

Wake Up!

It's time to start your real life

A Spiritual Guide to Self-Discovery
and Transformation



Vijay

This book is dedicated to

My main spiritual Teacher, Mère, who is truly the mother of my
soul.

My beloved soulmate Prema Devi who is to me a manifestation of the
Divine Mother whose love and Light always guided us.

My best friend, Arthur Birago who always helped me in many ways
and without whom this book would never have been written.

Introduction

It feels like yesterday, yet over a quarter of a century has passed since I first stood before Vijay's house in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, a mix of nervousness and anticipation swirling within me. The residents of Auroville, when I sought guidance to find a spiritual teacher, had pointed me towards Vijay, who dwelled in a community then known as "Fertile Windmill." This was a place remarkable for the tens of thousands of trees he had planted, transforming over decades a red desert landscape into a vibrant, evergreen forest.

When the door opened, a man greeted me with a smile as wide as the ocean. Though I am not naturally inclined towards physical displays of affection, even averse to contact, upon meeting Vijay, I could not hold myself back and had to spontaneously embrace him. In that moment, it felt as though I had found my spiritual father, my guiding light, after what seemed like countless lifetimes of searching. I felt I had finally arrived home. And I stayed.

My years with Vijay proved to be a period of profound transformation. I came to him a lost and desperate soul, yearning for answers to escape a life of misery and meaninglessness, a life where nothing seemed to make sense. Years later, I departed with awakened eyes, everything, my entire world has changed.

Vijay was never my guru, yet his teachings, sometimes subtle, sometimes bold and almost brutal in my face, were the perfect instructions in spirituality I needed. He did not fill my mind with endless information, nor did he ever impose his will upon me. Instead, he placed me in situations that often felt like being cast into deep water, forcing me to learn to swim. He offered little by way of explanation, always telling me that my mind is anyhow already too full with too many thoughts, but

pushing me to discover my own answers from deep inside me. Those years in his company often felt like a grueling journey, like walking barefoot through hell. Everything to which I foolishly clung was stripped away—lost, taken away for good. Yet, the more I realised the truth behind appearances, the greater Vijay's joy seemed to grow. "Finally, you are making progress," he would observe, "It took a long time to crack your stubborn head." In those early days, his words and teachings often eluded my understanding, provoking outbursts of frustration at my inability to grasp the truth. He would respond with gentle laughter, a broad smile, and eyes brimming with love, so much love!

Eventually, I left Auroville to explore the world, but I returned year after year, drawn back to Vijay's presence as we became soul friends on a journey into the infinite. As my consciousness gradually ascended, I began to truly comprehend the depth of his wisdom, the boundlessness of his love, and the profound nature of his spiritual explorations. With each passing year, our bond deepened, as we discovered together, with shared wonder, the unfolding of the Divine, realizing the intricate and timeless connection of our lives. Every moment spent together was precious, pure, and beautiful, filled with awe, excitement, and a love that continually left us searching for words, for language seemed inadequate to capture its essence.

My constant urging to Vijay was, "You must find a way to share your insights, your life, your vision, and wisdom with fellow seekers on the Path. You cannot remain silent." It was years before he began to commit his thoughts to paper. Then, despite the challenge of his failing eyesight, he dedicated countless hours each day to transforming those initial notes into this book. A tireless perfectionist, he revised and refined his work countless times. Now, with his vision no longer permitting him to write, he has entrusted me with the task of helping him publish it, to share his guidance, infused with wisdom and love, with all who seek it.

And so, here it is: a masterful work that endeavors to express the inexpressible, to guide you on a journey into the unknown, following in the footsteps of one who has journeyed toward infinity.

I am eternally grateful that you took me under your wing and illuminated my path, my beloved spiritual father, Vijay.

Your friend

Arthur

BOOK ONE

A note: I use the term “Great Awakening” instead of Self-realization because the latter encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings such as Moksha, Liberation, realizing our full potential through self-improvement techniques, becoming free from the cycle of death and rebirth, etc, but the Great Awakening is one and encompasses all this.

I also use the term Divine instead of God because the latter has too many limiting religious beliefs, while the Divine transcends them and has a much broader, non-dogmatic meaning. When referring to the Divine, I use the term That (Tat in Sanskrit) as the Vedic seers did.

1. The Unanswered Question

Through the ages, so many spiritual Teachers have affirmed that the answer to the inquiry “Who am I?” is that we are not the so-called I but our Higher Self who is immortal, full of love and ecstasy, forever one with the Divine.

Nevertheless the inquiry “Who am I?” has been called the Unanswered Question because until we have experienced that we are our higher Self remains empty words. No definition of our Self, however true, can make us realize that we are one with it just like the water in the painting of a lake cannot satisfy our thirst. The answer to “Who am I?” cannot be found just by examining our mind, emotions, personality, or any other aspects of the “I” that we appear to be.

**To find the answer we must embark on a transformative,
life-changing quest of self-discovery.**

According to Krishnamurti, a recent Indian spiritual Teacher (although he did not consider himself one in the traditional sense):

“Asking the question “Who am I?” is like exploding a bomb within oneself and shattering the very foundations of ignorance on which we have built the superficial image of ourselves.”

It is this self-image that covers up who we are by making us feel separated from the whole. If we cut out a small piece from a large painting separate from it has no meaning: *we are the entire painting, not just a detail of it.*

Ramana Maharshi, a very wise and humble recent Hindu spiritual Teacher who went to the core of every issue he spoke said that:

”When the mind comes to an end of its resources and stands baffled by the question “Who Am I” then a higher power takes charge of the mind and the Self stands revealed as the real, the wonderful.”

This higher power is the one of the Divine and it is on it that we should rely to find the answer to the “Who am I?” question, not on whatever mental knowledge we may have acquired.

In the first memory of my childhood when I was four or five years old, I was in a kindergarten watching children doing all sorts of things that I could not understand, and I wondered why I was there and wished to go back to where I came from which could not remember. I did not play with them, seldom talked, and at times stared for a long time at ordinary things as if I had never seen them before, so my parents worried that I might be mentally retarded.

How I felt is just like Rumi, an enlightened Persian Sufi poet who wrote mystical verses when he said:

“All day I think about it, and then at night, I say it. Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing? I have no idea. My soul is from elsewhere, and I intend to end up there.”

I asked my parents, school teachers, and some other adults who I was and what was the

meaning of my life, but none could tell me and some mockingly told me something like:
“What, you don’t know who you are? You are little Vittorio!”

I eagerly awaited when I would go to school because I had been told that when I was six years old I would go to it and there all my questions would be answered, but what a disappointment it turned out to be! For instance, when I asked a schoolteacher what I should do in my life he said:

“First of all you should get a good education; ideally a university degree to obtain a well-paid job; then you will marry, have one or more children, and enjoy your life as much as you can.”

I asked him “And then?”

“When you are sixty years old you will retire on a pension, no longer have to work, and relish your leisure.”

“And then?”

“Oh well...then you will die like we all do.”

At that very moment, I knew with absolute certainty that I would never live such a life. This determination set me on a path that after decades of struggles, setbacks, and breakthroughs in my inner journey I finally found the answer to the Unanswered Question.

In my late teens in one of the stands of second-hand books along the parapet of the Seine river in Paris, I found a book entitled Aut-Aut (either/or) about existentialism by the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard. According to him, to find the answer to the "Who am I?" question we must raise our consciousness to a higher level than the ordinary one. He was only too right, but how he advised raising it used religious terms which I disliked, so I did not read more of this book. I then passed through periods in which I often thought about who I was and others when I forgot all about it, but first or later the question "Who am I?" came back to haunt my mind.

**Dear reader, if you were asked who are you
what would you say about yourself?**

Would you mention if you are single, married, or in a relationship, whether you have children or not, your profession, political beliefs, your religion if any, some artistic, intellectual, or social interests, your favorite books or music you like; your values, goals, aspirations, etc?

Even them all together do not add up to what you truly are because they are mere roles that you have been playing in the dream of your life. Indeed there is a part of you that is the essence of who you really are beyond your apparent identity but it abides in a dimension far from the dream of your life.

Dear reader, I cannot give you the ultimate answer to the Unanswered Question, no one will ever be able to with any amount of explanations or metaphors, but I hope that by pointing out which are the main obstacles, dangers, and helpers in your inner journey this book may help you to discover the Answer by yourself. The advice of Wu Hsin, a great ancient Chinese Taoist Teacher whose existence has been questioned is:

“Who am I? is the Only Question. With the attention fixed on the sense of being, ask the Only Question. Do not develop an answer. Ask the Question and wait.

**When a thought intervenes, ask the Question again,
then wait. This continues until one falls off the floor.”**

2. The Inward and the Outer I

Besides our inner Self and the Psychic (mentioned in a further chapter), there are two parts of us: an inward I and an outer one. Most assume that they are the outer I because are so identified with it, but by examining it no definite entity can be found, only a fleeting fluxation of thoughts, sensations, and emotions, a phantom that under closer inspection disappears. To a great extent in many of us - in some even completely - the outer I is dominated by the ego to the point that there is hardly any difference between them. As Satprem, a main disciple of Mère, the spiritual Teacher of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram said:

“The outer I is but a complex mass of mental, nervous, and physical habits held together by a few ruling ideas, desires, and associations, an amalgam of many small self-repeating forces with a few major vibrations.”

**The transition from the outer I to our inward one
is the very essence of the spiritual Path.**

It is only the inward I who can discover the answer to the “Who Am I” question because is under the influence of our inner being, but the borderline between it and the outer one is blurred and we may shift from one to the other without being aware of it.

What few realize is that we do not have just one outer I but many that appear and vanish all the time, a series of temporary I's. About this Gurdjieff, a recent Armenian spiritual Teacher known for his sharp directness in speaking pointed out we are continually changing and seldom remain the same even for half an hour; we have no permanent and unchangeable I.

By this “I” Gurdjieff meant the outer I and made this metaphor about it:

We have several I's who are like a group of people on a bus in which each of them wishes to drive it so they take turns, but when one drives it first or later it will be the turn of another I who will say: "Hey, get off the driving seat, it is my turn now!"

Until it is only our inward I driving the bus of our life problems and difficulties cannot be avoided. For instance, if we had a strong intention to do something but then didn't, probably is not that we changed our mind about it but because one of our outer I's took us over.

According to many texts about the Path, we should discard the outer I altogether, but instead of doing so we should integrate it with our inward one and put it at the service of the Divine.

One day I had a very intense dream about the outer I: I was looking at a mandala that I had once seen in the library of my cousin Gianni, the illustrated Divine Comedy of Dante. In this mandala, several circles of radiant, ethereal angels expanded out from a bright point of light at its center. Suddenly, I heard an ominous cracking sound, and the mandala fractured into sections of various sizes. In some sections the angels were drab and gray, in others had retained some of their previous radiance, but only the point of light at the center of the mandala was still very bright.

Then my cousin walked in and angrily scolded me: "What have you done? This copy of the Divine Comedy was a precious antique, irreplaceable! Get out and never go near my library ever again!"

My interpretation of this dream is that the bright light at the center symbolizes my inner being, the sections with drab and gray angels the negative aspects of the outer I, and the ones with still some luminosity represent its positive ones, but they were a minority and this made me realize that

**to quite an extent I had not been living
as who I was but as the outer I.**

Realizing this brought about a big conflict between my inward I and the outer one that pushed me almost to the brink of insanity. At a certain point, I became so disheartened that I almost resigned myself to keep living as the outer I, but my innate rebellious nature prevented me from doing so.

**Dear reader, even if I haven't met you I know that
at times you may feel as if there were two of you,**

the outer I with its mundane desires and worldly attractions and another, the inward one observing it like we may watch a child playing with his toys. By focusing your consciousness on it you will be able to experience everything without getting entangled in it, and then gradually the outer I will begin to fade away until you will be free of it. About this, Mère affirmed that:

“This sense of one’s person (the outer I) becomes like a cage, a prison enclosing you, which prevents you from being true, to really know, really have power, to truly understand yourself. It is like closing yourself in a very hard shell and then being forced to remain there.

**it is only when all is ready that there comes the capacity
to pierce the shell and to be born into the light of day.”**

3. The Dreamworld

Through the ages, many spiritual Teachers and texts affirmed that the world is not real, or at least not as we perceive it but like a dream, so I call it the dreamworld.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, there is its concept of Maya, the Great Illusion, which makes the world appear as if it was real and substantial, and as the ancient Hinduist text Ribhu Ghita asserted is only an appearance, a fleeting illusion devoid of reality covering up our Atman (inner Self).

Everything we see, the house where we live, the places where we go, and everyone we meet is not outside us as they seem but in our mind. The world is a manifestation of our internal state in which our consciousness plays a central role in determining our beliefs and thoughts and what we experience. As Yogananda, an Indian spiritual Teacher who the previous century popularized Yoga in the West said,

**“We are walking on the earth as in a dream
and our world is a dream within a dream.”**

Also according to the Buddha, everything in the world is a dream, a mirage, a cloud castle, a magician’s illusion in which nothing is as it appears and Taoism affirmed that everything in the world is just like a dream that fades upon waking.

