. They should take to heart the truth that no spiritual darkness is a permanent one, and that at no time are they really lost, deserted, or fallen creatures. If their will weakens or their light clouds, it is an inevitable part or result of their imperfect nature as well as of their unfinished development. But it is also a condition which must right itself with further experience, evolutionary pressure or unexpected Grace.

When my meditation seemed to have ended a great store of strength poured into me. Indeed, it was so overwhelming as to appear irresistible. I felt that every obstacle could be overcome by its support and help, and that I merely had to stretch out my hand to gain victory. Suddenly I saw a vision in which a duplicate of myself was pushing a huge boulder away from the entrance to a cave. I knew instinctively that the boulder was a symbol for the lower self and that the cave was a symbol for the Higher Self. I could feel a change working rapidly in my character and personality, bringing me closer to the ideal which I held. I succeeded at last in rolling away the boulder and, with that, attained a certain degree of self-mastery which from that moment onward remained with me. I felt that I could never again fall below that degree, that it was no more possible to do so than it was for the hatched chicken to return to the egg.

I stood at the entrance to the cave and looked inside.

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(continued from the previous page) I found it to be full of light, dazzlingly brilliant by comparison with the murky gloom outside it. The power to enter the cave was not given to me, only to stand at the entrance and gaze inside. I understood that the inner work necessary to gain this power would constitute the next cycle of my labours.

The vision came to an end and with it I realised that a man does not become truly humble until he has first seen himself as truly great. The glimpse of his Higher Self throws a powerful light by reaction upon his darker one. He discovers how simple, how ignorant, how weak, and how arrogant he is and has been. If the discovery brings him to the ground, it also stimulates him to resolve to remake himself in the image of the ideal. With the shaming contrast between the animal and the angelic in him, as well as between the human and the Divine, he is penetrated through and through with the need of imposing the Higher Will forcefully upon the lower one.

The years which succeeded this vision were years of development and growth. One of the most interesting new phenomena of that period came about occasionally when I was entering into or emerging from the deeper states of meditation. Out of the silent recesses of my being there came forth utterance - yet no form was to be seen and no one was there, nor did any vision come with it! This was the mystery - that speech came into existence without a speaker. It was the activity of vocal intuition, a Presence which spoke to the inner ear and not to the outer. It must not be confused with the hearing of audible voices such as mediums and psychics are supposed to hear. It was nothing of that kind. This was one's Spiritual Self speaking to one's human self. I suppose it was what the

(continued from the previous page) German mystics of the sixteenth century called "The Interior Word" and what the medieval saints of the Catholic church meant when they claimed that God talked to them. It was definite, commanding, forceful, insistent, and authoritative. If it gave an order, it gave also the power needed to carry out the order.

Yet it was not the intuition associated with everyday existence as an occasional phenomena, for that is usually a mental first impression or a silent feeling. That intuition may well be the faint beginnings of this Voice, which I like to call the Voice of the Overself.

I felt that I could put the utmost confidence in its guidance wherever it led me, even if it led directly to loss of every material possession, to sacrifice of every human relationship and to the renunciation of every professional ambition.

The place where I heard this Voice became ever after a holy sanctuary, an oasis of peace and a citadel of strength to which I could return or retreat whenever I was alone, or whenever a crisis of the outer world was impending. People think too often that they have to travel to distant places for wisdom or teaching. They fail to recognise that it is not only within themselves - this wisdom or this teaching - but that it will never be found anywhere else. The echo of some other man's will never take its place.

