

Pages from:

*The Diffusion of Sufi Ideas in the West*

*An Anthology of New Writings By and About Idries Shah*

Edited by Leonard Lewin  
Keysign Press, Boulder, Colorado (1972)

Man is asleep. Must he die before he wakes up?

Idries Shah, *The Dreamwalkers*

There are different kinds of 'awakening.' Man may be asleep, but he must awake in the right way. One necessity is that when he is awake, he will also have the means to profit by his wakefulness. It is preparation for this profiting, as well as preparation for the wakening, which is our current endeavor.

*Precepts*

## Preface

### *The Emergence of Mankind from the Chrysalis*



The Institute for Research on the Dissemination of Human Knowledge (IRDHK) is a non-profit corporation founded for the purpose of advancing public education and information in certain selected areas, with the aim of stimulating a wholesome forward movement in the development of both the individual and the local society in which he operates, and of which he forms an integral part.

The 'knowledge' referred to is contained both in the products of current Western thought, particularly in the fields of sociology and behaviorism; and also in the so-called ancient wisdoms, often, but quite erroneously, associated only with Eastern philosophies. Since the central core of this wisdom is experiential rather than informational, the ways in which it can be transmitted and presented depend essentially on a particular form of human contact and involvement; though some aspects of it can be written down and transmitted in literary forms.

This written material, now available, has been revealed for the first time in the West only in the last few years and stems from the pen of Idries Shah, Director of Studies of the Institute for Cultural Research, a learned society in England. The material, much of it in the form of stories (superficially resembling parables) is valuable reading,

not only as entertainment, but primarily because, encoded in narrative form, it embodies the essential wisdoms which constitute a part of the priceless cultural heritage of all mankind.

In the incredibly complicated and ever more rapidly changing setting which is today's world, many traditional values are now seriously under challenge, while new ones vie for support.

To most observers it is far from clear what it is that is taking place; what fresh patterns of human thought and activity may be emerging from the matrix of mankind's vast evolutionary past.

When the present upheaval which is beginning to manifest in social and cultural unrest, both national and international, has finally disclosed the true nature of the world of tomorrow, we can all then participate in that knowledge of the further evolution of the human state. But meanwhile, in the present uncertainty and confusion, many must be asking such questions as, 'What *really* is happening?' or, 'What does it all *really* mean?' or just, 'Where do we go from here?'

To answer such questions when in the midst of it all is not easy if only because, preoccupied in day-to-day details, one cannot readily discern the wood for the trees. The familiar can be a bridge to the unfamiliar. Sometimes a well-chosen analogy can be used to enable one to stand back, as it were, and survey the scene from a greater distance. The appropriateness of any such analogies can then be assessed by the insights that they ultimately bring; and this is indeed the only valid criterion to apply since, after all, this is precisely what they were

introduced to accomplish.

Here, then, is one such:

*Transformation.* What does the caterpillar know of the destiny of the butterfly? The caterpillar eats and eats and eats, and grows and grows, molting its skin a number of times, until, under the influence mainly of internal factors (themselves the product of external factors via evolutionary forces acting over a long period of time), the caterpillar changes its mode of living and turns into an apparently quiescent chrysalis. Again under the influence of internal and external factors, the contents of the chrysalis are transformed and restructured until a butterfly, long latent within, begins to take form. Shortly before emergence its outline can be clearly seen inside the pupal case. At last it breaks through the protective casing (provided the latter has not hardened to excess to form a prison's walls) and the mature insect emerges to fulfill its destiny.

A butterfly does not look at all like a caterpillar, yet it is, in some sense, the inevitable eventual form that it must take.

Mankind is now preparing to emerge from the chrysalis. Not his physical form, but the quality of his consciousness is about to undergo a transformation to a new condition long latent within. The protective casing which must be breached is a mental prison-shell compounded of vanity, self-love, self-deceit, greed, mental arrogance, prejudice, selfishness, and years and years and years of conditioning.

In all cultures, and at all times, a few, a very

few, individuals have been able to free themselves, and have helped others also to escape. Now this opportunity is being made available to all who are able to perceive its reality. The social turmoil, of our times can be seen as an external manifestation of this process.