As a last example, Sri Aurobindo, the great Indian spiritual Teacher who founded his ashram to teach Integral Yoga said:

“The world is like a dance of shadows and light where we play our roles with fervor and forgetfulness, a stage where we wear masks of ego and desire, and get lost in the drama of our life.”

Just like even after we have realized that a lake that we see in the desert is a mirage we can still see it, so even when we know that the dreamworld is not real our senses will still make

us perceive it as if were. About it, this question may arise:

"But if the world is but a dream, why should we bother to do anything?"

Well, whether we like it or not we cannot avoid doing something because the forces of our life will compel us to act in one way or another. If we have a toothache, the awareness that it is a dream will not alleviate the pain, and when hungry or thirsty will eat and drink.

We perceive the dreamworld as if it were made of matter, but everything physical consists of energy vibrating at a frequency that our senses can perceive. In the last decades, scientists have discovered what the Vedas, the most ancient scripture of Hinduism revealed: *there is no matter*.

What we call matter consists of atoms with protons and neutrons in their nuclei, and electrons orbiting around them. The proportion of the volume of solid matter in an atom is approximately 0.000000001%, leaving 99.9999999% empty space.

**All matter including the one of our bodies
consist of almost only emptiness.**

The sensation of solidity that we feel by touching something is due to the electromagnetic forces between the atoms of our fingertips and those in it. This tactile sensation is then transmitted through our nerves to the neurons in our brain which process it and bring about the sensation of solidity.

This is *science*, not Facebook mumbo jumbo.

According to the recent quantum physics scientist Karl Pribram, the so-called "external" world, in its true essence, does not exist as we perceive it but appears so vivid and tangible because the brain transliterates its holographic nature into images and sensory information. This means that what we see is mostly a fabrication of our mind, a construct shaped by our cognitive processes. Einstein also said that the world is a reflection of our mental state, a process of our thinking.

However, the dreamworld is not only an illusion of Maya but also a teaching device, a testing ground for our inner growth, a cocoon or womb in which we gradually become ready to awaken from the dream of our lives. The advice of Sri Aurobindo is:

“Accept the world as God’s theater; be the mask of the Actor and let Him act through you. If men praise or mock you, know that they also are masks and consider the inner God your only critic and audience.”

**As our dreams feel real while we are dreaming them, of course
the world dreamt by the Divine seems much more real.**

See the dreamworld like a theater stage on which you perform your roles with their successes and failures, comedies and dramas, in the awareness that every moment is an opportunity to go forward in your inner journey until you can transcend them. Ramana Maharshi, a very wise and humble recent Hindu spiritual Teacher who went to the very core of every issue that he spoke of now tells you:

“Within the prison of your world appears a man who tells you that the world of painful contradictions, is neither continuous nor permanent and is based on a misapprehension. He pleads with you to get out of it just like you got into it:

**you got into it by forgetting who you are and must
get out of it by realizing who you truly are.”**

4. The Dream of Our Lives

The dream of our lives is brought about by the illusions of Maya, a powerful force that makes us forget who we are and become identified with our body, emotions, mind, and the outer I. Without it, we would never have left our original state of peace, ecstasy, and boundless love in our Source to be born here and endure suffering and many adversities. When we are happy we have a good dream, when unhappy a bad one, but in both cases, we should just awaken from it.

As Gurdjieff pointed out “The main characteristic of man is that he lives in sleep, is born, and dies in an inner sleep. But no matter how unsettling or even frightening acknowledging this may be

**we must find the courage to do so or we will
never awaken from the dream of our lives.**

In this dream most of us are stranded in a sea of illusions and pursue transient things unaware of how ephemeral they are; we grasp them but they slip away like sand between our fingers. As Shakespeare said we are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with sleep. In it most of us get an education, a job, marry or have a partner, may have children, read spiritual books, try to do Yoga, and even teach it to others while remaining entranced in this dream. Many do not want to awaken from it even when it is full of suffering because is all they know and fear that without it they would be no more.

As Krishnamurti said, “Awakening from the dream we are in requires an inner revolution that is not brought about by thought but by understanding its nature. When you see how the mind operates and how makes up the apparent “me”, there comes a stillness that is not manufactured by the mind and becomes less difficult to awaken from the dream.”

Until after I had been on the spiritual Path for some years could not perceive the inner being of others and wondered how they could bear the shallowness and the apparent meaningless of their lives which are not present to themselves in any real sense. After reading the novel *The Sleepwalkers* by the recent Austrian writer Hermann Broch in which its protagonists live in a state of alienation, estranged from both others and themselves, I saw everyone as sleepwalkers as well, and wrote this in my first journal which I still have:

“Alas, the sight most dreadful, the nightmare of my being surrounded by sleepwalkers transfixed in countless conditionings imprisoning them in the inexorable vortex of their unexamined lives until even their feelings are no longer their own. Spotlessly clean clothes wear, fake smiles, and greetings offer us, good morning, good evening and how are you, but are moved around like robots by a myriad of impulses, cravings, fleeting thoughts, and trivial concerns. The crushing weight of familiar, monotonous gestures inanely repeated day after day drains their lives into the void....”

But eventually became aware that even such lives have meaning because

**even the most materialistic of them has a specific role
that is part of the divine’s cosmic Design.**

Once in a trekking lodge in the Himalayas, I met a very unconventional, open-minded Dominican monk who told me that in the Bible after leaving the Garden of Eden Adam fell into a deep sleep, and then *never said that he woke up from it*.

As Adam symbolizes all humanity, looking at its sorry condition is clear that we are still far from waking up. Once when I told this at a conference a man stood up and said something like this:

“But even if my life is a dream as you say what is so wrong with it? Most of the time I am not unhappy with it, enjoy watching football games and the TV, and if I have some problems nobody can be okay all the time, life is like that...”

What is wrong with it is that our life may pass by very fast into old age and death without us truly living it.

Dear reader, when you get up in the morning it is your body that wakes up; you are still immersed in the dream of your life.

Realizing this presents you with a basic alternative: to enjoy this dream as much as you can until you die or strive to awaken from it. About this, a great recent Indian guru, Nisargadatta Maharaj, said that all that we need to do is:

“See the dream as a dream and realize that we have projected onto ourselves a world of our imagination based on memories, desires, and fears, and became imprisoned in it. Break the spell and be free.”

How to break this spell is the main aim of this book, and he gave this advice about it:

“Once you have seen that you are dreaming, you shall wake up. But you do not see it because you want the dream to continue. A day will come when you will long for the ending of the dream with all your heart and mind, and be willing to pay the price; which is the loss of interest in the dream itself.

**Cease from looking for happiness and reality
in a dream and then you will wake up.”**

Nothing should ever be more important than this to us.

5. The Legend of Narada

The illusion of Maya is vividly illustrated by an ancient Indian legend of which there are several versions, and this is the one that a sadhu (itinerant monk) told me:

One afternoon Narada, a disciple of the Hindu god Vishnu, while walking with him asked him about Maya, the Great Illusion. Vishnu pointed to a village in the distance and replied:

“Humnn...my throat is dry and our water pot empty; go to that village and fill it, then after drinking some I will tell you all about it”

Narada went to that village and found a well at its center but there was no rope to lower the pot into it, so he knocked on a nearby house door to borrow one. A beautiful girl lent him a rope and he filled the pot, but by then was almost dark, so she told him:

“How will you find your way in the dark? My family is very hospitable; eat with us and sleep here tonight, then go back to your Guru tomorrow!”

But after dinner, while talking they fell in love and Narada forgot all about the pot of water and Vishnu.

The sadhu who told me this story briefly mentioned that they married, had some nice children, and had a prosperous and happy life, but then remained silent until I asked him “And then?”

When he replied his voice became very intense as he said:

Alas, then there was a devastating flood that swept away his house, and despite all his efforts to rescue them his wife and children drowned. He held onto a tree branch to save himself but was uprooted by the flood and he also began drowning, but instead of dying found himself in front of Vishnu who asked him:

“So, Narada, where is our pot of water?”

Narada clearly remembered so many details of his life in that village, the laughter of his children Rajesh and Karthik playing in the courtyard, a serious illness from which his

wife almost died, the festival celebrations that his village enjoyed so much, the sound of the temple bells, two friends with whom some evenings played chess, the quiet moments when he and his wife Kamal sat sit on the porch drinking fragrant black tea, and these memories seemed so vividly real that it could not believe that they had all been but illusions induced by Vishnu in his mind to show him the power of Maya.

**Only by recognizing that your life so far has mostly
been a dream you can begin living your real one.**

It is said that our entire life flashes before our eyes just before we die, and if this is true in that moment you will realize, if you haven't already, that your life has been an illusion of Maya like the one that Vishnu had projected into Narada's mind. Realize this as soon as possible, not when you are old and close to death because then you can live all your life in the blissful state of your inner Self, share its immense peace and love, and eventually merge with it. As Sri Aurobindo said:

"The world is like a passing show, a play of shadows on the screen of consciousness. Maya is the master magician who creates this grand spectacle, keeping us mesmerized in the drama of our life.

**Awaken from the illusion of Maya and discover
the truth of your own existence."**

6. The Forces Of Our Lives

Since our childhood, our parents, schoolteachers, and those around us tried to make us conform to their beliefs and way of living. Then while growing up we were subjected to more influences from those we met, books, magazines, television, movies, videos, etc. They all form programs in our brains like those installed in a computer and determine most of our thoughts, actions, and how we live. A main one of them is our desire for the attractions of the dreamworld, but as Wu Hsin pointed out:

"First you try to obtain it, then once acquired to keep it. When is lost you try to take it back.

**This is the wheel of striving. Its grip is tight,
but it is you who must let go."**

If we attach several wires to an object and pull it in different directions will go where the resultant of their energies brings it, and likewise, the forces of our lives pull us in many directions, and the result of them all...is our life. About this, the famous Chinese Taoist Chuang Tzu noted:

"See how people keep trying to grasp things, carried away by the forces of their lives, in the general onrush of the human herd, unable to stop themselves from changing their direction, harassed, obsessed, and still claim to be close to happiness!"

When we grew up and began exploring the dreamworld it was like venturing into a virgin forest. With each step, we left behind footprints and trampled over some grass, and if we kept going the same way a footpath began to form which gradually widened into a road, and then for many even in a major highway. Most do not wish to leave the

highway of their life with its familiar routines to explore the possibly more rewarding side roads. This highway is our comfort zone and by never leaving it we miss out on new experiences, limit our inner growth, miss out on many opportunities, and in the worst scenario this highway no longer has any side roads, no exit, and is lined by an impenetrable barbed wire fence on both sides.

If someone tried to force us to do something we would resist, but often we allow the forces of our lives to make us do something without considering whether we should or not, and all of them together form something like a prison in our minds very hard to escape. Most are unaware of this and would rather not know because it is so awful to contemplate or believe that anyway there is nothing they can do about it. Einstein was not a spiritual Teacher but knew that:

“Everything is determined by forces over which we have no control, for the insect as well as for the star, and human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper.”

Taking an action comes into play before any rational evaluation: the impulse to do something comes first, and subsequently the mind comes up with reasons for doing it. For instance, suppose that you are invited to a party and a part of you is inclined to go but another part doesn't. Of course, it is the stronger one that will have its way, and if it is the one wishing to go the mind will suggest to you reasons to do so, such as:

"I must have some fun now and then, meet some new people, and a couple of drinks won't hurt either: *I decide to go!*"

But if the stronger part is the one who prefers not to go you won't, and the mind will tell you, for example:

“Ah, the last time that I went to a party got bored, the music was too loud, I drank a bit too much and got a hangover; I prefer to stay home, read a book, or watch a movie: *I decide not to go!*"

But the "decision" to attend the party or not was not yours but brought about by a range of factors and events in your past that molded your inclination to go or not long before you were invited to this party.

Rumi put it very vividly:

“Do you think I know what I am doing? That for a breath or half-breath I belong to myself? As much as a pen knows what it is writing, or a ball knows where it is going next.”

But he also offered this reassurance: “There are many winds full of anger, lust, and greed. They move the rubbish around,

**But the solid mountain of our true nature
remains where it has always been.”**

The rubbish is our negative thoughts and emotions, illusions, wrong beliefs, and everything that distracts us from our inner journey, and this “solid mountain” represents our inner Self.

Since my teens, I was aware of being moved around by forces that I could not control and they made me feel as if I was in a boat without a rudder, not knowing where I would end up, or like the protagonist of a novel who would like to do something else than what its author wrote that he did.

It was only in my early twenties that I began to find a way to become free of the forces of my life through Krishnamurti. At the time he was not yet besieged by so many people wanting an interview as in later years, so I could speak with him at some length. I may not remember exactly what he said when I asked him how I could overcome my conditionings but this is the gist of it:

The basis of all conditionings is the accumulation of our convictions, past experiences, and societal influences that shape how we perceive ourselves and the world, causing us to act and think in repetitive, predictable ways.

His advice was that to become free of them I should thoroughly examine my mind, observe it without judgments or reactions, see how it operates in its habitual patterns, constantly reinforcing my beliefs, and no longer allow them to take me over.

