

Prefatory

Editor's Note: This file consists of a single type-written essay with very little editing. PB references the publication of "The Spiritual Crisis of Man" so we know that this essay is from a later time – and that it is, as its title states, prefatory to something. We do know that PB planned to write a final book titled "Summing Up" in which he planned to draw upon his many thousands of paras, and we know that this never happened.

This essay focusses on balancing one of the points PB felt he had failed to emphasize in his books: the need for developing a healthy body as well as healthy mind. He also expressed a desire to correct the impression that the Quest for the Overself was somehow easy, but that point is not discussed much in this essay. While the main point is quickly articulated, the reasons why, and the very long term consequences of either the presence or absence of a balanced view of the body, form the substance of this text. This is one of the few bits of continuous writing by PB which we have that is not already part of his published works, and it is also one of the last, making it of particular interest and importance.

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) Those who read The Spiritual Crisis of Man will remember that I brought the book to a close with chapters which depicted the portals of the Quest but which did not penetrate far beyond them. There was no attempt to venture an explanation in any detail at all of the physical aids which I hinted could make markedly easier the systematic reform and uplift of the seeker's mental and emotional life, nor was there any elaboration upon the bodily pressures tensions abstentions and cleansings which I merely mentioned could help to re-educate instinct and appetite, nerves and passions.

Here the attempt has been made; I have tried to give those explanations and elaborations. The fact that there are practical benefits from the use of these methods is only incidental to my purpose.

The other material is devoted to psychological, emotional and spiritual work connected with the Quest of the Overself, work that makes it a life of unceasing self-improvement. Out of the wide personal study and the continual observation of numerous cases throughout the world, I have tried to give helpful counsel and to discuss

problems from the seeker's point of view. At some time or other, everyone has to deal with such matters as the place of prayer, difficulties in meditation, the life of activity and the management of desire. Questions have often been asked me about them and the various other topics touched upon. The answers given here have been clearly defined so that they shall afford help for those otherwise unguided. The problems and situations, the

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(continued from the previous page) principles and teachings have been illumined by actual illustration taken from personal widely-scattered case histories. The exercises, of which many have been given, have been drawn both from ancient traditions and practical modern experience.

Every aspiring student who ventures to try to bring the Quest into application finds himself at times faced with problems which generations of seekers before him have also had to face. How to handle these problems successfully is something which he cannot too easily attain since competent personal instruction is hard to come by in these days. I have tried to discuss them, which cover a very wide ground² and which have been brought to my attention during the past quarter-century.

Some may express surprise or even criticism that any space at all, let alone a few chapters, should have been given to purely physical topics and exercises: surprise because the topics seem unrelated to the mystical and the metaphysical ones of earlier books; criticism because the exercises seem to drag the student's mind down the very material plane which he is trying to transcend. Yet it was a loin-clad teacher named Kartiswami whom I discovered in a curious artificial underground cave only twelve miles distant from the Maharishi³ of South India, a cave which he had had burrowed out and constructed for him, who maintained most emphatically that the Yoga of Physical Control was the proper foundation for the Yoga of Spiritual Development, and the proper beginning of it.

And it was no less a mystic than the Maharishi himself who, without going to Kartiswami's obvious extreme, thought that

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² The original editor deleted a comma by hand.

³ "Maharishee" in the original. Referring to Ramana Maharshi.

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(continued from the previous page) some attention to physical regimes ought to be allied to the mental ones. When my book The Secret Path was printed many years ago, I sent one of the first copies to the Maharishi. Eight months later I arrived in India for another extended visit, during part of which I went to stay with him. He told me he had read the book and had strongly recommended it to English-knowing Indians of the modern educated class, those who had little mystical faith or knowledge left in them. "However," he added, "there is one defect in it." I asked him to tell me what that was, and then he uttered this criticism: "It is not complete. It should have had a chapter on dietary restrictions. The Westerner should be told that his habits of eating meat, drinking intoxicating liquor and smoking tobacco, whatever effect they have on the ordinary man, bring impurities into the mind and make meditation more difficult for the spiritually aspiring man." I immediately accepted his criticism but explained that the omission was deliberate. In those years it seemed to me more important to awaken the Westerner to take a little sympathetic interest in the practice of meditation than it was to arouse his swift antagonism by attacking some of his most familiar daily habits. I felt sure that this could be done.