The analogy to the caterpillar's transformation is a weak one because it is too *superficial*. The purpose of the description was to help guide the imagination in a realistic and constructive way. But the mind is *much* more complex than this. Most of its operation is beyond the reach of consciousness. An analogy, to be fully effective, must relate also to those deeper levels. This is the function of the so-called Teaching Story, whose inner structure relates simultaneously to the different levels of the individual's mental organization.

Like a formula in, say, physics or chemistry, it relates different variables in a way which *quite precisely* corresponds to the way these things are related in actuality. And, also like the formula, it requires a correct practical setting to reveal the full nature of the reality which, compactly encoded in symbolic form, resides latent within the pattern of its structure.

It should, perhaps, be emphasized that these creations are highly ingenious and sophisticated works of art, though their true character is never perceived in its entirety at first glance. They have to be 'lived' with, and 'worked' with, in order to reveal their secrets: as is indeed the case with, for example, the equations of physics -- who would have suspected that so simple a relation as Einstein's

famous energy relation  $e = mc^2$  could underpin anything so dramatic as, say, the tremendous release of atomic energy with which we are now so familiar? And so it is with the constructions called Teaching Stories.

This present collection of pieces by Idries Shah, and of writings about him and associated activities he is supporting, has been produced under the auspices of the IRDHK. It is being issued in the hope that it will succeed in bringing to a wider audience the existence of this very important medium for the transmission of human knowledge; so that, ultimately, it may enable many to respond with new vision to that ever more pressing question: 'Where do we go from here?'

The reader can assist in this. For he is offered, at this very moment, the opportunity of beginning to couple to the operation of slipping through the veil of conditioning, if now he will freely undertake, for the sake of the further dissemination of this material, and not in expectation of reaping personal reward, to engage in the distribution of this publication.

'What is done for you -- allow it to be done.  
What you must do yourself -- make sure you do it.'\*

Leonard Lewin, December 1971

\* Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*.



yogi exclaimed: 'In all my years of meditation and discipline I have never approached such depths of knowledge! May I travel with you?' After some days the yogi said: 'Now that we know each other better, do please tell me how the fish saved your life?' The dervish replied: 'Now that we know each other better, I doubt whether it is any use telling you, but I will: I had not eaten for three days, and I was starving. That fish saved my life all right.'

Sufism works through such jokes as this one, books, lectures, all sorts of everyday activities. A Sufi can be a scientist, a politician, a poet, a housewife, the usherette in the cinema and may never be known as one, since Sufism may have nothing to do with outward appearance and behavior. It is in operation all the time, all over the world, in every country, sometimes openly, sometimes not. The people offering it can be well-known, as it were, beating a drum to say, 'We are here.' Or they may teach secretly.

But what, you ask, *are* they teaching? What is Sufism? In a Persian dictionary, the entry for Sufi goes, in rhyme: 'Sufi chist? Sufi Sufi'st. .. "A Sufi is a Sufi.' This is not a form of coyness but an acknowledgement of the difficulty of defining something that must be experienced and in a different way for every person according to his or her state of development. 'God is love' can be the highest experience man can have, or some words scrawled on a poster carried by a poor old tramp -- in between are a thousand levels of experience. How to guide the student from one level to the next is the knowledge of the Teacher.

'Man must develop by his own effort, toward growth of an evolutionary nature, stabilizing his consciousness. He has within him an essence, initially tiny, shining, precious. Development depends upon man, but must start through a teacher. When the mind is cultivated correctly and suitably, the consciousness is translated to a sublime plane.' (from *The Sufis* by Idries Shah). As Robert Graves wrote in his introduction to this book: 'The earliest known theory of conscious evolution is of Sufi origin.... The child's slow progress into manhood or womanhood figures as only a stage in his development ... for which the dynamic force is love, not either asceticism or the intellect.'

Now, all this is at a far remove from the sort of thinking regarded by us as 'rational.' But it is no odder than things we do believe or institutions we take for granted. In the West we all live beside one version or another of Christianity and believe, half believe, or have to put up with some pretty bizarre ideas. Perhaps the most useful thing I personally have been invited to do in my own approach towards Sufi study is to 'find out why you believe the things you do believe; examine the bases of your ideas.'