To overcome the forces of my life I also did some visualizations such as imagining them as smoke swept away by the wind, burning them in a fire, wiping them off from a blackboard, dropping them in a garbage can, flushing them down the toilet, etc. A friend to whom I mentioned these visualizations sarcastically told me:

“Cool, I just visualized flushing them down the toilet...am I free of them now?”

Well, of course, nothing so important could be achieved that easily, but as for the subconscious there is almost no difference between what is real and what is intensely imagined, these visualizations weaken our conditionings.

**Becoming aware of how deeply the forces of your life
are ingrained in you is likely to be very upsetting,**

but instead of denying or ignoring their hold on you face them head-on and whenever an impulse of these forces tries to make you do something see it as a bully ordering you around and rebel. Sri Aurobindo goes to the core of this issue:

“All life is the play of universal forces. Most people indulge in the play of these forces. It is only when you can make yourself free of them that one can be a true person and have a true life,

but one can be free only by living in the Divine.

7. Petrouska

As Rumi said, “In the grand theater of existence we play our roles with earnestness, yet the cosmic jest is that we are but actors dancing upon the stage of time, lost in a drama of our own creation.” To awaken from the dreamlike trance of our life brought about by the forces of our lives we must first of all acknowledge that they dominate us through so many compulsions and constraints.

Emerging from this dismal state requires letting go of our ingrained beliefs and preconceived notions, the deep-seated patterns and biases that shape our perception, and being aware that

**they can make us like marionettes
pulled around by invisible strings.**

In my early twenties when my conditionings were driving me around like a puppet I saw an avant-garde version of Stravinsky’s ballet Petrouska very different from the original and more like a drama. It was set in Russia at the time of the Czars and the actors were disguised as puppets seemingly moved around by thin wires from a “puppeteer” on a perch connected with them. Some other actors dressed like Russian peasants with their typical fur hats sat on benches on both sides of the stage drinking from bottles labeled vodka pretending to be the audience.

In this drama, Petrouska opposes an evil magician, and in the end, they fight. Of course, one expects Petrouska to win, but instead the magician defeats and kills him. The “Russian peasants” protested, shouted, threw their bottles on the stage, and threatened to burn down the theater and kill the magician. But then the “puppeteer” came down from his perch by a rope ladder, lifted halfway up the actor playing Petrouska, tore open his

shirt, poured out some sawdust hidden in it, and asked them:

“Why are you making such a big fuss about it?

Petrouska is merely a puppet!”

Then they broke into a burst of laughter.

The night after seeing this drama I had a very vivid dream that began as a nightmare but ended well. In it I was Petrouska in the last scene when the puppeteer tore open my shirt and poured out the sawdust from it. When he told the “Russian peasants” that Petrouska was merely a puppet they loudly laughed mocking me. I was horrified and desperately wanted to scream that no, I was a human being, not a puppet, but was unable to speak. Then time slowed down, and as the last of the sawdust poured out of my shirt suddenly realized that I was in a dream, and without waking up from it somehow managed to go back to the moment when the magician was about to kill me and instead I killed him.

In the last scene of his dream, I was sitting on the stage in a torn shirt with a heap of sawdust at my feet and felt an immense relief that I wasn't a puppet but an actor in the drama of my life. Then I felt a profound peace in the awareness that I could step off the stage and was not bound to the script of this drama.

Dear reader, if you ever feel like a puppet,

find out who is the Puppeteer.

The recent English author of spiritual books Alan Watts offers these comforting words about this:

“What you do is what the whole universe is doing at the place you call the Here and Now.

You are something the whole universe is doing in the same way that the wave is something that the whole ocean is doing.

**The real you is not a puppet that life pushes
around but is the whole universe”**

But we are so much more than merely the universe.

8. Freedom – Free Will

The issue of liberum arbitrium, free will, making choices that are not predetermined by God, genetics, causality, fate, or some higher power has been debated for millennia but is still a very controversial issue. It seems that the forces of our lives are so powerful that we do not have any free will at all, and as Ramana Maharshi said:

“We are not the 'doer' of any action and have no free will. We are the consciousness illuminating all actions and decisions. Free will is an illusion created by the ego; in truth, all actions unfold according to the divine plan." That we are not the doers of actions as we believe can make us feel very insecure, uncertain, and vulnerable,

**but until we acknowledge that we do not yet have
free will we will not strive to achieve it.**

There is a general assumption that freedom means to be able to do what we want, but this is merely the absence of external constraints. We might well get what we want but until we have overcome our conditionings we *are not free to choose what we want*. When a great but almost unknown Sufi spiritual Teacher nicknamed the Kabuli was asked whether we have free will or not he replied:

“Our soul has free will, but of course so does Allah! When your will opposes Him, what do you think will happen?”

The sad truth is that most people do not truly wish to be free although they might believe that they do because they don't want the responsibility that comes with it and prefer the comfort and apparent security of their familiar routines.

But ultimately the dichotomy between free will and determinism is meaningless because

**both are true, only on different levels: our inner being
is forever free and the outer I can never be.**

Free will is not a birthright but a conquest, and requires not being attached to anything, and not relying on any system of belief no matter how valid. Above all, we must feel an unyielding aspiration, a compelling need to be free because only then we can establish a firm contact with our Self and share its freedom.

As the famous Austrian physics scientist Nikola Tesla said:

“The human being is a self-propelled automaton entirely under the control of external influences. His actions are governed not from within, but from without. He is like a float tossed about by the waves of a turbulent sea.”

If there was an earthquake and our house was collapsing nothing would be more urgent than running out of it, and our yearning to be free should be no less crucial. We should feel a sense of suffocation from all our conditionings, realize that they are like a prison, and ask ourselves this question of Wu Hsin:

“What is outside the walls of the prison is the unknown, possibly not secure, not safe, at times hostile, and not at all predictable. Yet what sane man would choose prison over freedom?”

And yet most remain in this prison all their lives.

**As this prison consists of most aspects of your outer I
to be free you must no longer be identified with it.**

If you believe that you already have free will, prove it by keeping your mind without any thoughts for as long as you want, or *permanently* letting go of any regrets that you may have about the past or worries about the future. If you thoroughly examine your main concerns, desires, and habitual ways of being you will become aware that you have not consciously chosen them. But do not think too much about it because as Vivekananda, an Indian spiritual Teacher who in the last century popularized Yoga in the West warned:

“To say or to think that we are not free is dangerous - it is a mistake, it is self-hypnotism. As soon as you say, "I am bound," "I am weak," or "I am helpless,

**you rivet one more chain upon yourself.
Do not say it, do not think it.”**

9. Life as a Computer Game

A note: in this chapter, reincarnation is mentioned and many do not believe in it although it has been recognized as a fact by Hinduism, Buddhism, Anthroposophy, the Druids, the Essenes, the Gauls, the Gnostics, the Platonists, the Pythagoreans, Sikhism, and more recently by Theosophy.

One evening when I visited a friend her eleven-year-old son Eric was playing a noisy computer game. When I looked at it he pointed at the monitor where a warrior with bulging muscles and a big sword was walking along a path with a menacing expression and proudly told me:

“See that very strong, powerful guy? That’s ME!”

As the warrior entered the ruins of a castle was attacked by several monsters that seemed ridiculous to me but scared Eric and he gasped “Fuck!”, that his mother heard and scolded him for it.

“Oh nooooo!” Eric exclaimed as a skeleton in rusty armor banged a heavy-looking wooden club on the warrior’s head, and then a massive dwarf with the face of an enraged gorilla stabbed him on his side with a spear. I noticed that a green line under the warrior’s feet had just become a bit shorter and when I asked him about it he told me:

“That’s my life energy: whenever I am wounded I lose life points and if that line gets to zero I am dead!”

I asked him if then the game would be over but he, proud of being able to teach something to an adult replied:

“Of course not! I can start again from the last point where I saved the game, but then will have to kill again all the bastards that I have already trashed!”

Eric’s words “Well, that’s ME!” about his “avatar”, the warrior, kept echoing in my mind and made me feel that

anything I could do apart from striving to reach the Great

Awakening would be as unreal as the game Eric played.

The next time that I visited his mother I talked again with Eric and found that there are many similarities between our lives and such games. In them, the “avatar” is a character created by the player by selecting gender, and appearance, and customizing various attributes such as skills, clothing, etc. When the avatar kills one of his enemies in its dead body may find gold coins, powerful weapons, special powers, magic amulets, etc. But when the game is over the player cannot bring any of them to the next game, only the experience that he has gained by playing the previous one. Likewise, in our next life, we can only bring with us the inner growth that we have reached in the present one.

When the avatar is wounded loses points of life force, and similarly when we allow something to make us angry, sad, unhappy, etc we lose some of our vital energy.

In these games, some limitations are set about what the player can do: for instance, he might wish to climb a mountain but cannot because only its two-dimensional outline was created by the game designers. Likewise, in our life there are some things that we cannot do because they are not part of the divine Design.

A player can get so identified with his avatar that when it is in danger becomes afraid as if he was in danger as well, and this is how Eric reacted when his avatar was wounded.

When the avatar turns a corner, the game’s digital programs determine whether he finds a treasure there or falls into a deadly trap; *but neither existed before he turned that corner.*

Similarly, when we get up in the morning Maya creates the room where we slept and what we will find outside it *which were not there until we walked out of the room.*

Now please consider this: if you were asked whether in the game of your life you are the player or the avatar, you would probably say the player, but until you have reached a high level of the Path you are the avatar of the forces of your life.

**To become the player of your life you must
find your inner Self and merge with it.**

10. The Alternative

The main alternative is between the outer I who is entranced by the dreamworld's illusions and our inward one who is not deceived by them. Before we have found our Self there is always a mixture of light and darkness, positive and negative energies in us, and of course which will prevail depends on how much time, energy, and consciousness we put into it. Rumi expressed this alternative very sharply:

**“The garden is home of the nightingale,
the dung heap suitable to the beetle.”**

Of course, almost everyone would like to be the nightingale, and yet many behave like beetles with the dung heap of their selfishness and greed. In one of the most important Upanishads, the Mundaka, there is this metaphor about the Alternative:

“Two golden birds are perched on the branch of a tree. The former eats the sweet and sour fruits of the tree while the latter looks at it in detachment.”

The first bird represents the outer I and the latter our inward one.

In the main text of Hinduism, the Bhagavad Ghita, just before an epic battle Krishna (representing the Divine) told his charioteer Arjun, a prince of the Pandava royal family, that in this battle he must choose between relying on him (the Divine) or on his whole army. Of course, our choice should be Krishna, but in most cases cannot be made once but must be reconfirmed again and again whenever we are confronted by any alternative.

For instance, right now as I am writing this chapter have several alternatives: continue working on it, check my emails, meditate, or take a walk in the forest; so I silenced my mind, asked inwardly what I meant to do, and was inwardly told to keep working on this chapter.

In a period when I was passing through a very difficult time I opened at random a large

illustrated book, Dante's Divine Comedy upon a page in which a naked, desperate-looking man was pushing a huge rock up a bleak, barren mountain. I profoundly resonated with this image because it mirrored my dismal state at the time. I then remembered a dream in which I had seen many circles of ethereal angels expanding outward from a bright point of light at its center. The extreme contrast between these two images made me realize that I had a crucial alternative: find the equivalent in my life of those circles of angels or end up in a state like that desperate man.

**When confronted by any alternative, to find the best option
do not rely on the mind but on your intuition.**

To be sure that it is the right one consider whether it brings you closer to your Self or away from it. As Rumi warned,

“The sanctuary is in front of you, the assassin behind you. If you go on you will be saved, but if you sleep will die.”

The “assassin” is the ego and often most of the outer I. If you go on to the sanctuary of your Self you will be saved, but if you remain in an inner slumber you will also die when your body does. As Nisargadatta Maharaj pointed out:

“You have two alternatives: to be driven by the desire to search, seize, retain, in a game of loss and regret, or go forward in passionate pursuit of the immutable state of perfection in which nothing can be added and nothing subtracted. Then all desires and fears disappear,

**not because you have renounced them but because
they have lost all attraction for you.”**

11. Memento Mori

The Memento Mori "Remember that you must die" reminds us of how precious our life is and that we should not waste any of it in the transient. This gives us a fresher, clearer outlook on everything through which we cherish every moment more intensely with a sense of awe and wonder, and feel deeply grateful for them.

Through Memento Mori, we can fearlessly gaze into the bleak eyes of death in the awareness that it is not the end but a renewal in which we return to our Source and if we are meant to come back on Earth we rest a while before doing so. As Wu Hsin said,

“When a water bubble in the ocean bursts, it returns to the ocean. This is death; all deaths. Your death and my death. Returning to the Source, what is there to fear?”

**There is great joy when the raindrop is reunited with
the ocean. Likewise, there is great joy in death.”**

Oh well, let's say that there should be.

I had a first hint of the Memento Mori when I was eleven years old while going somewhere with my father and saw a black van with a big rectangular wooden box covered with flowers followed by a procession of sad-looking people, some of whom were crying. My father told me that it was a funeral procession and in that box, there was the body of someone who died and was brought to the cemetery to be buried. I then asked him what happens to us when we die; I don't recall his answer, only that he did not know. I just could not understand how one could live without seeking the answer to such an essential question, but when I asked someone about it from what they said was obvious that they also did not know.