How far I succeeded in the first objective was the subject of appreciative comment by the late Margaret Wilson, daughter of the celebrated President of the United States. She once expressed the belief that as regards initiation into meditation I had given a real message to the West. It was an undeniable fact that when I first began to write on the subject it was a little known art to most Occidentals, however familiar it was

(continued from the previous page) to the Orientals. That was more than a quarter-century ago. I then publicly stated that restoration of its practice to an honoured place was an important part of my work. How contrasting is the situation today! Special chapels for the purpose of meditation have been constructed in the United Nations headquarters for the use of delegates and the staff; at the United States Capitol for the use of congressmen and senators, and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At the

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Hotel New Yorker, special rooms are open twenty-four hours a day for those persons desiring moments of contemplation and prayer. During a critical time of the war, B.B.C., the British Broadcasting Corporation, was persuaded to institute a "Silent Minute" period on its evening program which called for a quiet pause in the nation affairs to be used in meditation or prayer. There are now several churches in England and America where the sign "Open for Prayer and Mediation" is prominently displayed, and where the doors are kept open for this special purpose beyond the usual service hours.

As regards the second objective, which was the subject of the Maharishi's allusion, the fact is that my researches into religious, mystical and philosophic subjects have been of so many-sided a character that no narrow result could ultimately emerge from them. For instance, it will be noticed throughout this book that I have drawn contributions from Oriental knowledge and practice, including the less known systems of Indian yoga, but I have not limited myself to the Oriental systems. Indeed, it has been my aim here, as in all my earlier books, to create a synthesis of them with the best

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(continued from the previous page) of our own Occidental knowledge and practice. Such a synthesis is essential for those who wish to achieve the highest success in their endeavours; and I consider it will have to be made eventually – not only by those who follow the Quest, but by the leaders of Western culture itself.

How then, with such a broad aim in view, could I have failed to omit covering the subject of physical yoga during the years of my researches? More than twenty years ago I published some article about it in a British journal and even proposed to write a short book on the subject. But the publishers did not think there was sufficient public interest to justify their risk so the proposal was dropped. It was ahead of its time then, but there is no question that its time has now arrived. The interest in Oriental culture, which began as an interest in Oriental art, furniture, porcelain and tea as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was followed by the interest in Oriental religion and philosophy which began in the last quarter of the last century. An interest in Oriental mental hygiene developed during the second quarter of this century. The present interest in Oriental physical culture and physical hygiene started in several European countries a few years ago and has now spread to America. It will not only develop further⁷ but, along with the

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⁷ "farther" in the original, but that is incorrect in this context.

interest in dieting for purposes of weight reduction,⁸ in America and Europe⁹ these waves will in time ripple far beyond bodily concerns. They will not only fulfil their obvious and immediate function but as in the case of the Oriental physical hygiene will also fulfil a deeper function than relieving ailments, improving health and increasing vitality: this is to

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(continued from the previous page) prepare the way for interest in the devotional, mental and mystical yogas.

In the Orient itself there were several objectives combined in the physical level. Among them there was the intention to train the body to remain firm and steady during meditation. This promotes concentration of attention during the first stage, and helps to achieve mental stillness during the more advanced second stage. A further objective is to make the yogi the complete master of his body. If he succeeds he is able to get a grip on himself and force the body into greater obedience to the higher self. Many mistake the means for the end and fail to see these higher objectives, or are trained (or train themselves) to carry the exercises to fantastic extremes. This is deplorable and a waste of time and energy that could be given to the higher yogas. It is true that many, probably most, of the Oriental physical yogis, fakirs and dervishes are victims of this error in the end. They miss the chance to rise to higher levels and fail to perceive that the life of the body is only a means of attaining a higher purpose which leads far beyond it. They lack sensitivity subtlety and intuition and thus write their name in the lists of spiritual failure. Perhaps the greatest danger of excessive attention to physical yoga is that it leads to identification with the physical body, just as excessive attention to devotional mysticism leads to identification with the emotions. In each case the seekers stray away from the Goal of the Quest subtly and unwittingly.

But such thoughts do not invalidate the virtue out of which they develop. The mastery of the body is a highly desirable

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⁸ The original editor inserted a comma by hand.

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(continued from the previous page) virtue, not only on the so-called Spiritual Quest, but just as much in day to day living. That some of the postures used in the Oriental exercises are uncomfortable, others strange or dangerous, still others impossible to emulate by those who have lost their suppleness with advancing years is undoubtedly true and deplorable; but since I make no attempt to present the physical yoga system in its entirety here, nor even to copy any part of it blindly, there is no need to offer any excuses or to compose justifications. The practices drills regimes purifications and exercises described here are not wholly new, but some of the modifications are. In accord with the attitude I have learnt from philosophy, with its ideals of balance, co-ordination, practicality and helpfulness, I follow in this book my habitual practice of selecting adapting altering and then combining the ancient knowledge with modern scientific knowledge, and what I have learnt in countries of the Orient outside India with both. The reader can walk with safety where otherwise he would need to proceed with caution.