Here is an approach to this philosophy that may seem a long way around; it is to take a look at those great Islamic civilizations that blossomed all over the Near East, Spain, Central Asia, North and West Africa, for a thousand years or more. In these, Sufism was always a strong visible force, dervishes being kings, soldiers, poets, astronomers, educators, advisers, sages. Sufism was the core of Islam. The contention is that the river of knowledge

'from beyond the stars' that has run since Adam, through Noah and Abraham, and on through a hundred wise men and prophets, ran also through Jesus and then Mohammed. It is not a question of one's being better or worse than another, smaller or greater, but of these men's being different aspects of the same Truth, or Way, manifesting as Divine Messengers. Both started world religions, both fed the inner heart of religion. During early Christianity this inner knowledge was available, then was lost, or went underground. But it was able to survive the death of Mohammed and his Companions and to illuminate Islam wherever it took root.

But it is very hard for us to look in this direction at all. Our history has made it almost impossible. You can try this small experiment: Go down to the nearest paperback-book shop, and leaf through the first dozen textbooks on popular astronomy, the history of art, meteorology, medicine, psychiatry, archaeology. In each will be found versions of the following: 'Between the decline of Greece and Copernicus, science stagnated in superstition.' 'Those temperate latitudes in which all civilization has flowered.' 'Europe, the cradle of civilization ...' 'Science was the creation of the Renaissance in Europe.' 'Before Freud the unconscious did not exist.' 'Jung's theory of the archetype ....' A much trumpeted, and very flattering, history of civilization, on television, is the history of art in Europe -- with a few side-glances elsewhere.

This attitude is always implicit in our scholarship. It is one of the great pillars of our thought; but while Europe lay in the dark for centuries,

marvelous civilizations brought some sciences to levels we have not approached -- medicine and psychiatry among them. Individually, each one of us may or may not be Christian; but like it or not, we are steeped in Christian history. The centuries-long wars with Islam are done with; but the residual mental blocks, the myopia, the parochialism, still cripple our thinking. Nor is it only Islamic cultures that suffer from our prejudices. When Copernicus and Galileo discovered that the earth went around the sun, this knowledge was not only a commonplace in Islamic cultures, but, in Darkest Africa, cultures that our scholars are only just beginning to notice, let alone study, taught that the earth was the sun's planet. Long before Lister had to fight the medical hierarchy about germs and infection, African witch doctors were using antisepsis and other advanced medical techniques.

It is almost impossible for us to see Europe as it was, a little dark provincial fringe to great civilizations that sent emissaries, advisers, missionaries out of the plenitude of their arts and sciences to help the barbarians.

Then Europe came forward, in its particular contribution to human knowledge, technology; and it was the turn of the others to fall back. The newcomer, like an adolescent, has had to believe that he was the first to experience or to understand anything. But already this insularity is beginning to break down. When there has been an area of prejudice in a culture, a dam in the mind, the time of its dissolving is always exciting, one of sudden unexpected advance. As one researcher put it: 'It is

exactly as if great heaps of treasure were lying about in the open; but we were looking in another direction, we were hypnotized by the words Greece and Rome.'

But Sufism is not a study of past civilizations - it must be contemporary, or it is nothing. Why is it being offered again in the West now? For the simplest of reasons -- Sufism works openly where it can, silently when it must. Even fifty years ago, the churches had so strong a hold on thought and morals that the introduction of this ancient way of thinking would have been impossible. But in an Open Society, Sufism can be offered openly; and perhaps we can now look calmly at the claim that it is a philosophy that can be hostile to no true religion, since all religions are the outer faces of an inner truth. As for people like myself, unable to admire organized religions of any kind, then this philosophy shows where to look for answers to questions put by society and by experience -- questions not answered by the official purveyors of knowledge, secular or sacred.

'Man has had the possibility of conscious development for ten thousand years,' say the Sufis. This thought shows itself differently in the claim that man is woefully underused, undervalued, and does not know his own capacities. I have believed this all my life, and that the idea is central to Sufism is one reason I was attracted to it. Put it this way: In a circus, every child born to a certain family will become a wonderful acrobat. Is this because these children have "acrobat's genes" or because they are expected to be acrobats? The implications shatter

our assumptions about education. I must have read hundreds of manuscripts in my time. Very early I saw that these authors have every bit as much talent as I have: All writers' early efforts are very similar. But some writers go on writing, others fall out: We live in a society where we all think in terms of success or failure. I am sure that the manifold talents, creativity, inventiveness of young children -- who can sing and dance and draw and tell tales and make verses and whose view of life is so very clear and direct -- could go on into adult life and not disappear, as tends to happen in our system of education.