Many years later I was reminded of that procession when a dervish told me that while a

funeral cortege was passing by the Kabuli remarked:

“How strange! Why are they all following the empty husk that their loved one left behind? It is just like crying in front of the empty cage from which a sweet nightingale escaped to its freedom!”

When I was fourteen years old my father died due to a misdiagnosed illness and a year later my mother also died from a tumor in the brain. It may seem heartless, but I didn't feel a deep grief because intuitively felt that death is not our end, but a shift to...*to what?*

Even when I did not know about the Memento Mori, I often pondered over the mystery of death but remained a perplexing riddle to me. A few years after their death I stopped going to school because I could not stand the conformist and materialistic atmosphere of my native town, Turin. I went to Paris because my cousin and guardian Gianni had told me about its Quartier Latin, a vibrant district on the left bank of the Seine River. At that time was a bustling hub of students from the nearby Sorbonne University, artists, models for painters, anarchists, revolutionaries, and other interesting people several of whom were concerned with the same existential questions that I was.

One day in the living room of a friend I noticed a brass hourglass with the words Memento Mori etched on its base. When I asked her about it she said that in Latin means to remember that we will die and enjoy our life the best we can till it lasts.

During one of my visits to Turin, I was confronted by the Memento Mori when my cousin Gianni talked me into visiting my uncle Angelo who was in a dreary, extremely depressing old government hospital with terminal cancer and had not yet been told that he would soon die. He was a meek, timid man completely dominated by his obese and bossy wife, and his life had merely consisted of a boring job and watching television in the evening. Gianni told me that recently he had defied his wife, something that he had never dared to do before, by insisting that they stay in Turin, while she wanted to move to her native town.

When I arrived his wife was about to leave and was shouting "Stupid asshole, now you will soon crap out at last, and I will go back to Modena! So there!"

After she had left after some small talk he told me:

“Now that I am retired, if I get better in the afternoon can watch those playing boccie in the park near our house!”

Watch it, not play it.

Boccie is a game mostly played by older men which consists of throwing metal balls close to a smaller one. I had to refrain from telling him that if this was all that he had to live for he might as well die right now. About those living such inane lives, Satprem said:

“When the imprisonment is complete the death outside becomes one with the death inside, exactly as we have built it gesture by gesture. In such a death one does not pass to the other side: *one has always been on the side of death.*”

My uncle was an extreme case, but so many also spend their whole life without really living it. Dear reader,

**May I ask how long can you consider that you will die
before the mind diverts your thoughts away from it?**

I assume that you wouldn't be reading this book if you weren't interested in finding out who you truly are, but to discover it will have to confront the riddle that death presents us with. Use the Memento Mori to no longer waste time, get out of your familiar comfort zone, free yourself from the limitations of the outer I, and make a great adventure of your life. As the American writer and professor of comparative mythology Joseph Campbell advised,

“As you journey through life, remember that death walks beside you, whispering in your ear. Embrace the reality of your mortality, for it is a reminder

**to live authentically, with integrity and authenticity,
and cherish the beauty of each moment."**

12. I Am Not I

Most assume that we are the self-image that we have of ourselves which consists of all our qualities and tendencies, but it is merely a mental construct that covers up our real nature. As Ramana Maharshi asserted, "You are not your thoughts, you are the witness of your thoughts. You are not your emotions, you are the observer of your emotions. You are not your body, you are the consciousness pervading it."

Realizing that we are not who we believed to be can be very bewildering, but it is also a profound, liberating moment of self-discovery. Indeed is a daunting task to shed our identification with various aspects of the self-image that we accumulated over time,

**but until we have transcended it we cannot
wake up from the dream of our lives**

One day in the library of my philosopher cousin Gianni I opened at random a book by the recent Spanish poet Jimenez and read this poem written from the standpoint of the outer I:

"I am not I. I am this one
beside me walking whom I do not see,
whom at times I manage to visit
and whom at other times forget;
the one who remains silent while I talk,
the one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
the one who takes a walk when I remain indoors,
the one who will remain standing when I die"

This poem was a profound revelation to me and sometimes wondered what my life would have been if I had not read it, and shuddered at the thought. Through it, I became aware that

**the person that I seemed to be was not me but an usurper
who often had been living my life instead of me.**

Many years later I found this passage by Wu Hsin about it:

“All thoughts serve to support the unreal “I” Every spoken “I” is an inauthentic “I”, usurper-I. It points to be body and mind as author and actor. Every spoken “I” is inauthentic-I, usurper-I”

I could not perceive him directly, only discern some of his aspects through what he said with my voice, the negative thoughts that he often indulged in, and how he used my body and mind to fulfill its desires. When I talked about it to my philosopher cousin Gianni he said that in psychology what I called the usurper is the "alter ego", a secondary personality. He mentioned a novel by Stevenson in which the good Dr. Jekyll and the horrible Mr. Hyde take turns inhabiting the same body, and the latter exemplifies a split personality that can overpower our better one.

This poem lingered in my mind, and the verse “whom at times I manage to visit...” reminded me that in some rare and precious moments, I had some contacts with him, albeit not consciously. The first was when as a small child in a kindergarten I felt that did not belong there. Then once when some schoolmates bullied me I was filled with anger but suddenly it dissolved into a profound calm. It could only have been because “this one beside me walking whom I do not see” had taken me over.

One day in a youth hostel I met Kathleen, a woman a bit older than the average backpacker, full of aliveness and with such a joyful smile, and as we talked asked me which poet I liked most. At the time Jimenez was the only one I had read, and I told her the poem that I knew by heart, “I am not I...”

When she said that she knew it also and liked it very much I was exhilarated; at last I had found someone who understood what it made me feel! When I asked her how I could become “this one beside me walking whom I do not see” she looked intensely into my eyes and asked me:

“May it perchance be that deep within you already knows the answer, but do not dare to confront it?”

Her words hit me with such power that I could not speak for a while, then I told her:

“I know that I can never be truly myself until I am free of the outer “I”, the usurper of my life. I have not confronted it because I was ashamed to admit that somehow it is also a part of me.”

We were silent for a while and then she added:

“Indeed what you call the usurper is an obstacle to your spiritual journey and must be overcome, but is not as bad as you think but more like a forlorn, unloved child who needs care and affection. Instead of being ashamed of him give him the love that desperately needs.”

I felt like crying but couldn’t; apart from perhaps when I was a small child, which I do not remember, I had only cried once when my father died. She then told me that sometimes she had intuitions that turned out to be right and had just been inwardly told that as my aspiration to become “this one beside me walking whom I do not see” was very intense I could be sure that one day I will become one with it. I believed her and felt such relief

and peace as never before.

By realizing that you are not the outer I, the usurper, the answer to the question “Who Am I” will begin to be revealed to you.

But do not try to understand it with your mind because it cannot, just feel it in your heart. Sri Aurobindo called the outer I the outer self and said that:

"The outer self is like a mask that you wear in the world, but it is not your true face. Your true self is a spark of the Divine, a soul that is eternal and immortal. Do not be deceived by the outer appearances or the fleeting changes of the external world.

**Look within and discover the inner truth of your being,
which is beyond all limitations and boundaries."**

13. The Awakening Call

The awakening call is a profound experience that triggers a radical change in our lives and brings us to the Path or to a higher level of it. Is like the first rays of dawn after a very dark night, finding a key unlocking the door to a priceless treasure, a ship reaching calm waters after a harrowing storm. As Rumi said, every moment a voice out of this world, calls on our soul to wake up and rise.

This call is more easily heard in moments of solitude and stillness when we are focused inwardly, free from the concerns and distractions of the dreamworld. Sri Aurobindo offers this reassurance:

“According to the nature and the circumstances the call will come.

**The call, once decisive, stands; the thing
that has been born cannot be stifled.”**

The awakening call may come through the words of a spiritual Teacher or guru, reading an esoteric text, a vision, a serendipitous encounter with a special person, and often through an existential crisis that makes us question the meaning of our life, re-evaluate our priorities and values, and see the dreamworld and ourselves with newfound clarity. According to Rumi:

"The Awakening Call is the one of the heart, a beckoning to dissolve the barriers separating us from the Beloved and awaken to His eternal dance of love within and all around us"

My first main awakening call had come through the poem of Jimenez mentioned in the previous chapter but I had not recognized it as such, and the next also came through a poem.

Near our house, there was a kiosk of second-hand books to which I was attracted like a famished cat to fish, but his owner, a grumpy, unfriendly old man, knew that I had no money to buy any and did never let me look at them. But one day a kind middle-aged woman was there instead of him, and she let me browse through them in peace. After several uninteresting ones, I chanced upon a book by the American writer and poet A. E. Poe, and read these two verses:

**“Would God that I could awaken,
for I dream, I know not how...”**

I felt very dizzy, leaned against the kiosk, and shut my eyes. When I opened them I saw the street as if for the very first time and immersed in an eerie glow. Nearby some children about my age were chattering excitedly about a football team. A cyclist sporting a bright red cap whizzed by at a breakneck pace and a car in the distance blew its claxon. I heard a strange sound that kept getting louder, and it took me a while to understand that was an airplane passing by in the sky.

The woman at the kiosk was looking at me with a concerned expression but did not say anything, just let me be. Although I didn't believe in any god, this invocation was often in the background of my mind: “Would God that I could awaken, for I dream, I know not how...”

I had always assumed that I was not a sleepwalker like I deemed almost everyone else, but this invocation made me aware that I also was still adrift in the dream of my life. This was a mighty shock but made me more intensely yearn to awaken from it. But, alas, all too soon the dreamworld's attractions and the vagaries of my mind distracted me from it.

Only several years later I realized I had already had some minor awakening calls of whom I had not been aware. For example, once at school, a professor mentioned the injunction "Nosce Te Ipsum," (know thyself) which was inscribed in the forecourt of the temple of Apollo in Delphi and attributed to both the Greek philosopher Socrates and Heraclitus. This reminded me that I did not know who I was, but I had no idea of how I

could find it out.

A major, life-changing call came when I was in an awful depression because I could not bear the thought of spending my life without meaning. Even many things that I used to enjoy, like writing short novels and poems, making love, listening to classical music, exploring a city for the first time, smoking a joint, etc, had lost almost all of their attraction for me.

What helped me to come out of such a dismal state was an awakening call by a voice in my mind saying three times in a row:

“This depression to the outer I belongs, not to you, so like a phoenix from its ashes rises soar to new heights, spread your wings wide”

I whispered back, “I will,” and soon this depression was no more.

**That you are reading this book means that you have
already received your main awakening call.**

You can never go back to what you had been before it because how you see yourself and the dreamworld has drastically changed, any temptation to return to your old life is a longing for a home that no longer exists. Then your inner journey will be filled with new challenges and discoveries and while you may still be tested by some adversities you will face them with greater courage and determination and discover your hidden strengths and capacities. Feel these words attributed to Rumi as if the Divine was telling them to you:

“From afar I am calling to you. Calling you since the beginning of days. Calling across millennia, for eons of time, calling, calling since always...

**for I am that in you which has always been,
that in you which will never end!”**

14. The Path

The spiritual Path is a journey of inner growth, self-discovery, and transformation whose main aim is to realize that we are one with our Self and the Divine. There are many versions of it, but as Krishna speaking as the Divine affirmed in the Bhagavad Ghita:

“Many are the paths of men, but in the end, they all come to Me”, and the prophet Muhammad also said that “There are as many ways to Allah as there are created souls.”

But they all have one thing in common: to accomplish the Path we must transcend our ego and outer I. This is the fulfillment of the invocation of a main text of Hinduism, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

**“From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness
to the light, from death to immortality.”**

The major drawback at the beginning of the Path is starting in it from the standpoint of the outer I who can talk about it, read spiritual books, meditate, try to do Yoga, etc, but can no more attain the Great Awakening than the protagonist of a novel can become its author. So we must identify ourselves with our inward I which is often a challenging process, but there is a part of the outer I which to some extent is open to the influence of our inner being, and by focusing on it gradually increases until only our inward I is left.

Another drawback of the outer I is that may follow the teachings promoted by pseudo “gurus” through Facebook posts or other media claiming that through them we can quickly and effortlessly become enlightened. Mère gave this warning about this: “Let us

shun the paths that are too easy and ask no effort, the paths which give us the illusion of having reached our goal.”

As Krishnamurti often asserted, the aim of the Path, Self-realization, cannot be achieved through any religion, doctrine, ideology, or relying on a Guru. However, is a fact that some seekers have achieved their Self-realization through the guidance of a Teacher or Guru, through Yoga, Sufism, Zen, etc. The main reason that most don't is that they follow their teachings like believers of a religion do, without integrating them enough into their lives, which is like to keep examining a map to one's destination instead of starting the journey to it. Mère's advice is:

“Whatever you do, whatever your occupations and activities, the will to discover the truth of your being and unite with it must be always living and present in all that you do, all that you feel, all that you think.”

When I asked Beehar, a very advanced disciple of Mère who was a bit of my mentor how I could achieve my Self-realization he told me that the best way is to adhere to this ancient injunction:

**All you must give to one thing only. Just because of this,
you will no longer be disturbed by anything else.**

He then added that this “one thing only” is the Path, and ought to be my foremost concern, second to none, and I should make everything I do an integral part of my sadhana (yogic practice). Then he asked me to what extent I did and I had to admit that it was not enough. He laughed at my embarrassment and comforted me by saying that according to Sri Aurobindo, the Path consists of falling on our face, getting up, turning and looking sheepishly at God, and then taking the next step.