It is not only the Indians who use physical methods for their psycho-spiritual systems. The ancient temple hierophants of the Nile Valley did so, too. Some of their exercises have been pictured on the walls or Pharaonic tombs. The Coptic Christian occultists who succeeded them have inherited the secrets of some of the more dramatic and startling phenomena. Of such are Dr Tahra Bey about whom I wrote in A Search in Secret Egypt, and also Hamid Bey, who was trained from the age of six to achieve complete bodily mastery. The dervishes of Arabia and Syria and other Mediterranean lands who have

(continued from the previous page) mostly disappeared today use such methods too. Some of the exercises were devised to have a therapeutic value; others to achieve the glow of physical fitness. Granted that among these holy men there are men of different levels of understanding and different types of character; that the proportion are not at all holy, others mere beggars and so on; the fact remains that there is the tradition of seeking out the God among them, so it would be a misconception to see only the surface value of the ancient systems of physical yoga.

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A course of spiritual development which corrects the bad habits of the mind and purifies the feelings of the heart but shows no interest in the habits and conditions of the physical body is based on a one-sided concept of man. It is unbalanced. How can it yield any other than an unbalanced and incomplete result? Whether the body is ignored or considered, life must still be lived in its entirety by all human beings. This includes spiritually seeking human beings, and their bodies are still with them whatever they do or fail to do.

It is reasonable to suggest that we ought to understand something of the nature of the world in order to live in it more successfully and more harmoniously. The part of the world that is closest to us and most important for us is the body through which we experience it. To neglect that body or to ignore its needs is not necessarily a spiritual attitude. If it were then there must have been an error in the Divine Creation! It has its own value, place and purpose in the Divine World-Idea. They are high. At the present stage of

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(continued from the previous page) human existence there is no other way to durable spiritual development than through physical embodiments. The total sum of its varied experiences offer us the chance at first to learn and thus to progress, and later to overcome ourselves and thus to attain spiritual awareness. Through it the soul,¹⁴ sent by the World-Mind to gain experience and obtain growth, lives and functions in this world. Without it how could the soul¹⁵ get the necessary range of experience to bring into manifestation its potential powers of thought, imagination, understanding and decision at the lower level, and of ultimate consciousness at the higher level?

On this plane the body is indeed the only medium of our existence and not to be disconnected from our higher aspirations. A complete and competent spiritual instruction ought not to be so foolish as to neglect or overlook the physical frame of the disciple being instructed, but should see it with its several organs and higher senses as it truly is, that is, an expression of Infinite Intelligence through which he can gather the experience needed to become fully aware of his relation to that Intelligence. There is another and usually much less considered point of view to this matter: the body contains countless little lives which look to us as their protector and leader and guide, which need and should get from us kindly attention. Knowledge of the laws which govern its

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¹⁴ The original editor changed "Soul" to lowercase and inserted a comma by hand.

¹⁵ The original editor changed "Soul" to lowercase by hand.

sustenance, health and functioning, and which affect those lives is therefore a necessary step on the Quest and a necessary duty of man. It is true that most people misuse the body through ignorance of these laws and injure it through succumbing to weakness of will. It is

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(continued from the previous page) true that although it is only an instrument to be used for a certain higher purpose, they have perverted or ignored that purpose. It is true they have indulged the body's senses and some of its organs to the extent of making this force and artificial indulgence the main object of living. Yet despite these errors it still remains a sacred temple of the Holy Spirit and the useful servitor of man's progression.

The physical body is neither an enemy to be harshly treated nor an encumbrance to be sadly denounced. When through the Quest's disciplines man establishes proper control of it he will no longer regard it as the enemy of his spiritual aspirations, the paralysing weight of his spiritual being.

It was easy in earlier days to set up an opposition between body and soul when so little was known about the mind-body relationship. But in these days when the influence and moral character of malfunctioning organs, of nerve plexus and of endocrine glands is scientifically better known, when psychosomatic medicine is tracing a connecting line between negative thoughts and physical sicknesses, the place of the flesh in the life of spiritual aspiration is better understood although hardly better than it has been understood by the developed adepts of the ancient East and by a few seers of the modern West. This understanding reveals how susceptible the mind-force is, how the millions of tiny microorganisms which work together in a single community are the body. It is in truth and fact the Temple of the Spirit, a holy dwelling place wherein we are slowly learning lesson after lesson in the art of unfolding characteristics

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(continued from the previous page) and awareness which bring us closer to our God-like Goal. How could philosophy fail to respect it?

It is a curious paradox which few of his commentators seem to have noted that although Jesus declared his Kingdom was not of this world¹⁸ he put so much time and effort into healing sickness and disease which are very much of this world. It is difficult to resolve this contradiction. If Jesus despised the body as he is often supposed to have done, why then did he trouble to heal it?