We see as quite different the process of intense concentration of the scientist or artist that results in flashes of extraordinary achievement, telepathy, second sight, hunches, the intimations of dreams ... but these are seen by the Sufis as manifestations of the same thing, the first stirrings of this evolving part of humanity. But it is easy to waste this potential, for instance, by using drugs to stimulate the brain or by self-induced ecstasies. 'It is only those who taste, who can know,' say the Sufis, reiterating that this experience is not a question of intellectual development.

Every person comes to a point when the need is felt for further inner growth. Then it is wise to look for the Guide, the Teacher, the Exemplar, the figure central to Sufism, who shows others what is possible. This person, the product of a certain kind of varied and intensive education, will be master not of one trade but of a dozen, learned through pressures of necessity, created by the people by

whom he has been surrounded from birth, people whose duty it is to see that he should fulfill all his capacities. The child will be protected from the narrowing and littling of ordinary education, from the idea that a person can be a tinker or a tailor but not both, or if both, then he is to be congratulated on his versatility.

In Sufism the notion of 'two cultures' is nonexistent; the idea that the arts and the sciences must be hostile, absurd. Of the great figures who have successfully combined mathematics and poetry (and much else), perhaps Omar Khayyam is best known in the West. The products of Sufi schools are people who are prodigies from our point of view. Our forms of education produce nothing like them. People who, in our violent time, get whirled out of their little ruts through different countries, climates, ideas, languages, who have had to learn to earn their living in varied ways, who lose the arrogance of class and race are more likely to approach the Sufi idea of the whole man.

Idries Shah, who is bringing Sufism into the West now, is the product of this intensively varied education. He has been living in Britain for fifteen years and in that time has re-established Sufism as a vital force. He exemplifies Sufic versatility. For instance, he has just helped to decipher and to have performed ancient Egyptian music unheard by man for three and a half millenia. He has patented scientific devices. He has been journalist, explorer, traveler; has studied archaeology, geology, economics, politics.

He writes books on travel, anthropology, magic,

Sufism, each unique in its field. He writes Sufic fables and stories of his own. He has written a prizewinning film script. He corresponds in Arabic, Persian, English, French, Spanish with experts in a dozen different fields. He is a husband, the father of three, and runs, from his home, the Institute for Cultural Research, which has hundreds of members and is in vigorous operation. Two years ago he started a publishing firm, which has already put out a dozen books, all successful. But he would say: 'Perhaps it is not me, but your ideas about the possibilities of man that are extraordinary.' And he discourages all those who approach him with the idea of finding a 'guru.'

It does not do to say that a man, a book, an institution is Sufism, which is essentially something always the same, but taking different forms. 'If you encounter two institutions calling themselves Sufic, exactly the same, one of them must be a fake.'

Those who are likely to recognize a Sufic current are those with noses for the fresh and the lively; and this thing might be anything from a person, a book, a sharply angled statement by a physicist at a conference, the attitude of a politician, a new trend in fashion, a poem, a play, a garden planted and tended in a certain way. In every part of the world, the forms of Sufism differ, since they are shaped to fit the people living there. The way Sufism is being taught in Britain now differs from what happens in Morocco, Afghanistan, Greece, South America; the teachers and the institutions containing Sufism for this time are different from those in the past, and always changing ... a far cry

from what our conditioning has taught us to call 'mysticism.' Before you can even start on Sufic study, you must first try to 'learn how to learn' -and everything is unexpected.

Sometimes, when we look back over our lives, we may think: 'I learned more through that experience than in all the rest of my life put together;' and the experience may be a tough job of work, a phase of a marriage, a serious love, an illness, a nervous breakdown. This way of learning, a time of crammed thoughtful living, is perhaps nearer to the learning of the Sufi Way than any other.

*Part II*  
SUFISTUDY MATERIAL

## A Note on Sufi Study Groups

Study material comes in different forms. Literary writings include pieces for the presentation of new information, writings for indicating new ways of looking at established ideas, and Teaching Stories, a highly developed form of narrative whose contents and structure relate simultaneously to several levels of understanding in the individual.

Many of these stories have now appeared in book form, though not all have been published in books. From time to time new books may appear with a timely release of new material.