**Be concentrated on the Path all the time, whatever
you might be doing, not only in your meditations.**

Indeed there may be times when your aspiration is very intense and others when you forget the Path, but do not be discouraged by this, and if any doubts or misgivings arise in your mind remind yourself that they do not come from you but from the outer I, don't listen to them. Sri Aurobindo gave us this reassurance:

“Our incapacity does not matter, for there is no human being that is not incapable in some parts of his nature, but the divine Force is present even in it. If one puts his trust in that Force, the incapacity will be transformed into capacity, and

**the difficulty and the struggle will thus
become a means to achieve the aim.”**

15. Seeking

Those on the journey of self-discovery on the Path are called seekers, but everyone who aspires to something more than an ordinary life and its petty gratifications in a way is a seeker, or close to becoming one. Often there is a wrong approach to seeking which Rumi warned against: “We may be searching among the branches for what only appears in the roots”

The branches are yogic techniques and practices, reading too many spiritual books, reciting mantras, devotional chanting, etc. The roots are in the silence and vastness where our Self dwells in bliss, but to find them sometimes we must lose to gain,

**embrace uncertainty to acquire an unshakeable certitude,
and overcome doubts to have an unwavering faith.**

The recent American/English poet T.S. Eliot was not a Teacher but had the right attitude about seeking:

“We shall not cease from exploration and at the end of all our exploring we will arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

When a seeker requested the great Sufi mystic Rabia’a of the 8th century CE to ask Allah so that He would open a door to him she replied:

“Oh you idiot, *when was the door ever shut?*”

**How long will you keep pounding on an open door,
begging for someone to open it for you?”**

As a child, I often had the urge to open every door, even when could not reach the doorknob. Adults found this amusing and thought that I was just curious, but

subconsciously I was trying to find a way back to where I came from, but did not know that it is from our Source, and whether we are aware of it or not we are all journeying back to it.

As a teenager, I was obsessed with trying to find a meaning for my life and sought it amongst those that our society marginalizes because they looked to me as much more alive and present to themselves than the so-called “normal” people are. They did not help me to find the meaning of my life but some gave me some clues on how to live in a way that brought me closer to discovering it. For instance, a mercenary I knew encouraged me to never fear whatever happens by telling me how he managed to survive extreme dangers in his profession. A prostitute in Barcelona’s Barrio Chino taught me unconditional love with her sincere, heartfelt one by helping me during a very difficult time without expecting anything in return. As a last example, a tramp in the Arab district of Marseilles gave me this valuable advice:

“I don’t care about being homeless because the Prophet told us that we should live in the world as a traveler, a passer-by, with our clothes and shoes full of dust, just like mine are. Sometimes we rest under the shade of a tree, and at other times walk in the desert. Be a passer-by always, *because this world is not your home.*”

Intuitively I always knew that isn’t. Once I asked Pandiji, a great but little-known Tantric Teacher how I could best seek the Divine and he told me:

“I know that you would like to be given a powerful mantra or some extraordinary yogic techniques. Why simple and easy when complicated and difficult is also possible? All you need to seek and find Brahman (the Divine)

**is to quieten your mind and no longer
live as if you were not one with That.**

He also read me a passage from the Bhagavad Gita in which Krishna as an aspect of the Divine said:

“The ignorant attribute to Me a limited form and seek Me in the world; but as I am their

very Self why seeking Me in the limited when I am everywhere present?”

This reminded me that when a dervish told the Kabuli that he had inwardly been told to seek Allah in another zawiya (the Sufi equivalent of an ashram or monastery), he replied: “To seek Him, remaining in our Zawiya or this other one will not make much difference because Allah is everywhere in it as well as He is also in the tavern and the whorehouse!”

**Dear reader, I certainly don't want to discourage
you from seeking the Great Awakening,**

but would be irresponsible if I didn't caution you that achieving it is like an earthquake razing to the ground almost all that you have ever been. As Nisargadatta Maharaj warned, the search for reality is the most dangerous of all undertakings because it will destroy the world in which you live. But he added that if your motive is love of truth you need not be afraid.

Never forget that as seekers yearn for the Divine, That also yearn for them. You are at the same time the seeker and what you seek, both a traveler on your inner journey and its destination as well. If the Path is the most important thing in your life first or later the illusion that you are separated from the Divine will dissolve and the Great Awakening will take you over. As Mère said:

“When a man who seeks the Divine attempts to re-ascend by degrees towards the inaccessible, he forgets that all his knowledge and all his intuition cannot take him one step forward in this infinite; neither does he know that what he wants to attain,

**what he believes to be so far
from him, *is within him.*”**

16. Books

Especially at the beginning of the Path books can be very useful, but at a certain point we should stop reading them and practice what they taught us. Reading too many of them can result in an indigestion of the mind, a fog obscuring the clarity of our intuition, and make us drown in an ocean of words.

Just like the movies, videos, and TV programs we watch, books shape our thoughts and ways of living. Those with all sorts of horrors, violence, killings, tragic endings, loveless sex, etc, tend to bring our consciousness down to its lowest levels. Besides books about the Path, Yoga, and high poetry, the only ones worth reading are those that inspire us, foster our inner journey, or are about helping others.

**Reading books is of little use if we do not
incorporate what they teach in our lives.**

Even spiritual books are not always very good: some depict a too marvelous portrayal of enlightenment and self-realization which can bring about a discouraging sense of inadequacy in those who have not experienced any hint of them. Then there are many of the old, obsolete spirituality that advise to escape from the difficulties of life in a Himalayan cave or an ashram instead of confronting and overcoming them. The Indian Teacher of Khrya Yoga Yukteswar warned that:

“Sacred writings are beneficial in stimulating desire for inward realization if one stanza at a time is slowly assimilated, otherwise, a continual study of them may result in vanity, false satisfaction, and undigested knowledge.”

In my early teens, I hoped to find the answers to all my questions in books, but my parents had only a few uninteresting ones. The happiest moment of my life so far was when I went with my mother to visit an aunt and her son, my philosopher cousin Gianni, had a big library with so many of them. While looking at their titles, my mother bitterly complained:

“Books! He never plays with other kids, and is not even interested in soccer; it just isn’t normal at his age! All he likes to do is read books!”

Somehow, she managed to make the word books sound obscene.

While she kept ranting away, I opened a book entitled *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) by the recent German existentialist philosopher Heidegger in which I found a very interesting passage about “Dasein” which means existence or being-there, to be fully present to ourselves in “Here and Now.” I asked my cousin about this book and he said that according to Heidegger there is an authentic self and a false, superficial one in us, and of course, we should endeavor to live as the former.

Yes! I knew it! Somehow, intuitively I knew it!

I had never felt such enthusiasm before and trembled all over with excitement. I also found two very interesting psychology texts about the mechanisms of the mind which increased my euphoria even further. When I asked my cousin to borrow them and *Being and Time*, at first he refused, but then seeing my desperate expression lent them to me, sarcastically wishing me good luck in understanding Heidegger.

What I needed would have been books about spirituality and he had some of them, but I did not ask to borrow any because I had associated spirituality with the Catholic religion of my family which I detested because of its rigid dogmas that

require blind faith and obedience to its commandments. Moreover some of its bishops had supported fascism in WW2 and in Spain even afterward.

Books had been my companions for so long and I learned much from them but not what I most wanted to know, who I was and the meaning of my life. Then one day while looking at my cousin's library I suddenly realized that their authors over the ages had expounded countless different and often contradictory versions of the truth. So in such an ocean of words, how could I find which one had truly discovered it? It would be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

So I gave up on philosophy, and for several years, only read books about psychology, poetry, and some science fiction.

After I found thePath, I studied many books about Sufism, Zen, the chakras, reincarnation, etc; but eventually realized that they were more of a distraction from my Yoga than any real help. One day, while writing a mystical novel in which its protagonist passed through a dreadful experience, I remembered that as Mère said:

“There are already so many bad things in the world, so why do writers invent even more horrors instead of writing something beautiful and high? What is the use of imagining yet worse things than are already there? If you imagined something more beautiful, a more beautiful life, that would be worth the trouble.”

But as this dreadful experience was too crucial in the plot of this novel to be deleted, I threw it in the wastepaper basket. Now I feel about books like the American poet and philosopher Thoreau did:

“Books, not those which afford us a cowering enjoyment, but in which each thought is of unusual daring; such as an idle man cannot read, and a timid one

would not be entertained by, which even make us dangerous to existing institutions, such call I good books.”

More than in books, find what you need to know through your intuition and the insights and intimations from your depths.

The danger of books is that by reading too many of them, you might lose yourself in the pursuit of knowledge and let them become a substitute for experience, leaving you with a mind full of not-so-useful information. Ramana Maharshi’s advice is:

“As for reading books, you may go on reading any number of them. They can only tell you to realize the Self within you.

**The Self cannot be found in books. You have
to find it out for yourself, in yourself.”**

Which is what Krishnamurti always said.

17. The Labyrinth

Since ancient times labyrinths have been used for meditation, introspection, and contemplation. To deal with the intricate journey of self-discovery through our uncharted depths in which we encounter both the light and the darkness within us. The most known labyrinth is in the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur which for those on the Path Theseus symbolizes our inner being, and the Minotaur represents the ego, so slaying it signifies the triumph of light over darkness. But at a high level of the Path at the center of the labyrinth instead of the Minotaur, we find our higher Self.

**Then when we emerge from the labyrinth we are
no longer the same person who entered it.**

The labyrinth's twists and turns mirror the challenges, setbacks, and breakthroughs on the Path. According to the famous psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Jung, the journey into the labyrinth is an archetypal one into the depths of the psyche, and crossing it is a profound descent into it.

While crossing our version of the labyrinth we may enter some passages which lead to dead ends. Some can be very dangerous because it can be very difficult or even impossible to get out of them, like for instance an addiction to alcohol or drugs, chronic depression, compulsive gambling, bulimia, etc.

However, the recent Indian poet, philosopher, and mystic Tagore affirms at times the traveler has to knock at every alien door to reach his very own and must wander through all outer worlds to find the innermost shrine at their end.

The problem is that even quite a few of those who are somewhat aware of being stuck at a dead end of the labyrinth instead of seeking a way out of it just tell themselves that they will get out of it but, alas, not right now, only when their children have grown up, after getting their divorce, when are retired and have more time, etc. But such self-deceptions make them sink even deeper into the slumber of their lives.

The ultimate labyrinth is in our mind which often misinterprets and deforms what we perceive; therefore to find its center we must reexamine the mechanisms of perception and how we interpret reality, because as the German philosopher Nietzsche said

There are no facts, only interpretations.

On the last page of a weekly magazine of crosswords and rebuses which my father bought every Sunday, there was a labyrinth puzzle: he started at its entrance and with a pencil blackened all the passages leading to a dead end until he found the only one leading to its center. Success. When I asked him why he did this he said that it was to kill time. *Kill time? Why?*

When I was about eleven years old I had a strange idea that Turin, the town where I was born was a labyrinth, and explored the streets around our house. None came to a dead end like those of my father's puzzle but there was no center, merely always more streets. As a teenager, I hitchhiked around a lot, and when visiting a town for the first time often kept roaming its streets as if subconsciously searching for one leading to another world, perhaps India, of which I knew almost nothing about. One day I wrote this about it in one of my notebooks:

“Why did I search so long for who I was and the meaning of my life in the labyrinth of the world and the one in my mind, full of dead ends and locked up doors? It was like seeking a glimmer of light in a dark dungeon, or water to quench our thirst in the most

arid desert. All around me sleepwalkers in a daze wander, of themselves apparently so sure but of those like me not inwardly asleep secretly afraid. My need to be free, to awaken from the dream of my life they cannot comprehend; forever a stranger amongst them I will always be...”

**It is by keeping your mind utterly silent and still that
you will find the way to the center of your labyrinth.**

Then you will realize that every defeat, unfulfilling relationship, loss, or setback had been one of your labyrinth dead ends, but each time you emerged from one of them became closer to the center. As the recent Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh affirmed,

“The journey into the labyrinth is a journey of surrender, of letting go of control and trusting the journey. It is a journey of faith, of knowing that we are guided and supported every step of the way.

**It is a journey of love, of opening our hearts and allowing
ourselves to be vulnerable and authentic."**

18. Dead Ends – The Nada Commando

A note: some may wonder what this chapter and the next are doing in a book about the Path, but I included them as examples of which kinds of dead ends we might end up in the labyrinth.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries there was the Internationale, a revolutionary faction so called from a socialist anthem which became a symbol of unity and internationalism. Its primary aim was to bring about a revolution in the whole world to free it from capitalism, fascism, and dictatorships by establishing a socialist or communist government.

But first or later most revolutions end up setting up new despots in the same old seats of power like the Russian and the Chinese ones did. The revolution that we really need, long overdue, is in our consciousness to free it from all the conditionings that our culture brainwashed us with, a revolution against the ego and outer I.