The religious, mental and concentration path yogis who regale their souls with sneers at the misguided physical yogis; the theologians who look suspiciously at the flesh, unsure whether it is the handiwork of God or Satan; and the metaphysicians who dismiss it altogether as not worth the attention which they give exclusively to abstract things, are nevertheless unable to ignore the body when it falls sick. Whatever their opinion of it, they have then to take notice and take care of their physical tenement and get it treated. However much they despise the flesh they must still live in it. However much they argue the body away they must still use it. Behind every dismissive sentence directed against it there is a disquieting unbalance, an unhealthy refusal to face actuality which may draw on itself the punishment of malfunction, obstruction or sickness. If it is such a handicap why do they endure it at all? Why not discard it and live in the spirit world? Why waste time disciplining it when the simple act of committing suicide sets them free from its obstructive tactics?

Let us have a wiser balance! Why not sensibly and

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(continued from the previous page) philosophically accept having a body, limited always and troublesome occasionally though it may be? Why, indeed, should any spiritual seekers feel guilty simply because they have a body? Their penance would be better directed toward their real sin – that they surrender to the ego instead of surrendering the ego. Even the most inveterate idealist must admit that physical surroundings influence the mind to some extent, that climate does affect temperament, that alcohol can bring about dramatic change in a man's outlook and that illness never exhilarates but often depresses the feelings. There is too close a relation between body and mind, too much interaction between them to engage safely in any enterprise which proposes to reconstruct the mind and yet totally ignores the body. To be the master of oneself is to be the master of the body – one's instrument – as well as of the mind. And if the goal is

¹⁸ The original editor removed a comma after "world" by hand.

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both mental and physical, as it has to be if we are to live in the world of physical acts, a solely mental technique cannot be enough; a physical one needs to be added to complete it. But by getting the body under control, we shall find it easier to get the mind under control. There are physical aids with the general aim of self-mastery which may profitably be used just as there are physical hindrances which make the Quest harder.

Since the philosophical attainment of illumination is primarily a mental affair, the means to attain it are primarily mental also. That is why so prominent a place has been given in all traditions to mental exercises, devotional attitudes and emotional disciplines. But because man has to live in and use his physical body, and especially because there is

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(continued from the previous page) some influence of the body upon the mind, part of this means must necessarily be physical. The Quest has to be staged progressively like all journeys. It begins with the body, which must be clean, disciplined and controlled. Philosophy cannot be dissociated from a proper use of the physical organism. Why should it stop short with a proper use of the emotional nature or of the intellectual nature alone? The ancient Greeks' respect for the body, its cultivation of its vitality and beauty, can be joined to the ancient Hindus' fight against its desire and appetites. The ideals of the Greek Masters were not incompatible with those of the Indian ones. Both the athlete and sculptor of Greece and the Hatha yogi of India desired physical perfection although their ways to it were so different.

The cleansing process is simply one to remove the obstacles and push back the limitations on the seeker's spiritual journey. It has to be brought into all departments of his activity - his actions, his intentions, his words, his thoughts and his feelings - and along with them all into his body. The latter will correct its instincts which can then, whereas only brokenly and distortedly before, bring him information that is valuable for keeping the body as a pure temple of the Spirit. But artificial modes of living either pervert them so completely that the bad is taken for good until the body breaks down, or else represses these instincts so effectually that the ego gets more and more confused until the nerves break down. The body must be cleansed and refined at some stage of the Quest. If this is not done at the beginning, it will have to be done during the middle

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(continued from the previous page) stages. If the reformation of life, character and consciousness begins with the body, it will have to include the mind later. If it begins with the mind, it will have to include the body later - for the latter's influence on the mind will prove inescapable and will have to be brought into harmony with the Quest's ideal. Its pressure upon the mind in many cases is as powerful as the environment's pressure upon the body. The artist seeking to create beauty and the thinker seeking to discover truth and the mystic seeking to feel intuition are subject to this pressure during the earlier stages of their endeavours. They free themselves from it only when they can reach the deep rapt absorption of the later stages. This cleansing of the body, the emotions and the mind is an indispensable preparatory stage of the Quest. For the advanced techniques, it is a necessary means of clearing the way for the influx of spiritual forces during meditation. Meditation which is not accompanied by purification leads easily to pseudo-intuitions. The aspirant may follow at one and the same time the paths of purification and meditation, or he may place them in their logical order and attend to them consecutively. There is much to be said for both choices, although tradition has usually said that purification should precede meditation.

The food taken into the body, the emotions taken into the heart and the thoughts taken into the mind must be carefully screened as part of the disciplinary regime in the earlier and preparatory stages of the Quest. They must be refined and cleansed. This will protect against the misdirection of the life-giving forces which will be aroused

(continued from the previous page) and brought into them by the Quest's practices. It will enable seekers to receive without instruction the Light of the Overself and to reflect it in their activities. It will restore a truer health to them. The lower nature will no longer be able to prevent them from becoming aware of their higher nature.