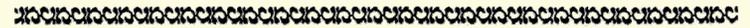
Among titles published by Idries Shah the following are particularly relevant to these studies:

The Sufis  
Tales of the Dervishes  
Caravan of Dreams  
The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin  
Reflections  
The Way of the Sufi  
The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin  
Wisdom of the Idiots  
The Book of the Book  
The Dermis Probe  
Thinkers of the East  
The Magic Monastery

Groups for the intensive study of this and other material proceed by a thorough familiarization with the contents of these writings: the student is asked to 'soak' himself in them, as rain soaks into the earth. Guidance of these studies through a 'deputy' who is in contact with the source of the material is essential for the proper development of a study group.

The following two pieces have been selected as being somewhat typical of these writings. When reading them, the context of their intended use should be borne in mind.

## First Statement



Man, like a sleepwalker who suddenly 'comes to' on some lonely road, has in general no correct idea as to his origins or his destiny. In ordinary life he is a prey to influences of many kinds. Some of these he knows about, others he does not know, or else considers them not to be influences which can be modified, but as inevitabilities.

He cannot evaluate what is happening to him qualitatively, or the means of control or direction of his psychological activity. He will admit, for instance, ambition, and will see how it seems to work. He will go further, seeing what seem to be the origins of ambition. But he will never, in the ordinary way, be able to find the basic factor which dominates, say, ambition. He therefore seeks refuge in concepts which are merely giving another name to things, thus conveying the impression that he knows what they mean. Take the word *ambition*. *Man* will say that he has an inner urge to struggle, to attain something. Why has he this tendency? He will say it is because there is a sexual drive, for instance. Why this drive? Because he has to propagate his species. Why this propagation? Because it is his nature. Why is it his nature? He does not know. No matter how sophisticated his arguments become, he cannot avoid this fact.

The creature called man, however, is also hazily aware that there is a 'world beyond;' another dimension, or something more than what he ordinarily knows. Accustomed to seeking answers in certain ways alone, he cannot make contact with this vital element, the only thing that will help him in his dilemma.

Consequently he goes around in circles. These circles take one of the following forms, or some variation of them:

1. He constructs systems to try to penetrate into the 'unknown territory.' But these systems do not work, because they are constructed on the basis of systems which he used for other purposes: for the purpose of making his 'prison' intelligible to him.

2. He adapts traditional teachings, and warps them until they no longer function in the way in which they should. He has infected them with the 'prison germ.'

3. He opts out, and settles for a substitute equilibrium, in which he lives according to a system which is obviously not complete, but which answers some of the questions. The ones which he cannot answer are 'swept under the carpet.'

There is, however, another way out of this maze. There has been so much misunderstanding about this 'Way' that in most cases it is altered so as to be unrecognizable as what it really is. What is this Way?

The Way is the product of a certain form of scientific specialization over a number of centuries. It is nothing less than the discovery of certain laws and their application. There are many ways of putting this.. One of them, recognizable to most people,

is that this is the method of breaking through the familiar limitations, gaining knowledge by unfamiliar methods; the method passed down through the millennia as the 'inner doctrine' of religions. It is nothing less than the discovery of the meaning of man.

At this point all that can be said about the meaning of man is that it is evolutionary. Man has the capacity and the duty to make the bridge between himself and the rest of creation. He attempts this in the physical world by technological and material methods. In his 'psychic' life he tries to do the same thing. But outside of the schools which specialize in this teaching, he still lacks the knowledge of how to prepare himself for this: how to learn how to learn, how to stabilize his consciousness. He is consequently beaten before he starts, because with his usual, unstable consciousness he can do almost nothing.

In a more or less disguised form, most religious systems have taught this fact. What confuses people about them is the fact that religions in general have obeyed the physical law of this planet whereby there is a constant warping towards repetitiousness. The aim rapidly becomes lost. The system becomes automatism. Further, the distinction between social stabilization aimed at by religion and the further aim of preparing certain people for an inner teaching is lost. The religion becomes an instrument of social domination, no more. As this happens, the emotional factor creeps in. Before long this emotional factor becomes so strong that it is assumed that religion is based entirely upon emotion. The 'secret protects itself.'

The automatism of the world, like a parasite, takes over most forms of human thinking and nullifies it. This happens in politics and philosophy as much as in religion. Modern science and philosophy are incapable of studying the 'Way' of which we are speaking for certain very real and obvious reasons:

1. The subjectivity of the scientist, reared in a physical world interested only in what it calls 'consistent results.' Since the minds of these people are not stabilized, they are compelled to work only in narrow fields where the non-equilibrated mind can operate.