I was so desperate to find a meaning for my life that I could easily have been taken over by all sorts of ideologies, and because my friends were almost all on the extreme left, I ended up joining the Paris branch of the Internationale. Its members were a mixed lot: Spaniards who after losing the civil war had escaped to Paris, communists who deemed their party as sacrosanct as Christians do their church; middle-aged, bearded anarchists in old-fashioned clothes who disregarded every rule like coming on time for the meetings and not smoking their pestilential Gitanes or Gauloises in the room, and a recently joined Corsican who opened his jacket to show of the revolver in his belt - big deal, we were all armed.

But soon I became dissatisfied with the Paris branch because we kept talking and talking but not much was done apart from fundraising for more active branches. Eventually, one of the Spaniards put me in contact with the ETA, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, (Basque Homeland and Liberty) whose aims were the independence of their country and free it from Spain's fascism and its dictator Franco. I was assigned to the Nada (nothing) commando, jokingly so-called because its Catalan leader, Alejandro, had been an anarchist. Almost all its members were Basques trained in urban guerrilla warfare and inspired by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

So one fine summer morning in Pau, a French city near the Pyrenees, I wore a Boy Scout uniform and boarded one of several buses full of Boy Scouts going on a holiday in Spain, and although I was older and taller than them nobody paid any attention to me. When the buses stopped at a service station they rushed out to the toilets and the refreshments stall. I hid in a toilet until the buses left and then an old Volkswagen driven by my contact from the Paris branch picked me up.

When we arrived at the safe house in Tarragona the Basques were already there and even before offering us a glass of vino tinto checked my backpack and yes, the explosives were there.

About this gruesome period of my life, I only mention that in the end almost all my comrades were killed, and when Alejandro was shot right next to me it was the end of the Nada commando. I could have joined another one but instead went back to Paris because I had realized what should have been obvious, that no matter how many of Franco's Falangists we killed we would not be able to liberate Spain from fascism.

The saddest thing about it was realizing that I had not risked my life so much for our ideals as I assumed but mostly because I enjoyed the drama and excitement of being in almost constant danger and made me feel superior to those whom we called the ovejas,

sheep, who did not fight with us. As the recent Indian Jesuit and psychotherapist Anthony de Mello noted,

“Most people end up being conformists; they adapt to prison life. A few become reformers; and fight for better living conditions in the prison, better lighting and ventilation. Hardly anyone becomes a rebel, a revolutionary who breaks down the prison walls.

**You can only be a revolutionary when you
can see the prison walls in the first place.”**

These walls are our unexamined beliefs and assumptions, ingrained biases, prejudices, and societal pressures that often go unnoticed. Start a revolution against yourself, against all that you have ever been. Krishnamurti’s advice is:

“There is a revolution that we must do if we want to become free of the anguish, conflicts, and frustrations in which we are caught. This revolution must not begin with ideologies but with a radical transformation of our minds by breaking free from all conditioning, all authority, and all fear.

**To bring peace to the world, to stop the war, a revolution
must take place in the individual, in you and me.”**

19. Dead Ends - The Flower Children

The Flower Children (nowadays called hippies) was a counterculture movement in the 60s based on rejecting consumerism and materialistic values in favor of celebrating a holistic way of living based on love, peace, and freedom. Their dream was to bring about a new and more just, loving, compassionate world. Their unconventional lifestyle included communal living, smoking marijuana but not taking hard drugs, and when affordable using natural, organic cures instead of allopathic medicines. Many of them participated in anti-war demonstrations and civil rights protests or were pioneers of social activism and environmental movements. They listened to the Beatles' songs, often wore colorful clothes, and the girls put flowers in their hair.

When I left Spain and went back to Paris I remembered that the famous guerrilla leader Che Guevara who was murdered by the CIA had said:

“The true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love and it is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary without this quality.”

But how many revolutionaries had it? I never met one and I also didn't have it. But his words inspired me to find meaning in my life by joining the flower children's dream of changing the world not with guns but through love and songs.

To join them I went to the famous “Marche au puces”, fleas market, and with the last of my money bought a colorful T-shirt and a second-hand jacket embroidered with rainbows which every flower child would like. My long hair which had not seen a barber since I was fifteen years old completed my image as one of them. Then I went to the Quartier Latin which many flower children frequented and in the evening passed in front of a window through which I saw a large room where several of them were having a

party. Although some chairs were there they sat or laid on colorful pillows and the Beatles were on with their famous song: “Because the wind is high...it blows my mind...because the sky is blue...it makes me cry...”

A couple was just going in and I followed them closely as if I was with them. At the entrance, a ravishing raven-headed girl with tiny sparkling stars in her hair and a bowl of sugar cubes in her hand welcomed us with a big smile. She took one, put it between her lips, and lightly kissed the man, leaving the sugar cube in his mouth, and then did the same with the girl and with me, pushing it gently in my mouth with the tip of her tongue. It had a slight flavor of licorice.

Inside the hall, most looked very spaced out although there wasn't the smell of weed or hashish that I expected. Two girls were passionately kissing each other and in a part of the hall which could not be seen from the window two couples were quietly making love. Gradually I began to feel more and more strange and my attention kept getting focused on sharp details like a dark spot on the hem of a gypsy-looking dress, a button missing from a man's shirt, the very simple design of the floor tiles which seemed so meaningful but could not understand why; a shiny blue stone in the ring that a girl wore, and I saw everyone there enchantingly beautiful. Then I noticed that the feet of a girl dressed like a Spanish flamenco ballerina who was dancing with a fan in her hand did not quite touch the floor — *she was levitating a few inches above it!*

Only then I remembered that the hallucinogen LSD, often called acid, sometimes came in the form of sugar cubes (at the time), and belatedly figured out what was going on. Oh well, here I was, flying high on my first acid trip.

After some time the sugar cubes girl came and asked me whether I had already given my contribution to the party, but when I showed her how little money I had left she shrugged it off and asked me who I was. I replied:

I have been unsuccessfully trying to find this out all my life, could you kindly tell me who I

am?”

She laughed and repeated the same question, and then for a while we spontaneously played a game in which she kept asking who I was and I gave her a different answer every time, like:

I am an alien in this world, not knowing where to go.

A gatecrasher in the festival of love.

A revolutionary who exchanged his gun for rainbows.

A dream striving to awaken from itself.

A lost child seeking the family of his soul.

Then there was a long blank in my mind and when I came back to myself all the flower children had left apart from a few sleeping on the floor; someone had put out the light and lit a few perfumed candles. I and Celandine, the sugar cubes girl, had made love and she was still laying on me, softly and sweetly kissing me as I had never been kissed before, and introduced me to the flower children's world of universal love and peace.

But, how sad, the flower children's dream turned out to be a dead end. In the beginning, it was so wonderful, like having a family everywhere I went; I could arrive penniless in any major European city in a cold winter and meet some of our tribe who helped me to find a place to sleep and something to eat. There was so much love and sharing amongst us, not only of weed and food but also of such things as a blanket on a cold night.

But, alas, as our lifestyle became popular many joined us not for our ideals but for the free sex and access to weed and acid, and then all rapidly degenerated until the term flower children was downgraded to hippies. They did not talk about love and peace like we did but mostly about where could best buy or sell their drugs. For us “dropping” an acid trip or smoking weed was a sacred ritual, but they used them just to escape from themselves as some do through alcohol.

Another sign of this degradation was that while we called marihuana weed or hashish “pot”, which some of us associated with the peace pipe of American Indian shamans, they called it *shit*.

20. Dead Ends – Nihilism

According to nihilism life is meaningless, and ultimately nothing has any intrinsic meaning or purpose. According to what Shakespeare said in his dramatic play Machbet:

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing."

But as Heidegger affirmed, nihilism arises from a fundamental misunderstanding of our existence. We have lost touch with our inner being and instead rely on our limited reason and pursue fleeting pleasures. As he said,

**“Nihilism, in its essence, is the flight
of man from his authentic being.”**

After leaving the Flower Children I was still without a meaning for my life, and became so discouraged that lost all hope of ever finding it and no longer believed that we have a higher Self, “this one beside me walking whom I do not see”.

I felt that my life was a journey without a destination, merely an everchanging, chaotic vortex of desires, emotions, sensations, thoughts, and memories, a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors that determine most of our behavior.

This was the worst dead end of my personal labyrinth in which I lived an apparently ordinary life, something which I had always been sure that I never would, and for a while even worked in a factory. I read almost only science fiction and uninspiring novels,

watched action movies, and sometimes when run out of weed to smoke even drank alcohol.

In this state, I felt like the panther in the short poem entitled “The Panther” by the Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke:

“His vision from the sweeping bars so weary
has grown that can hold it no more,
what he sees is a thousand bars
and behind these thousand bars no world.”

Who brought me out of this dismal state when got so bad that I was tempted to commit suicide was Gianni Freccero, a very special person who my ex-guardian introduced me to so that he could help me. When he was five years old he found an unexploded grenade - it was soon after the end of WW2 – played with it and it exploded. He not only lost his eyesight but also the lower part of his arms apart from a short stump below the elbows. On it, he had a watch that he could read with his lower lip, and in his strap put a spoon or a fork to eat, and a toothbrush to brush his teeth. He studied philosophy with two tape recorders, one to study and the other to do his homework, and after getting his degree taught it at Turin University. He had many friends with whom was often on the phone helping with their problems. He was often laughing and joking, telling them not to take themselves too seriously and encouraging them to enjoy their life. He delighted in his own. Once told me that finding that grenade and losing his eyesight and the lower part of his arms was something that he was grateful for because it was through the challenges of his handicap that he did not live an ordinary life like his parents but became the man he was.

After he told me this my indulging in nihilism for so long seemed so absurd that I could hardly believe I had indulged in it for so long and was ashamed of it.

A very good example of the essence of nihilism is this one of Rumi:

“Think how it is to have a conversation with an embryo. You may say: ”The world outside is vast and intricate. There are wheat fields mountain passes and orchards in bloom. At night there are millions of galaxies, and in sunlight the beauty of friends dancing at a wedding.” You ask the embryo why he, or she, stays cooped up in the dark with eyes closed. Listen to the answer:

There is no “other world”. I only know what I’ve experienced. You must be hallucinating.”

21. The Starting Point on the Path

The starting point on the Path is the moment for which consciously or unconsciously we aspired for in many lives. It is the exhilarating, irreversible transition from a life based on the so-called “pursuit of happiness” that only leads to the grave to one whose main aim is the greatest achievement of all, the Great Awakening.

At the starting point, we realize that there are two parts of us, the outer I entranced by the dreamworld, and another, “this one beside me walking whom I do not see” observing the former as one may watch a child playing with his toys. In the measure that we are identified with the outer I

**we may feel like an actor who has been enacting
another role than the one meant for him.**

The starting point may be triggered by something that we read in a book or were told at the right psychological moment; the shock of a tragedy like the loss of a loved one, or even just an unbearable discontent with an ordinary life. After it, many things that seemed so important to us lose much or even all of their appeal, and we become aware that often we have been taken over by a swarm of thoughts, emotions, and reactions that we never choose to have.

Realizing this is like entering a house belonging to us but which we never visited before containing a lot of furniture, paintings on the walls, carpets, decorative objects, etc. We may find that some paintings are too banal; a carpet moldy, and there are some other things that we don't like; so we get rid of them and if we want substitute them with better ones. This house represents our personality and way of living, and also in them, we should discard everything which is not in harmony with the new direction of our life.

My starting point was triggered by a book by Krishnamurti that someone gave me, the second volume of a trilogy entitled Commentaries on Living. From its back cover summary, I had assumed that it was just some mystical mambo jumbo, but then in its introduction, I read a passage stating who we truly are and the meaning of our lives

**cannot be found through religions, ideologies, or any
other system of belief *but only deep within us.***

What did I read? The meaning of my life which I had always sought is *within me*. But then why I had not yet found it?

According to Krishnamurti, the reason is that the truth is a “pathless land”, a state of being in which the mind that sees all in terms of results, success, and acquisitions has come to an end, but I found this hard to accept this because I was an intellectual who had always relied on the mind. This book had been like finding a treasure and touched me deeply, but somehow despite its profound impact kept living much as before.

But a few months later while sitting in a café this realization struck me like a lightning bolt:

**as I felt that what Krishnamurti said was true
*my whole life must change.***

Even now that more than fifty years have passed since that magical, transformative moment, I still vividly remember the waitress flirting with the bartender, a lonely old man near a window watching those passing by in the street, a man angrily speaking on the café’s phone, the ad of a bright red, surreal looking aperitif bottle on a wall, a jukebox with three boisterous adolescents around it, its song reaching me as if from far away; my forgotten cup of coffee getting cold...

My whole life must change.