The Western metaphysician or Indian yogi who is uninterested in the question of health merely because it concerns the condition of the despised body or of the unreal ego is unbalanced. The body has been formed ultimately out of the Divine Substance, out of the same light waves from which the entire universe has been formed. How then can we

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call it evil? No, what is evil is the body's rulership over the mind without regard for the higher purposes for which we temporarily live in it. Balance must be established between the needs of the body and the functioning of the inner life. If we undervalue the body and treat it as nothing then we take risks with its welfare and set up obstructions to our illumination. The body is an expression of the World-Mind and it is our duty to love and care for it in the right way and give the proper attention to its various needs. We must value health and realise the importance of the body's influence upon the emotion and intellect. In the highest Oriental philosophy – usually given only to the few – balance is allotted an important place. The philosopher will attend to the necessities of his bodily existence as carefully as to his spiritual existence.

It is not too difficult to get some sort of spiritual feeling, peace or awareness by simple means, especially by

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(continued from the previous page) fervent prayer or intense aspiration. The annals of religious experience, conversion and monasticism testify to that. But to get a fuller and deeper awareness, correct in its result and durable in its nature, is comparatively much harder and more demanding. The effort and practices required are more complex since the mind must be trained, emotions cleansed and the body disciplined, for they all affect each other and obstruct or help the attainment of the desirable result. Those who are not satisfied with less must be ready to pay the higher price than those who are. This is the reason why the way of spiritual self-discovery introduces physical exercises and techniques not commonly associated with religious seeking in the Western world. This is why anyone who is dissatisfied with the life of mere impulse and irrational habit and who wishes to bring it under his own control will have to practise exercises in some form. Now, exercise means accompanying discipline, restraint and the discomfort of change, all of which involve self-control. The saving power of this teaching is proportionate to, and dependent on, the self-control achieved by its followers.

It was an ancient Chinese sage, Lao-Tzu,²⁴ who said that those who conquered other men showed power but those who conquered themselves showed strength. On this Quest it is needful to calculate strength of will. The aspirant needs it to practise self-control, to overcome harmful desires and to reject negative thoughts. He needs it to gain control of his actions which result from those desires and thoughts. Only so can he obtain full victory over the

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²⁴ "Lao Tsu" in the original.

(continued from the previous page) animal part of his nature.

The body is to be his servant, a willing and obedient servant. But it can carry out his bidding properly only if it is trained to do so, and easily only if it is strong and healthy. A sick and diseased body is less able to obey the disciplining will and the reasoning mind than a healthy one. It becomes a gaol when it ought to be a temple. So far as right living will bring it to better condition, the aspirant who is strong enough and receptive enough will put himself willingly under the needed discipline to ensure those habits.

All through history, spiritual guides and religious prophets, ethical teachers and enrapt mystics have told humanity to elevate ideals, conduct, thought; to discipline self, passion, emotion; but they have seldom told humanity what practical procedure to adopt to make such drastic changes possible. How many good persons have found themselves in the disquieting position of St. Paul when the melancholy confession was wrung from him: "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do!" What is the use of urging them to live up to high ideals if they lack the means whereby this can be done? If a man is told to be good he is given counsel that may yet be worthless to him. If he is taught the Law of Recompense and told why it will profit him to be good, the counsel may appeal (should he be a reasonable man) but he may still lack the strength of will to implement it; he needs to be taught how to be good. The purification of the body is the first step in this direction.

(continued from the previous page) Anyone who takes philosophy seriously enough will have to take to its discipline. This will assault his formed habits just as much as its psychology will assault his self-conceit. His way of living – his diet, sleep and rest, for instance – will have to be examined and where necessary reformed. A real Truth-

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seeker is not only willing to search for and try out new ways but is actually eager to do so. The story of his regime is one of the dynamic reaching for the new, the untried.

Too many have been kept away from these ideas of reform because they have been associated with monomaniacs and eccentrics, with foolish diets and indiscriminate propaganda. Indeed, the Quester will need to keep these new habits to himself, for society, mesmerized by so many faults and timid conventions as it is, may ostracize him as an odd and peculiar person. Society's attitude is understandable and even pardonable; but why should a fellow Quester who does not care to adopt these habits or who rejects their value be intolerant of them? If an ideal or practice is believed by any other school of thought than the one which he happens to be following as being good in its time and just as right for its place, he ought not to belittle it. Why can he not simply turn aside and leave it to those who think they need it? He ought to recognise their perfect right to follow a different way of thought, even if it seems to him an inferior way.