2. The assumption, taken from familiar experience, that psychological phenomena must work in a way similar to crude 'worldly' workings. This is partly a semantic difficulty, because words are full of associations derived from primitive experience or attached to them by day-to-day impacts. We are dealing with a completely different science, and it must be pursued by means of itself, its own laws.

Since these laws have no obvious applications in the familiar world, they form no part of ordinary human study. Indeed, they are so sensitive that they can easily be overlooked, discounted, ignored. The 'secret protects itself.'

It can be said in one sense that these laws, for the average man, do not exist. They do not, in the sense in which the light of a candle does not seem to exist if you place it in a powerful beam. If, however, there is a reason for your placing the candle there, it can be performing a function. It cannot be said 'not to exist' except for the electrician. The electrician, because of his preoccupation with electricity,

is blind to the candle. This, however, does not negate the candle's existence or function.

Although there is no other way out for man than to capture the sense of his meaning through the only possible way of becoming conscious of it, he often acts as if he does not want to believe this. Why?

Because:

- a.* He has heard of many psychological, religious and metaphysical systems and assumes that they could not have survived if there was no truth in them. This, in turn, makes him think that if he only gives the time and work to them he will find truth through one or other of them. This assumption is ridiculous and untrue.

- b.* He has generally been *trained* to believe that he can work out his own salvation, by means of struggle. All he has to do is to struggle hard enough to understand, and he will be able to understand. This is absolutely untrue. It is not a fact at all, but a generalization derived from his primitive experience gained in dominating his material environment. It does not apply in the psychological field.

What are the requirements of this Way?

The Way requires:

1. A teacher, who has been that way before;
2. The individual whose consciousness is correctly orientated, so that he can make use of the material which is given to him;
3. A group of such people.

To this extent, then, the Way does partake of the nature of enterprises carried on in the familiar social context. All of the three factors must operate correctly in order to make possible the transition of

the human consciousness from its crude state to the refinement which is needed before the individual and the group reach the stage where they can be called either integrated minds or conscious people.

Certain physical conditions are necessary even before such a situation (a teaching situation) can exist. The human community is involved in an evolutionary movement. The existence of the teacher and the community in a given place is connected, by cosmic laws, with a necessity of the community. There is, in fact, an organic situation of which the psychological position is merely a part.

The average man, seeking 'knowledge' or 'enlightenment,' does not pause to wonder whether these conditions exist. In general, he has not the first conception of this fact. He does not even wonder whether he is inherently or otherwise equipped for the undertaking of 'improving himself.'

The consequences of this disastrous shortcoming follow all too fatefully ..

He continues to revolve in circular thinking, deceived by the seeming variety of the 'ways' of human development or improvement into thinking that he has a varied life and experience. He may shun all the 'ways;' he may dabble with many of them. In no case is he generally equipped to do either thing. But he has the absurd notion that he is.

He has absolutely no objective yardstick with which to measure or assess:

- i) What he needs;
- ii) How to get it;
- iii) What is true;
- iv) What is false.

He knows some or all of these things only in certain limited senses.

This does not prevent him from pretending to himself and others either that he does know, or that he could know. This is a self-deception. We call it 'lying.'

In order to progress beyond this highly unsatisfactory stage, in order to start to fulfill his destiny, man must:

- i) Recognize the foregoing facts;
- ii) Detach himself to some extent from the automatism which surrounds and penetrates him;
- iii) Work towards his liberation and fulfillment.

People at all times have suspected, more or less correctly, that these are the ways to attain the human need for meaningful activity. Ordinary man, however, does not know how, when, where or with whom to start to carry out such an enterprise.

This enterprise can be started and carried out only when certain conditions are fulfilled. The knowledge of what these conditions are has been transmitted from the most ancient times to those who carry on this work. This knowledge is a characteristic of certain individuals and a mark of their quality. It is not common property. In assuming that he can acquire this knowledge by conventional thinking the ordinary man is making a considerable mistake at the earliest stage of his thinking. Such a person is not worthy of the knowledge, and so cannot get even to its threshold. Thus, the 'secret protects itself.'

Western man is accustomed to thinking at times of the East as a place of mystery, where immemorial traditions are respected and where strange religious and occult practices are carried on. Like many Easterners themselves, he is unaware of what practical, urgently serious, activity lies behind this outward picture. Like many an Oriental, he tends to be deceived by outward show, and will follow an attractive and emotional facade or personality, gaining a temporary illusion of 'meaning' or 'sanctity.'