The next day there was a remarkable synchronicity: I read this passage from Rumi:

“And you? When will you begin your long journey into yourself? One day you too will have to enter your final journey. It will be the longest journey you have ever taken. *It is the journey to find yourself.*”

What about you, dear reader? If you haven't already are you ready to start the journey to find who you truly are, your Self, and dwell in its everlasting peace, bliss, and unconditional love which which never fades away? Don't you wish that your life be full of wonder and the joy of seeing everything in the Here and Now as through the eyes of a joyful child? Well then,

**your whole way of living must radically change and begin
to do so not in some vague, ideal future but right now.**

Please put down this book for a moment, close your eyes, and look at your life so far, see how you did many things merely because of old habits when you could have used your time, consciousness, and energy for your inner work on the Path. As Mère said:

“One realizes suddenly...Since I am here, it means that I have a mission to fulfil. Since I have been endowed with consciousness, it is that I have something to do with that consciousness - what is it? And then to search with whatever consciousness is available:

**why am I here, for what reason? This
seems to me the starting point.”**

22. The Breakthroughs on the Path

The main breakthrough on the Path is when becomes the most important thing of all for us. We may also have some minor but still important breakthroughs that challenge our habitual way of living, help us to get out of our comfort zone, and break through the layers of beliefs and illusions covering up who we truly are. As Mère said,

“On the path of inner transformation, breakthroughs are moments of grace when the soul glimpses its true nature and the limitless possibilities that lie ahead. These breakthroughs remind us that

**our journey is guided by a divine force, and our role
is to surrender to its wisdom and guidance."**

All the inner work that we did, meditations, and yogic practices can bring about a transformative breakthrough in which we realize that all the obstacles, hardships, and setbacks that we went through were stepping stones on the Path.

As Joseph Campbell, a recent American professor of comparative mythology advised:

“We must let go of the life we have planned to accept the one waiting for us. The big moment in our life comes when we are suddenly forced to stop and see where we are going and realize that we have a choice to change its direction through a profound breakthrough on the Path.

At a certain point in my life, I felt that although I had been on the Path for over three years, read many texts about it and yoga, could meditate for a long time, had met Krishnamurti and Jean Klein, a recent French Teacher of Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism), my progress on the Path was slow. Therefore I decided to go to India to find a guru who could help me to progress faster in it, but somehow kept postponing going for

over a year.

But one morning at dawn after smoking a lot of hashish with some friends I found myself on the Tube, London's metropolitan, without remembering taking it. I went out at the next station and it was like stepping into a black-and-white movie: everything was grey, the asphalt, the sky, the buildings. Strangely, none was around, there was not a sound, and the absence of any sign of life made me feel as if I was in a dream that could easily become a nightmare.

It was the time of the Cold War and I thought that the global thermonuclear war that everyone feared had finally come and everyone but me was already dead. My imagination made me feel its deadly radiations in my body, but more than the thought that soon I would also die I poignantly regretted having missed my chance to go to India and find a guru who would help me on the Path.

But then turning a corner I came upon an open café with some watchmen in uniform in it. I stumbled inside and with a shaking voice asked how come that only they were still alive and had not been killed by the radiations. One of them replied something like this in the cockney dialect:

“Oi, mate, what the bleedin' 'ell ya blabberin' on about? This 'ere's the St. Paul district, innit? It's all banks and bisness fancy offices, so early on a Sunday mornin' there ain't no one else about but us, and you better quit dope, mate, 'cause ain't doin' ya any good!

A few days later I went to Turin, and said goodbye to my few friends there, my Hatha Yoga instructor Dharmarama, and my cousin Gianni who had been my guardian after my parents died. When I told him that I was going to India to find my guru he tried to dissuade me from going:

“You are so lucky to have a nice apartment with such a ridiculously low rent (after WW2 the government had blocked the rents because of the inflation), even if you don't stay in it

often, but how will you manage when you come back? You will no longer have a home, and how will you get a job? You have been in jail, even if for political reasons, do not have a profession and employers demand a curriculum and references you don't have..."

My reply was: "Darling, *I am not coming back.*"

Then I hit the highway out of Turin with a backpack and my old sleeping bag which was still warm at night, and held my thumb in the wind to hitchhike to India.

**Breakthroughs on the Path mark the transition from
who you believed to be to who you truly are.**

They confirm that you are going in the right direction and help you to overcome all obstacles, break through the boundaries of what may seem impossible, and reach a higher level of awareness. Your main breakthrough will occur, if it hasn't already when you shift the focus of your consciousness inwardly and let your inner being bring it about. Ramana Maharshi offers this assurance:

"It will come all right in the end. There is the steady impulse of your determination that sets you on your feet again after every downfall and breakdown. Gradually the obstacles are all overcome and your resolve becomes stronger.

**Everything comes right in the end. A steady
determination is what is required."**

23. The Obstacles on the Path

The main obstacles on the Path are the false sense that we are separated from the Divine, the ego, the Vital (mentioned in the next chapter), and the mind's restlessness with its endless thoughts. Others are a lack of discipline and perseverance, negative emotions and habits, attachments, and unexamined beliefs.

To become free of these obstacles we should not use our mind because often is what caused them but rely more on our intuition and the guidance of our inner being. As Wu Hsin pointed out:

“Which problems are there that the mind did not create? The solution to problems begins with the cessation of believing in the contents of one's thoughts.

**The only real problems consist of
the habit of seeing them as such.”**

Papaji, a recent Indian Teacher of Jinana yoga said the same thing:

“The greatest obstacle, in fact, the final obstacle, is the belief that there is an obstacle.”

Especially for those on the Path obstacles are meant to make us confront and overcome our flaws and limitations, but we cannot become permanently free of them with the same consciousness that brought them about, only by raising it to a higher level. About them, Sri Aurobindo said:

“The strangest of the soul's experience is this, that it finds that when it ceases to care for the image and the threat of troubles, then they are nowhere to be found in one's neighborhood. It is then that we hear from behind those unreal clouds God laughing at us.”

One evening I saw a large moth desperately trying to get out of a window, again and again hitting the glass headfirst. When I opened it to let it out I had the impression that it

was complacently telling itself something like:

“Hey, such a strong, almost impenetrable window and I managed to break through it by my efforts alone!”

I then remembered some times when I had been proud of overcoming a difficult obstacle but was not aware that it had not been me but my inner being who did so through me. Now I see any obstacle like Mère did:

“Obstacles are like clouds that temporarily obscure the sun of your inner truth. When you learn to see beyond them and trust in the Divine plan, you will find that the path becomes clearer, and the obstacles lose their power.”

**By seeing all your obstacles as rungs to the accomplishment
of the Path, they become much easier to deal with.**

If you look back at those that you overcame in the past, how hard some had seemed at the time but not so much now, you will realize that they had all been tests of your resolve and sincerity on the Path. Whenever you fail to master one probably is because you tried to deal with it from the standpoint of the outer I instead of from your inward one. Mère's advice is:

“When something extremely unpleasant happens to you, tell yourself, “Well, this proves I am worth the trouble of being given this difficulty, that there is something in me which can resist it”

Follow also this advice of a main disciple of Ramana Maharshi, Annamalai Swami:

“Whatever obstacles may arise on the Path, think of them as 'not me'. Cultivate the attitude that the real you is beyond the reach of all troubles and obstacles.

**There are no obstacles for the Self.
If you can remember that you always are the Self,
obstacles will be of no importance.”**

24. The Separateness

A major obstacle on the Path is the illusory sense of being separated from the Divine and each other because many of the others originate from it. Etymologically the term devil derives from the Greek diabolos, which means: “the one that divides” As Mère affirmed:

“When the separation from the Supreme occurred, Consciousness became unconsciousness, Light became darkness, Love turned into hatred, Strength became weakness, Felicity into suffering, Life into death and Truth into falsehood. The result is the world as we see it.”

To create the dreamworld the sense of separateness had been necessary to make us forget our inherent oneness with all or we would not have been motivated to enact our roles in it. However,

**with the speed of our evolution accelerating all the time
nears when the sense of separateness will be no more.**

Until we deeply feel and experience our oneness with all, the sense of separateness will keep making us feel incomplete, lacking something essential that we can never find. About this, Rumi pointed out that:

“Nothing is more bitter than the separation from You; without Your refuge naught but perplexity is there. Our worldly goods rob us of our heavenly one, our body rends the garment of our soul.”

What prevents us from becoming free of the illusion of separateness is mainly the ego which knows that without it will be no more and always tries to perpetuate it. We have a basic alternative: feel our blissful oneness with everything or suffer the misery of feeling separate and alone. When we make the right choice our perspective changes and we no longer see anyone as a stranger but as a part of ourselves dwelling in another body.

Sufism teaches that separateness is the result of forgetting who we truly are, and to dispel it we must become a gardener of the soul, and every step on Tariqa (the Path) is the recognition that *the gardener and the garden are one*.

Before finding the Path, I saw myself as an outsider in a meaningless world and felt an overwhelming loneliness. Eventually, I began to unravel the psychological mechanisms that had kept me trapped in such a dismal state by realizing that as they were of my own making I must have the power to overcome them. Now about it, I feel like the recent American guru Ram Dass did:

"We're all just walking each other home. We are all here to help each other, to guide each other, to share this journey. And when we recognize the divinity within ourselves and in others, the illusion of separateness dissolves, and we find our way back to the oneness from which we came."

**If you read this book so far you already know
that the sense of separateness is an illusion.**

May this awareness bring you a deep sense of peace and harmony, help you to feel connected to the greater whole, and bring you closer to what covertly you really are. Feel these words attributed to Rumi as if he were telling them to you right now:

"There is a void in your soul, ready to be filled. You feel it, don't you? You feel the separation from the Beloved and invite Him to fill you up, embrace the fire...break off all your bounds, for the final flight yourself prepare; from this weird world your last journey make,

**soar up to the peaks where no more separation
is there between you and your true home."**

25. The Ego

In Sanskrit the name for the ego is Ahamkara: Aham stands for the I and Kara for "maker" or "doer": the ego makes up the illusory I. It is a mechanism that focuses on personal needs and desires, often leading to actions that ignore the needs of others or even harm them to benefit ourselves. In the early stages of our evolution, the ego had a crucial role in focusing our consciousness upon the matter, but now it has mostly been taken over by the hostile forces that resist our evolution. Through the ego, they try to perpetuate their power over us through our identification with the outer I and by bringing to our mind fears and doubts to discourage us from the Path. But by becoming fully aware of its detrimental aspects the ego loses most of its hold on us and then we will no longer be carried around by its insatiable cravings.

**Only when we are free of the ego, or almost so,
we can live according to who we truly are.**

The ego is like an unruly child who relishes playing with the dreamworld's attractions, always wants more of them but is never satisfied; keeps craving attention, and tries to get it by making up all sorts of problems and conflicts. So many are not aware of this and assume that there is nothing wrong with their ego, or not much, or consider its harmful effects part of the normal human condition. It is so foolish, even insane, to be so dependent on the ego which often deprives us of inner peace and happiness, often brings about suffering, and conflicts, and prevents us from having meaningful relationships. Until we are free of it our life can be an arduous journey filled with limitations, insecurity, and missed opportunities, a never-ending cycle of insecurity in which what we most need seems always just out of reach.

However, the ego is not always entirely negative as many seekers assume, and by refining it can be put at the service of the Divine to help the transformation and divinization of the dreamworld.

Until this has been done, in most of us the ego dominates the outer I to the point that there is hardly any difference between them. In the worst cases the outer I becomes inflated with a sense of superiority and arrogance that makes it difficult to connect with others and can lead to reckless actions without considering which negative effects they can have on others.

There this vivid depiction of the ego attributed to the semi-legendary Chinese spiritual Teacher Lao Tzu, also called Laozi, reputed to be the founder of Taoism:

“The ego is like a monkey catapulting through the jungle. Totally fascinated by the realm of the senses, it swings from one desire to the next, one conflict to the next, one self-centered idea to the next.

**Let this monkey go. Let conflicts go. Let ideas
go. Just remain in the center, watching.”**

To deal with the ego we should not use the mind because as Ramana Maharshi noted would be like hiring a thief disguised as a policeman to catch the thief: he may pretend to make strenuous efforts to catch him, perhaps even offer some hints about his whereabouts, but of course in the end never finds it.

When a disciple told Mère that his giant ego was standing in his way and asked Her how to deal with it She just replied: “Ignore it and go through”

This may seem too easy to work, and yet it can be effective when done with our whole being.

To get rid of the ego I first followed the advice of Ramakrishna, a great spiritual Teacher of Bhakty (devotional) Yoga:

”Getting rid of the ego is like besieging a castle: if each time that an enemy comes out of it we immediately kill him eventually none of them will be left and the castle will fall to us.”

But when I read this sentence “We have met the enemy, and he is us” from the comic strip Pogo by the cartoonist Walt Kelly, I realized that seeing the ego as an external enemy made me feel that I had no control over it, while by recognizing it as a part of myself I could endeavor to integrate and transform it rather than fight against it.

**Never think that becoming free of your ego is too arduous
a task or will increase the difficulty of overcoming it.**

If you were lost, hungry, and thirsty in a forest with many snakes and would soon be dark, the thought that finding your way out of it is very difficult would not prevent you from seeking it. About dealing with your ego, suppose that someone insults you: unless you depend on this person for your livelihood or is your partner why should such insult bother you? It is not you but the ego that may make you react with anger or resentment instead of equanimity and detachment. This may well not apply to you, but to those who need it Nisargadatta Maharaj offers this warning:

“At present, you are moved by the pleasure-pain principle which is the ego. You are going along with the ego, you are not fighting it. You are not even aware of how totally you are swayed by personal considerations. A man should be always in revolt against himself, for the ego, like a crooked mirror, narrows down and distorts. It is the worst of all the tyrants.”