To find the holy Presence by withdrawing from the world temporarily into meditation was much easier than to find it while busy in the world. That was a different task. To go on from there until it became a fixed phenomenon was still

(continued from the previous page) harder. It may help others to learn how I did this. I had entered into a session which combined prayer with meditation. Although I assumed the usual physical position and it was the customary hour for the evening practice of meditation, actually I gave myself up to my feelings and spoke silently from the heart in fervent prayer. I addressed my words to the Overself and related how I had come evening after evening to this inner tryst, and I emphasised that it was aspiration and the attraction of love which had drawn me away from every other activity to spend more than an hour in this one. I admitted that an uplifting spiritual experience had often been the result, but I complained that the end of each session was the end of the experience. The next day had to be spent in ordinary consciousness like the day of any other person uninterested in the Quest. I had taken up the practice of exercises in constant recollection as well as exercises in declarative muttering but to no result; they were not my path. I still got so immersed in work or talk or whatever I happened to be doing that I forgot the practice and failed to carry it off.

It became obvious that if I depended on myself, on my own poor and feeble power, the effort could not end in anything but failure. There was no hope for progress unless the Overself came to my rescue and, out of its Grace, brought about the desired state. I asked ardently for its help; indeed, I begged for it and lamented that life was

worthless unless it could be lived continuously in that state. I carried on this one-way conversation in a lovingly familiar yet humbly beseeching tone.

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(Continued from the previous page) A response came at last. I felt myself being carried down deeper into my inner being until a level of rich consciousness was touched. It required great intensity of purpose, great resolution of will and extreme power of concentration to remain on that level, so I summoned up these resources and succeeded in remaining. After a while I was instructed by the inner Voice to form a mental picture of a duplicate of myself at work, in talk or travel, or in any other activity likely to be entered during the following day. In this picture I was to keep hold of the awareness in which I was now held and not to let my attention wander from it for even a minute. I was particularly guided to include such occasions or contacts where I was likely to be provoked by annoyance, irritation, overconcentration on work and excessive physical activity into forgetfulness.

Thus the first step was to make the desired state come true in imagination. This could not be done without the fullest trust that it would do so, and without the fullest consent of my logical mind that it could do so. The second step was to identify myself imaginatively with the ideal state during the day as often as I could remember to do it, and during formal meditation periods as intensely as I could force the mind into doing it. In the first step I had to project a picture of myself as active in the outer world, to put forth a thought-form which would incubate for a period of time like an egg. I had not merely to think about that desired state from present conditions but also – indeed, rather – to think from it. I had to determine my outlook by it as if it were already an actuality and to imitate all the characteristics

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(continued from the previous page) and qualities it had. I was not to gaze up to the idea, but to gaze down from it.

In the second step the ideal had to be knitted into me as if by a magic spell. I had to play the wizard and enchant myself into first seeing and then being what I aspired to become.

At first it was not possible to retain that peaceful state continuously. It would fade away intermittently. Both to prevent that from happening and to make the needed conditions to sustain its presence, the practise of this exercise in creative imagination became necessary. I found the exercise a valuable one for use in meditation practices of later years and so pass it on for the benefit of others.

Even then I knew that the effort required was too great for me, that imaginative power alone was too insufficient for such a result to be achieved without Grace. If I had to depend on myself, on my poor little human self, the end of it would be merely an illusion which would one day be harshly dispelled or a dream from which I would one

day rudely awake. The imagination by itself was not capable of bringing such an exalted state into actual realisation, but the imagination plus Grace was capable.

When the ego works on its own self its willingness is reluctant and its power is limited. When Grace works inside the ego its participation is joyous and its power is unpredictable. Does Divine Grace exist? Orthodox Theology makes an arbitrary fact of it and does not correctly present it. Yet it is reasonable in theory and verified by experience that it comes down to meet and mingle with human aspiration.

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(continued from the previous page) But it is also a fact that such a desirable consciousness is not likely to happen if the aspirant fails to fulfil the conditions controlling its appearance.

On the day when its long awaited dawn reddened my sky I certainly had no doubts that it was at work because I could directly feel its inner movements as soon as I started to meditate. I was perfectly aware of a swift change from the ordinary to the deeper level and of the inward pull from outward which are signs of its action and which repeated themselves many times in other meditations.