The average person is disinclined to practise any technical method of self-discipline. Why should he voluntarily suffer a dislocation of his settled character, habit or routine which it involves? Why should he trouble to accept a bothersome or austere regime when he can more easily do without

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(continued from the previous page) it? Why should he put himself in training with special exercises if he is quite unfettered by obligation to do so? Why, in short, enforce hard labours or harsh curbs which society does not ask from him and which natural inclination resists? Alas, it is easier to get such a man to spend his money foolishly; he will work apathetically at self-possession.

It is needful to make the reminder that all these suggestions apply only to those who have definitely committed themselves to the Quest and not to those who accept the Truth but wish only to read and think about it, or to those who merely wish to acquire information about it, much less to those who are not at all concerned with it in any way whatsoever. It is indeed essential to understand that the restrictions and disciplines laid down here are not intended for ordinary persons with ordinary aims. The practices are for the use of a certain class of reader only. They have special ends in view and are often only temporary means to those ends: when their fulfilment is secured some of them may be dropped if desired, or kept up if the habit has become attractive. It is by the light of this particular intention that the instructions given should be read. This class is a

comparatively small one and those who do not feel the call to join its limited number are under no necessity at all to adopt the hard trainings described here. The worldling who is eager to make his life as comfortable and as easy as possible, as well as the self-indulgent weakling who seeks to cram it with pleasure, will not welcome such regimes.

The Quester who is not hard with himself and not

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(continued from the previous page) willing to reform his habits will not go so far or so quickly as the one who is both. Great yearnings for a better state are not enough; he must do something to gain it. When he first reads about these disciplines he may quite likely feel alarm, and as he continues to read he may even feel despair. Such severe austerities are not for us in the world, he thinks, but only for those in the cloister or the cave. Yet if he regards the regimes as inhumanly hard, what is there in them which is not comprised in the admonitions of Jesus and in the repeated counsel of the Apostle Paul to rule the flesh? The answer to those who can go along with the rightness of the theory but must stop before the difficulty of applying it is that the body is teachable. Physical habits are not set for all eternity but are amenable to a sort. The difficulty of these objectors in moving from the will to do what is right to the act itself resolves itself under the proper training.

If even such disciplining of the body, hardening of the will and the controlling of the emotions as Philosophy enjoins seems too stoical to be worth enduring, the question may be asked: is it not more prudent in an era, which has shown up the wickedness and weakness of man on so wide a scale, to develop strength little by little now, than to remain too unprepared and too weak to be able to react well enough to the times ahead for the human race – which seem to demand much greater strength from it than it shows today? Finally, it can only be said that people who have lost their way have to be taught the laws of higher living anew.

Whoever willingly practises these teachings and works

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(continued from the previous page) faithfully at these exercises will find that the body tends to become more and more the trained instrument of his will and purpose. As he grows in moral stature and psycho-physical planeness, he will come to see as the stoics saw that the compensation for all his disciplinary labour and self-denial is in the virtue and cleanness themselves. They will give him sufficient satisfaction and confer a happiness of their own.

When not only the prohibited actions themselves are no longer indulged in, but even the very thought or them is always absent, when they no longer appear attractive to the desire nature, then he may regard himself as having achieved this purification. If the entire program is fully carried out with an implacable ardour in the pursuit of such self-mastery he will become a re-born man.

Some people may misunderstand these recommendations to physical self and form as an espousal of joyless asceticism. This will dishearten or even frighten them, for few persons in these days can find either the requisite external circumstances or the requisite internal aspiration to adopt the regimes so often associated with austere monastic life. The admiration of asceticism for which the ancient and medieval world was famous is not shared by the modern world. It finds few eager followers today. Its pallid figures are not attractive.

Like all things, asceticism has its use which is to be admired and its abuse which is to be reprehended. Its history shows much unfortunate confusion of values. It has not only run to extremely exaggerated forms but also to wildly perverted

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(continued from the previous page) ones. It has in the past been extremely wide spread in the Orient, so much that if anyone there seeks to take up the pursuit of Spiritual Truth seriously he is told that he must become a completely inhibited ascetic, leaving the world, not drinking, not smoking, not eating meat, not marrying, or leaving his wife if he is already married. To a less extent, there were the same restrictions in medieval Christian Europe.

The balanced life of Philosophy does not run to these extremes. It does not consider physical pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment as evils to be ruthlessly eliminated. It accepts them but disciplines them and trains the impulse toward them. They are kept in the place where they belong and not allowed to interfere with the higher purposes of

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life. Comfortable surroundings and the artistic presentation of meals, for instance, may be indulged in as part of the human pursuit of happiness so long and so far as they do not weaken the resolute search for moral perfection and spiritual awareness. The ascetic who thinks good clothes and modern sanitation, for instance, are going to deprive him of spirituality had certainly better do without these things. The philosophical student, however, has no such fear because he has a somewhat different view of what constitutes spirituality: for him it is primarily a matter of the mind. He does not see any spiritual crime in demanding proper clothing, good food and some of the useful amenities of material resources and modern invention. He sees no sin against the Holy Ghost in sharing the lonely caravanserai or life first with a wife and then with a child or two if he feels such needs strongly enough.