The actual fact is that in the East there are some places where the 'Work,' the 'Way,' is carried on with a dedication and outlay of efficient, meaningful, patient and conscious force, with a scientific purposefulness utterly unsuspected by the crude emotional thinker or sensation-seeker.

For the most part, this activity follows the path of its organic necessity. It is not, therefore, to be contacted by making hopeful journeys or being enrolled by some 'teacher,' however mysterious he may appear.

The 'Work' has been concentrated in the East for many centuries for very real and definite reasons. One of them is geographical or physical. Another is that the community, in general, contains, in a form of transmitted cultural values, important elements which can be used in furthering man's development. These elements, in the Western scramble for material progress at whatever cost, have fallen into disuse in the West. They are of no cash value.

From time to time, there has been a movement of inner teaching from the East to the West. This

has been a part of an organic necessity. Few people know how and why this process has worked. At the present moment there is a process of this kind, only of immeasurably greater import, at work. From time to time, let us say, it becomes necessary to graft a plant upon the root which has been growing somewhere, whose own fruit has ceased to propagate itself. It can also become necessary to plant a root, an entire root, in a place, in order for the necessities of this human development to find their intended function and expression.

To understand how this works, and why, one must be equipped for the understanding. The only way to become so equipped is to be involved in what we call a 'Work-situation.' 'Work' is the meaningful activity of individuals and groups of people dedicated to the Way, under a teacher whose mission is to preside over that Work. There is no 'Work-situation,' no real activity, where there is no such appointed teacher. The people who carry on the externals carried out by a former teacher, and who have no such appointed mission, are merely automata. The 'secret protects itself' denying access to those who are unworthy.

It must be positively realized that the Work is carried out by the teacher in accordance with his realization of the situation in which he finds himself. This means that there is no textbook, no system, no method other than that which belongs to the school of the moment. The exercises, the activities, the study material, the terminology, all these things are mere formulations which a teacher provides for the group with which he is working. Since the Work

is organic and depends upon the interchange between itself, the students and the teacher, as well as the environmental and cultural situation, it cannot be taught by repetition and dogma. It can only be taught by constant association between people and by making use of situations which exist.

In this important respect the Work differs from imitations and from those derivations of it which are in decay: and there are many. It is not learned from books. It is not carried out by repeating things said or done by previous teachers. It is expressed only by the application of real knowledge, interpreted by a living teacher, an exemplar, through methods which he uses and which he alone can plan for the community. Anything else is an absurdity.

Where the teaching exists, there are three kinds of people:

1. Those who have come into contact with such basic principles as have just been enunciated, and who are studying these essential principles.

2. Those who are admitted into some form of the Work, in a group which is engaged in preparing itself for conscious development, awakening certain functions and capacities.

3. Those who are actively engaged in fulfilling a function as conscious people, who have acquired the capacities which enable them to continue with their evolution and, in some cases, with that of others.

There are other groupings of people, but the above three are to be considered the main ones, for practical purposes.

In order to qualify even as a member of the first group of people, it is necessary to study such basic

texts as this one. It must be remembered that merely reading something and straining continuously to get to the next stage is not the way in which this Work operates at all. All material connected with the Work can be understood at various levels. Material has to be studied, not from different points of view, but in different ways.

*Example*

Study the material (1) for its obvious content or factual meaning. Then (2) for where it relates to you, and how you make mistakes in thinking which could be corrected by the material. Then (3) for what it may communicate to you outside of these two fields. Try to realize that this material is not a formal exposition alone, but contains elements which will help you to understand it in a deeper sense.

Remember that only repetitious, artificial or imitation systems are based upon exaggerations like withdrawing from the world, carrying on complicated and repeated activities, memorizing or following slavishly certain patterns of thought or action. The Way and the Work are carried on within normal life. Their object is just as much to improve the lot and the capacities of the individual in ordinary society as to increase his awareness of true reality. This Way has nothing in common with monasticism as such, or the arbitrary issuing of instructions for the purpose of making people move about or suffer. Everyone has to make sacrifices, to adjust to ideas and situations which are unfamiliar and even uncomfortable. This happens in any purposeful activity. The habit of sacrifice for its own sake, or of 'any action is better than none' is no part of this Work,

however marked it may be in other communities. Only necessary and correct effort counts. Only meaningful sacrifice is real sacrifice. Only essential study is real study. The 'Work-situation' is the most important of all possible human situations, to be considered a sacred activity.