In the result, the state of divided being – the state of disunion in the heart – which had been my general state, and which is necessarily the general state of all seekers, began to vanish. Instead of two opposing forces being ever at war within myself, the actual and the ideal, there began to appear only a single controlling force. This led in turn to a great happiness which made unnecessary all the constant searching for happiness in outside things, circumstances, or persons – a searching which is one of the causes of this self-division. I felt that the desires and attachments I had cared about so greatly, anguished over and worried for, were not important at all in themselves but only in the spiritual lesson to which they led in the end. All the little desires, all the personal yearnings, are really God-desire. At first it is unconscious but with the growth of understanding it becomes conscious. It is then that the will turns around to start on the Quest, and that the desiring heart which had been looking and hungering for things outside itself starts to look within itself.

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(Continued from the previous page) In this emptying of self, of fears and desires, the anxiety or relation about the results of their activity, is also emptied. At the same time there is the certainty that they will be taken care of in the World-Mind's providence.

By carrying out these exercises and then consciously forming the habit of carrying their results into the everyday life and routine, I came in time to keep the peace all day long. This was certainly a great reward for all the years of toil and effort which preceded it. But it also brought certain responsibilities to myself and to others.

Once identified with the Cause of the True Self how could one ever betray it by expressing any of the uglier traits and baser qualities which belong to the lower self?

Once it is discovered that all that is noblest in every human aspiration comes from this sacred Source, how could one go along with one's ignoble tendencies?

Negatively, one could not raise one's hand or open one's lips to injure a fellow being. One could not be antagonistic to him even in thought. Positively, one had to practise an active good will toward all living creatures.

Because of the sweetness which pervaded my heart the world looked different and it was not difficult to restrain those ignobler tendencies. I was perfectly conscious of the fact that I was Spirit and that my neighbour, however outwardly repulsive he might be, was Spirit, too. When I looked at anyone I saw his outer person as a mere surface appearance. Within it, in his heart region, there was a calm centre of divine peace. It remained unchanged no matter how educated the surface self was and untarnished no matter how evil that self acted.

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(Continued from the previous page) I no longer looked either for the worst in him or for the good in him, but accepted him just as he was for that was the way he was. Never again could I condemn him too harshly. Each person I met was indeed a part of my own consciousness. I automatically and sympathetically identified myself with him, or with anyone from whom I received a letter. I entered metaphorically into his shoes and shared his outlook, hopes, understanding and, even, limitations. My enemy was explained, too: how and why he could not help being so. In this immense sympathetic sweep, I even ventured to justify him against me.

The time came when this attitude developed to an extreme. I did not know how to stop losing myself in the process of absorbing the other man into my own entity, so that he became a part of it, too often an incongruous part. What he thought or felt was reflected in my own consciousness like an image in a mirror. So if he told me something which did not correspond to the thought in his mind I immediately became aware of his discrepancy. It was sympathy lifted to a degree which amounted to empathy.

This faculty brought many unpleasant registrations to my mind and began to make life intolerable. Not until some time later when I had had enough of it was I told and taught by the Interior Word that the condition was only a preliminary one and now needed to be brought under strict control. I was warned that I did not need to effect harmony with others on the plane of their ego. Help was given me for the cure of this condition but I, on my part, had to make a positive exercise of the will for many months and a definite withdrawal of attention from others as well. Gradually these phenomena

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(continued from the previous page) disappeared until I became quite free of them.

Although I did not get any cosmic revelation in those days, I did feel in a general way that behind the universe there was extreme beneficence, that whatever happened had its place in the Infinite Purpose. No event was merely a chance one. The Infinite

Wisdom was behind all human life and fortune. I felt that this applied just as much to the so-called evil events and calamitous happenings if only we could interpret them correctly. This strongly intuitive feeling made me happy and I wanted to share it with others and to get them to rise above their own experience into it.