The elderly bearded abbot of an Indian monastery where

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(continued from the previous page) I stayed for a while told me that as a young man he had crossed the country to live in the lower slopes of the Himalayas and devote himself to meditation. But he was unused to the freezing cold and misty dampness of the cave which he inhabited. After eighteen months he developed such acute rheumatism that he was unable to meditate at all, and had to abandon his enterprise and return to the warmer plains, where, he discovered in the end, he could master meditation and become an adept at it. The Abbe³² Vianney,³³ famous throughout France in the early nineteenth century as an ascetic holy priest, deliberately slept on bare damp boards to mortify himself and increase his holiness. He contracted severe neuralgia and suffered its torments for fifteen years. We may well ask, was such an extreme measure really necessary? – could he not have achieved his undoubted holiness just as well without it?

Admittedly, asceticism has a part to play in everyone's passage through earthly life and especially in the aspirant's. If he takes monastic vows he is put under discipline, if he remains in the world he must put himself under discipline otherwise there would be no difference between the world's values and his own Spiritual values. But asceticism is only a part of the means to his goal: it ought not to be made the complete goal in his life as it has indeed been made in those mystical circles where people have come to value it for its own sake alone. The discipline it provides should be sane, limited and controlled;

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³² The original editor changed "abbe" to "Abbé" by hand.

³³ Referring to John Vianney.

nor should it necessarily be confined to the monastic form only. We have to learn self-discipline and self-control, but these are qualities which

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(continued from the previous page) today are not less learned in the world than out of it.

The paramount factor of mysticism is essentially the mental and not the physical one. Renunciation is a new attitude of mind, not a new set of monkish robes. All the maturer mystics have come in time to see and to proclaim this irrefutable truth. The others who overrate external mysticism imperil their position, for where the giving up of outward satisfactions is wholly unnatural and wholly false there is certain to be an eventual reaction. When that happens the renunciation will itself be renounced, so that the effort and time put into it are wasted. In fact, the first words of the first sermon Buddha ever preached were addressed to five monks whom he warned against exaggerating the value of their asceticism!

There are valuable features in asceticism of which Philosophy gladly makes use. There is a time in most aspirant's lives when they must let its cool waves flow over them. So far-reaching a change of living habits must logically have equally far-reaching results. It does. They go all through the physical body which is obvious, and also all through the emotional and passional natures which is not quite so obvious. The ascetic regime was considered a necessity in ancient times in the study of philosophy for it helped externally to give the calmness, leisure, concentration and perseverance needed for the study. It was an effort to shake off bad emotional entanglements, exaggerated egoistic possessiveness and degrading bodily enslavements. Such an effort cannot be other than commendable. It was an attempt to bring passions into subjection to reason and to will.

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(continued from the previous page) Disciplines of the body conducted within reasonable limits and for limited periods are excellent. Philosophy puts them in their place, does not exaggerate them and does not abandon its balance for them. They prepare

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the way for the elementary experience and initiatory adventures of the Quest. But when excessive significance is attached to them or when they are carried out with exaggerated fanaticism they begin to do harm as well as good. The mind's balance is then upset. Indeed, the difference between a reasonable and moderate discipline such as is advocated here, and extreme ascetic austerity such as some have traditionally practised, is sometimes the difference between sanity and madness.

No ascetic discipline need be carried to an unnecessary extreme, nor further than its proper intention – which is to give physical self-control. The aspirant is not called on to forego some things and abstain from others merely because it is traditional in asceticism to do so, for he may reject a number or those traditions as unnecessarily self-martyring. If he is called upon for any of these abstentions in Philosophy it is because they give strength to his will, protection to his meditations, purity and fitness to his body.

He is not asked to bear a cross of suffering in anguish but to carry a staff of support in joy! The fanatics and extremists have made asceticism at once their strength and their weakness. The philosophers have made it a useful instrument for their perfectly balanced manifold purposes.