## A Gnat's Weight...



A Sufi once annoyed the scholars of a certain country so much that they vied with one another in trying to discredit him. One scholar spoke slightly of his ancestry; another of the quality of his writings; a third of the frequency of his utterances; a fourth of his silences; a fifth of his associates. In short, you will see that they treated him in the manner traditional in such circles.

In spite of this campaign, students continued to listen to the Sufi. Their questions caused their teachers continued concern. So the scholars changed their tactics.

Some of them went to the king of their country. They said:

'Sire, such-and-such a Sufi is corrupting the minds of your Majesty's subjects. We urge you to do something about him before your own position is threatened.'

The king was perplexed. 'Surely,' he said, 'you wise men can encompass his downfall, for you are, as I have frequently seen, adept at such activities.'

'We have tried, Majesty,' they said, 'but he seems to care nothing for his name, and the consequence is that people are denying the real value of repute itself.'

'Do you suggest that I kill this man and make him a martyr?' asked the king.

'No, indeed, that would be the last thing that we should do,' said the scholars.

'Since scholars are the advisors of kings in this country,' said the king, (who was aware that he should keep on the right side of these venerable beasts for his own safety), 'advise me, and I will at once put any suitable stratagem into action.'

'What must be done is to demonstrate the foolishness of the man, so that people will not want to copy him,' said the most cunning of the scholars.

'How can I do that?' said the king.

'Challenge him with an impossible task,' said the scholar. He provided a suggestion to verify the Sufi claim 'to transcend ordinary limitations.'

And so it was that the Sufi, passing the palace one day, heard a herald announce:

'His Majesty has been pleased to declare that he is prepared to adopt the ways of the Sufi, providing that any Sufi can endure physical hardships that no scholar could accept.'

The Sufi presented himself to the king, who said:

'Sufi, a gnat's weight of demonstration is worth an elephant-load of reputation. Will you take my test?'

'I will.' said the Sufi.

'It is midwinter,' said the king, 'and the nights in the open are unbearably freezing. I propose to leave you, without any clothes or covering, on the roof of the citadel for a whole night. If you are alive in the morning, and not even frost-bitten, I will accept that you have abilities which scholars lack.'

The Sufi accepted the challenge without hesitation.

In the morning an immense crowd had collected to see whether the Sufi had survived. As dawn broke they saw that he was not only alive but covered with sweat, rolling a huge boulder, which he had dislodged

from the battlements, from one end of the flat roof to another.

As the Sufi was brought down by the guards, the people cheered him to the echo.

'I have created a hero, and you have made me look a fool, you marvelous scholars,' screamed the king to his advisors. 'If I had left him alone, there would have been at least a possibility that his ways would not have undermined my throne. Now it looks as if I will have to carry out a sustained campaign to show the people that I am after all intelligent or worthwhile or something.' And he sat there listening to the cheers of the crowd, biting his nails.

The Sufi appeared and said:

'Your Majesty, come with me to the battlements.'

The king dolefully followed the Sufi to where the populace could see and hear them.

The Sufi said:

'Good people, look upon your wonderful and intelligent king. In order to illustrate to the whole world that scholars who were intriguing for position are limited to literalism, he put me to a test which was really a test of them. I was asked to survive a winter's night on the citadel to prove my Sufihood. But, since scholars are capable only of mental gymnastics, the only answer all would understand was by means of gymnastics.'

When they were alone again, the king said to the Sufi:

'Why should you protect me, when I was trying to disgrace you?'

'Because *you*, your Majesty,' said the Sufi, 'were not really trying to do anything at all, including

disgracing me. You were being manipulated by your advisors. If I had caused you to be disgraced, you would not have been a king any more. Now, a king who has learned a lesson is surely more useful than a beggar who was once a king.'

'But you told a lie when you said that I was trying to expose the scholars,' said the king.

'I was telling the truth, but I was telling it ahead of the time when it was to take place,' said the Sufi, 'because from now on, there can be no doubt, your Majesty will indeed try to preserve our society against such people: and one method which you will undoubtedly employ is that of: "A gnat's weight of demonstration is worth an elephant-load of reputation."'