But paradoxically I did not feel any necessity to talk to them, even to friends, about these new experiences unless they themselves were seeking the inner life. On the contrary, it seemed sacrilegious to divulge promiscuously what had happened to me. So I deliberately concealed the fact of their existence. This was because I soon found that to preach truth to the mass of people was of no use. They could not grasp it and it was better to be silent about it except to those few who were themselves on the verge of the Quest. I was taught inwardly, and confirmed by disappointment, that people stand on different levels of moral character, intuitive comprehension and purpose in life, and I was warned to cease to try to proselytise, and to let the unready go their way while I went mine.

The supreme lesson of all experience must first be learned by undergoing experience itself. There was no other way at that stage. What could I do for those who would not seek themselves, but only objects outside themselves? They sought

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(continued from the previous page) to impose more and more fetters on their minds and hearts; I to point out the way which could lead to a free and fetterless existence. The two directions were directly opposite one another. My time could be more usefully occupied with those who, having experienced the results of travel in the one and satiated or disenchanted with these results, were at last ready for travel in the other direction.

I prayed to become a clear channel for the unhindered flow of inspiration, goodness and truth to such persons, to those who were seeking for these things. As regards the unreceptive majority I found it was more practical just to let the feeling of beneficence reflect itself through me to them as sincere good-will and outward kindness. In some way and at some future time, the Spirit from which these two emanated would touch their subconscious being and affect them, help them or uplift them when eventually it succeeded in rising to the conscious mind. The result might be slight or great, but it was certain.

During the years which elapsed, nothing dislodged me from those attitudes. If I would no longer try to push the truth upon others, neither would I let them push me out of it; and if they tried to, I could only silently smile at their foolish arguments. Experience itself was better than their arguments. I preferred to believe in the awareness which always remained with me than in the merely theoretical reasons for its non-existence.

It ought now to be made clear that these two initiations were mystical ones and not philosophic. They enabled one to see the inner meaning of his own life, but not of all life.

(continued from the previous page) They concerned the 'I' and gave knowledge of the True Self. They did not concern the universe and the human relation to it. Those subjects belonged to the field of a philosophic initiation which came much later and was my fourth in line. That was an event which interpreted all other events. While still including the mystical initiation, there was blended into it the fuller perception of a Cosmic Knowledge.

I discovered that there are progressive degrees of the mystical initiation leading to progressive degrees of the Cosmic one in turn. I have no experience beyond the first of the Cosmic degrees. Yet even that slight unveiling taught me that the immense mystery which surrounds us will ever remain a mystery. The human entity is not competent to cope with more than a very limited degree of knowledge and still remain human. There is an iron ring around what it can know, a ring that we cannot pass beyond.

What I went through in these initiations may fairly be described as finding the True Self - that impersonal part of us which is covered over and effectively hidden by the personal ego. But the second time I found it in a very different way from that of the first, when the discovery had been tremendously emotional, excitedly rapturous and ebulliently joyous. The second discovery was quiet, strong and poised. This does not mean that it did not bring an intense glowing satisfaction: but all feeling was perfectly controlled by the sense of dominant will, of the higher purpose fulfilling itself rigidly. Indeed, I learned later that one of the tests of the greater enlightenment is the extraordinary calm in which it happens - a calm like the one which follows the violent monsoon storm in the tropics. To write that this

(continued from the previous page) inner peace is perfect is no literary overstatement nor emotional colouring, but an accurate factual description. "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest" is still as true today as when spoken by the Christ-Consciousness through Jesus nearly two thousand years ago.

In the first initiation I had only a vague notion of what was happening to me. This was partly because of its unfamiliarity, partly because I had little knowledge of the subject at the time, and partly because I lacked intellectual development at that early age. In the second one there was not only more understanding of the experience but better adjustment to it. Again, after the earlier experience, I found myself reverting to a child's simplicity, trust and openness. But after the later one there was a desire to add whatever discrimination, wisdom and practicality, experience and study had since been able to garner. These two tendencies existed side by side and seemed to accommodate each other without difficulty. There was no conflict between reason and intuition or between reason and faith.