There is another side of asceticism whose original intention of reducing worldly entanglements to a minimum is

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(continued from the previous page) excellent, but whose common degeneration is not. That intention served to curb the desire for luxury at some point, and to simplify the life at another point. Modern existence is too often cluttered with too many material possessions. These demand care and attention, time and energy, thought and feeling, which the average Quester is rarely able to find enough of to provide for study, reflection and meditation anyway. Somewhere he will probably have to sacrifice something if he is to gain them for his spiritual need. A time usually comes when he finds it desirable to reorganise his way of life so as not to be encumbered by so many things. It may not be easy and it will not be pleasant to strip himself of many unessential objects. Yet if he trains himself to demand less physical luxury and fewer physical gadgets this will put him in a better position to get control of his desires, strengthen his will and so to master himself. Even those who are unwilling to go so far and who are unattracted by the prospect of a simpler life must recognise the legitimacy of this attitude. A rigidly ascetic vow of poverty is not only unnecessary but also for most of us impracticable. The Indian

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yogi can successfully beg his way across his country; the tropic dweller can manage to exist on very few necessities, but the Euro-American can hardly be expected to do the same. If he were to get away from all possessions without at the same time getting into a monastery he would find outward trouble and not inner peace. To have this he must have some money. But, by simplifying his way of life and reducing his social ambitions, he need not strive so hard to get the money he really needs.

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(continued from the previous page) Yet even this worthy objective has been turned too often by foolish ascetics into a worship of unnecessary squalor, discomfort and torment; into a rejection of beautiful things and a repudiation of art; into a high valuation of drab and uncomfortable things, as well as into a deliberate repression of the finer aesthetic feelings. How foolish their attitude is can be judged by the methods given in my book The Quest of the Overself for using those very feelings as valuable helps in mastering the art of meditation.

The proper intention of mortifying the lust of luxury is to keep a man from getting too much involved in earthly things. It is an arguable point as to where luxury begins, for obviously the line will rise higher as a man's station in life, or professional circumstances, rise higher. It is arguable, too, how far the fine surroundings and beautiful objects are necessities or luxuries. Asceticism has often set itself flatly against these things. Yet if the Quest leads to the very spirit of beauty itself, why should one of the means adopted to that end be the joyless, puritanical denial of all beautiful expressions and a deliberate cultivation of ugly ones? A simpler life, avoiding the perils which accompany ambition, avarice or luxury, may be desirable; but a severer one, holding in contempt things which are valuable for human refinement and well being, is not. To give a part of one's life to a sane restricted disciplining is good and strengthening, but to give the whole of it to bleak denial and utter negation is bad and unbalancing.

In earlier writings I made some criticism of the concept of an antinomy between body and soul and of the fanatical

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(continued from the previous page) self-tormenting type of asceticism which espoused it. The real objection was to the metaphysical error which failed to see that the flesh was the temple of the Spirit and that the body was to be studied and respected as such. The extremists sought to punish the flesh masochistically and often uselessly. Moreover, they fell into a sort of spiritual pit³⁹ far too easily and exalted themselves far above those who did not think as they did.

A sane and balanced asceticism, on the contrary, should seek to make the body clean, purified, disciplined and obedient to the highest dictates of intuition, reason and will. It should consider the body also as a symbol of the entire universe, reflecting in design and operation the same Infinite Intelligence there discernible. Such an asceticism is worthy of the highest regard.

If for years I opposed the extreme forms taken by asceticism and pleaded for milder forms, another of the reasons why I did this is because so few people have the capacity to adopt them. But, by showing a liveable attainable way for modern times, many people actually became aspirants who would otherwise have shrunk in dismay from applying the spiritual teaching they read about. In this way many were brought into the study who would not have touched it otherwise. I tried to make the Quest a little easier than I found it – less formidable to the eyes and more suited to the capacities of modern man.

I must repeat the warning that those chapters which deal with the physical regimes, yoga exercises and disciplines ought not to get undue and disproportionate attention,

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(continued from the previous page) for they represent an elementary and not an advanced outlook. They are intended to help beginners who usually find it difficult, first, to understand the metaphysical teachings; second, to practise the mystical exercises; third, to adopt the attitude of seeking God or the Overself above all other things, and, fourth, to abandon their identification with the personal consciousness. They cannot jump into the advanced ideas or practices but must develop by slow degrees. These physical methods are a help to such earlier development, but in the end, if the beginner is to advance at all, he will have to rise to the study of the metaphysics of Truth and to

³⁹ “pie” in the original; we were tempted to leave it but... – TJS, 2020

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the practice of the exercises in mystical meditation. For only so can he outgrow the universal human conception of our selves. Only so can he rise out of the wide spread mesmerism of this world and illusion of this body into actual realisation of Jesus' statement: "I and My Father are One," meaning that there is only One Infinite and Eternal Reality, Life, Power and Mind, that This alone is all there really is, and that there are not even two Powers, Reality and illusion - for Reality exists alone as unsullied, undivided and unpersonalised Consciousness.

From that exalted height all these physical regimes and purificatory austerities assume [an]⁴¹ insignificant importance and the intuitive feeling and rational understanding of Consciousness, Reality and Self an immense one.

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⁴¹ "an" was typed above the line and inserted with a caret.

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