Nor was this the only result of a paradoxical nature: there was another. When I lived in the Himalayas I felt especially during full-moon periods like the solitary

inhabitant of an unpeopled planet. It is not easy even today to forget those unbelievable mountains where silence is total and absolute, where Nature seems to be meditating and man seems to be intruding. When I shut my door on the bustling world and retire first within my room and then within myself, it is as if I again enter into that still Himalayan world. There is utter silence within me. If I engage in work at the desk, or

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(continued from the previous page) go out into the bustling streets and mingle with people, it is as though a current is flowing steadily and incessantly through my heart – the current of that same inner peaceful silence.

Now I come to a metaphysical result of the second initiation. In the earlier one, I seemed to expand the ego with love and delight. In the later one, I seemed to attenuate it with perception and revaluation. Just before it happened I felt that some drastic and highly important event was about to develop. When it did happen the feeling was soon explained. There was a sloughing off of the old self which was followed by a sense of immense relief. It was as if a tremendously heavy and burdensome topcoat had been thrown off my shoulders. The sense of being liberated was immeasurable. The ego's dominance was gone. I could see now how it had confined my thinking and dimmed my outlook.

It was simultaneously a kind of death and also a kind of birth – or rebirth – for in that life which was Essence I felt that the wishes, desires, attachments and ambitions of the unreal self were futile, unnecessary and vain. The entire existence to which they belonged was a dream-like show, a passing cinema film. Those persons who were satisfied with such an existence were satisfied with a mere shadow of a shadow. They did not even suspect what the substance which cast the shadow really was, nor where it was, nor how to find it. This substance was the Infinite Life and Infinite Consciousness. It alone was real and eternal. Everything else was only a shadow-shape which merely reflected it. When later in the Near East an old Adept of the Hebrew Mystic Kabbala told me that

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(continued from the previous page) its major text teaches that the Real Man lives like a sun in Heaven while only the shadow-man lives on earth, I immediately caught his meaning.

All the people I had ever known in the past or in the present, all the events of forgotten years as well as well-remembered ones, temporarily became nothing more than dream-like figures in the mind, envisioned happenings in the consciousness, during this second initiation. If one of my own thoughts could suddenly become me, the thinker, the transformation would be something like the one which happens when the ego becomes the Overself. For I myself am nothing other than a thought in the Overself-Consciousness.

Yet that discovery delighted me. I did not seem to care. My surface individuality was going or perhaps was gone, but, somehow, something mysteriously remained that was anonymous, nameless, universal and absolute. That was the immeasurably important Essence of me: not the other with the petty desires and little idiosyncrasies, which had wasted my time for years and distracted me from the true significance of my life. Here, in this impersonal Being, I really belonged, lived and found happiness.

After this it was easy to see why people welcomed the condition of deep dreamless sleep. This is not only for the obvious reason of physical and mental recuperation, but also because it freed them from personal being, offered them an escape from the world and its care. This same freedom entered into knowledge of the Overself, but with a difference that the same happiness which is derived from deep sleep is here consciously enjoyed. Such happiness is really inseparable from

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(continued from the previous page) awareness of the Overself. The reward of giving up the ego-sense is the ability to live in the deepest part of one's deepest being - the Overself.

Thus it became clear from both these initiations that it was all important to rid the mind of the ego, or rather, of its crushing tyranny. This could not be the result of a single and sudden act, nor of years of disciplinary toil, but of a combination of the one leading to the other, of the Long Path leading to what is called the Short Path.

Although it properly belongs to my experience of philosophic initiation, it is perhaps interesting to note at this point that in the deep meditations accompanying that initiation I went through a stage where the ego's consciousness was annihilated so utterly and where pure consciousness, not centred or divided in any way, was so overwhelming that God alone reigned as I AM. There was then no duality of person and Overself, no hint even of the cosmic mysteries involved in the vanished world's existence.

And that is really the Truth: there is no second entity or power. There is only God.