**Start an inner revolution against it,
the usurper within you.**

26. The Ugly Troll

One day I read this metaphor by the American novelist Gael Greene about the ego as an ugly troll living underneath the bridge between the mind and the heart. This kept echoing in my mind and one evening in the twilight zone between wakefulness and sleep had this vision:

I was walking on a road lined on both sides by rusty, old machines some of which were partly dismantled, and amongst them, robots of different sizes and shapes were doing something that I could not understand. But as I walked on the machines were in a better condition and amongst them, there were marble pedestals on which stood beautiful copper symbols of sacred geometry like the Flower of Life, the Merkaba, the Ankh, the Star of David, the Yin Yang, the Sri Yantra, etc, which amid those machines looked very surreal.

Eventually, I reached a river too turbulent to swim across, and on its other side, there was a huge, blank screen like a computer monitor. But when I was close to it lit up and I was entranced by seeing ethereal women dancing in a circle while holding hands with angelic children, their feet barely touching the ground as if floating in a dreamlike trance. I saw wise-looking old men with long manes of white hair in meditation, a majestic dragon soaring through the sky, its scales shimmering with iridescent hues, and many other wonders. I was irresistibly attracted to them and there was a narrow bridge crossing the river. Somehow I knew that it was the one between the mind and the heart under which the ugly troll of the ego lives, and it came up from under the bridge very fast and blocked my way to its entrance. As I don't know what a troll looks like, my subconscious came up with the image of a demon devouring the world which I had once seen in a Tibetan thangka (mandala). Suddenly it changed into Frankenstein, and then into several other monsters: the vampire Dracula, a bloodthirsty alien from a science fiction movie that I saw as a teenager, a werewolf, Hitler, the Hydra, a fire-spitting scolopendra, etc. Every

time that one changed into the next grew bigger and taller, and the last to appear, which was the Minotaur, was about ten meters tall.

I desperately wished to cross the bridge and enter the amazing realm on its other side but had no weapon to fight the Minotaur with. He loudly growled while gesturing for me to go away, but I felt that if I did would never find my way to this bridge again. So when the Minotaur took a menacing step toward me I decided that instead of leaving I would rather die in front of this bridge, close to the enchanted domain on its other side.

As I took this resolution the Minotaur shrank to normal size and turned into a pitiful scarecrow in ragged clothes, a scrawny neck like a sick old chicken, a potbelly as a nine-month pregnant woman. It had a Halloween pumpkin as a head and for eyes just holes with the stub of a candle in them that seemed on the point of going out, and it also smelled bad.

I pushed it aside, eagerly ran across the bridge, and dived headfirst into the monitor. All the amazing images that I had seen before were still there with others no less amazing, and looking at them felt such peace and a sense of well-being that I cried with joy.

I passed from this vision into a deep sleep, and when woke up realized that all these machines represented the mechanisms of the mind, and the sacred geometry symbols symbolized the forces and entities helping us on the Path. The wondrous realm on the other side of the river is what Ramana Maharshi called the Mansion of the Heart, the haven where our Self dwells.

But the most important revelation from this vision is that the ego is nowhere as powerful and invincible as it may seem but more like the recent Tibetan lama Sogyal Rinpoche defined it:

“The ego is the absence of true knowledge of who we really are, a doomed clutching on, at all costs, to a cobbled together and makeshift image of ourselves,

**a chameleon charlatan self that keeps changing and has to
in order to keep alive the fiction of its existence.”**

27. The Vital

A Note: in this chapter OBEs, out-of-the-body experiences, have been mentioned. They consist of perceiving the world from the standpoint of what has been called the subtle body or “The Body of Light” a quasi-material one that is neither solely physical nor ethereal.

When we dream of flying around feeling weightless probably we are in an OBE. The existence of the subtle body has not yet been scientifically proven but since ancient times in the East has been affirmed by Buddhism, Hinduism, Tantra, and Taoism. In the West was confirmed by Theosophy, Plato, Plotinus, Paracelsus, and the alchemists.

Consider the small seed of a tree in the darkness underground: it could remain quietly, effortlessly there without bothering to germinate, but instead grows a sprout that emerges out of the ground “Hey! Light!” and grows into a tree.

The reason that it does so is that the Divine set in all sentient beings the vital, powerful energy that makes vegetation grow, animals explore their environment, reproduce, fight for supremacy with their kind, and at the human stage makes some of us seek also higher things.

There are two parts of the vital, a lower and a higher one, but this chapter has been put in the section on the obstacles on the Path because in most the lower one is predominant. Many seekers try to suppress their vital but

**to progress on the Path instead of weakening the vital
is better to strengthen, purify, and enlighten it.**

The lower vital always craves intense excitement, drama, very strong sensations, and doesn’t care whether finds them through pleasures or from conflicts and suffering. At its lowest level anger, hatred, violence, and extreme passions are like the best food is for a

gourmet. When we prevent it from getting what it craves often cuts off our energy and tries to make us fall into depression and become stagnant, apathetic, and joyless; therefore we must learn how to transform its energies and redirect them to our higher vital.

As in our depths, there is always an immense joy and ecstasy is a kind of insanity we allow the lower vital to seek shallow, transient worldly pleasures instead of them.

The higher vital is the basis of our enthusiasm, joy, and creativity; is capable of great acts of generosity and self-sacrifice and can bring about in us unconditional love, inner peace, and joy. Through it we can access the full personal power that empowers us to act with integrity and authenticity, do everything more efficiently and with harmony, and live a more fulfilling and meaningful life. Any discontent, stress, or suffering is a sign that we are still in the turmoil of the lower vital. The condition in which we will be after death mostly depends on whether the lower vital has been purified and merged with the higher one.

At the times when the lower vital dominated me a lot it often brought in me a restless compulsion to do something, no matter what; read a book, think about this or that, visit a friend, go somewhere, etc, depriving me of inner peace; I was as if addicted to it. When in 1968 I joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Puducherry in South India my life changed completely: I worked in its dining hall three times every day at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The rest of the time I read books about Integral Yoga, meditated, or went for a walk on a boulevard along the sea. I no longer had a girlfriend nor anyone I could call a friend; the ashram food was abundant and not bad but monotonous, mostly the same. As I no longer did almost anything that my lower vital enjoyed, it found the excitement that craved in very intense dreams and OBEs. Some nights I left my physical body, floated around in my subtle one, and had various experiences delighting my vital and since then seldom had an OBE.

I had a breakthrough in my effort to control my lower vital when I read this passage from the Indian poet, mystic, and reputed saint Kabir:

“Look at you, foolish man, screaming that you are dying of thirst in a desert, while all

around you a sea of water is there!”

Ramana Maharshi said the same thing:

“You are neck deep in water and yet cry out for it: it is just like saying that a fish in water feels thirsty, or water itself does.”

I could not understand why I was unable to deeply feel this “water”, and when I spoke about this to Pandiji he opened an ancient Sanskrit text and translated for me a passage that he had underlined.

“By merely drinking from the shallow puddles of the pleasures that the vital craves your thirst will never end; it can only be quenched by diving into the ocean of your Atman and becoming one with it”

Then I realized that if I refrained from drinking from the mundane puddles with the lower vital desires my thirst would become so unbearable that I would no longer hesitate to dive into this ocean.

**Do not see your lower vital as an enemy
but as a wild horse not yet tamed.**

While taming it at first do not deprive it of absolutely all that it wants or might go on a strike and deplete your energy. An ancient Arab saying warns that if we tie our camel with too loose a leash will go whenever he likes, but if we tie it too tight he will lay down and refuse to move. Therefore until you have mastered it now and then give it a little of what it wants, but don't let it take it without your permission. Mère's advice is:

“When you have to deal with your vital take care to remain cheerful, otherwise you will get into trouble. Instead of being depressed and saying, “Ah! Despite all my efforts it is beginning all over again”, one begins to laugh and says,

**“Look now, aren't you ridiculous, you know
quite well that you are being ridiculous!”**

28. Helpers on the Path - The Subtle Voice

There is a subtle voice in our depths that at times may quietly tell us what we need to know or offer some valuable advices. Potentially is in many of us, but our materialistic culture tends to suffocate it or make us assume that is just our imagination. To hear it we must be very quiet and receptive. Then it will speak to us more often, but if we keep ignoring might no longer do so until we are ready for it. Rumi's advice is:

“Every moment a voice out of this world calls on our soul to wake up and rise...

**Shhh...no more words. Hear
only the voice within.”**

This subtle voice is like a whisper from our inner being, “this one beside me walking whom I do not see”, and if we trust and appreciate its advice will guide us to the Path or a higher level of it. Sri Aurobindo called it the inner voice and said that it is the one of the Divine speaking from deep within us; is like an echo of eternity, a ray of light leading us back to our eternal Source.

I first heard of the subtle voice in the youth hostel near Heidelberg University when I had a discussion with a fellow backpacker who disagreed with my interpretation of Heidegger's assertion “Transcendence constitutes selfhood”. When I asked him what made him so sure of being right, he replied that his inner voice told him that he did. At first the idea of an inner voice talking to us seemed a fantasy to me, but then I remembered that in the past it had spoken to me, but I had assumed that it came from my subconscious. I first heard it on a day when I got very angry about something until I heard a very calm, serene voice from within me saying:

“Is this really worth getting so upset about? Have you forgotten that everything that happens in your life is but a dream from which you must awaken?”

Then my anger calmed down.

As far as I can remember, the next time that I heard it was when I met a Spaniard from Barcelona. While talking with him I felt a longing to revisit this town that I liked so much, walk again its ramblas, avenues lined with trees, enjoy a glass of tinto wine or a shot of Fundador brandy in the Barrio Chino with friends that I hadn't seen for since I left Spain. But then my subtle voice firmly told me:

“You feel that you have all the time in the world, but you don't. The time allotted to you to attain your Self-realization in this life is limited and there is nothing in Barcelona that can help you to achieve it.”

Sometimes this voice did not use words but when I had an impulse to do something that I shouldn't brought about a poignant feeling in me that translated into words would be: “Are you sure that you should do that?”

**Always listening to your subtle voice will bring you from
illusions to reality, from the outer I to the inward one.**

If you ignore it as most do you will miss out on many opportunities, so when it gives you an advice follow it even if it is not what you would prefer to do, but first make sure that it does not come from your ego or the outer I trying to deceive you. To those who still have many worldly desires Rumi's advice is:

“Deafened by the voice of desire you are, unaware the Beloved lives in the core of your heart. Stop the noise and you will hear His voice in the Silence. In every moment, in

every event of your life, the Beloved is whispering to you exactly what you need to hear and know...

Listen, and your whole life will become a conversation in thought and act between you and Him, directly, wordlessly, now and always."

29. The Signs on the Way

So many things can be a sign for us: some words that we overhear, a dream, a synchronicity, a message or video forwarded to us on WhatsApp, etc. But we must be very alert to clearly distinguish the real ones from the imaginations that our mind can make up. As Mère said,

“Life is a constant flow of signs and intimations, guiding us to our Self and the divine Presence. In the stillness of the heart, we can hear the softest murmurs of the universe, and they guide us unerringly on our journey.”

To deeply understand them we should follow the advice of Rumi’s best friend, the Persian Sufi poet and mystic Shams Tabrizi:

**Remove the veils from your eyes and see
with the ones of your heart.**

About signs, if while we are considering whether to do something or not we pass a side road and notice a DEAD END sign in front of it probably we shouldn’t, while if we see an advertisement: DON’T MISS THIS GREAT OPPORTUNITY is likely that we should. It is also possible to ask for a sign by opening a special book at random and finding in it something that seems to have been written just for us.

When a dervish told the Kabuli about a big difficulty that he had while attempting to do a certain project the Kabuli asked him: “Is this a sign that you should deal with it differently or that your project is not according to His will?” When this dervish replied that he had not considered that the Kabuli replied:

**You don't pay attention to Allah's signs
and call yourself a dervish?**

To mention just a few of all the signs that guided me on the Path, I arrived in India on the 25th of April, the day when at the end of WW2 the last of the German army was chased out of Italy; it is a national holiday in this country and called the Liberation Day and to me was a sign that first or later I would reach the Great Awakening.

Once while hitchhiking to India I passed through a small town between Herat and Kandahar and wished to visit a wise mullah (Islamic religious teacher or leader) that I had met a few years before. The only lodge in town was closed and under repair because a Tajik had thrown a bomb in it to kill a Pashtun politician staying there. I took it as a sign that I shouldn't visit this mulla but continue my journey to India.

Soon after joining Sri Aurobindo's Ashram and before I met Mère, I left it because disliked several things in it, especially the contempt that many Bengali ashramites had for their very poor and uneducated Tamil servants. One day in the ashram library I helped two of them carry some heavy bookshelves up a steep staircase to the upper floor and when I came down the librarian told me:

“You know, those are dirty people and you should never go near them!”

Without bothering to answer him I just walked out of the library, took my backpack, and boarded a bus to Tiruvannamalai to join the ashram of Ramana Maharshi and do Jinana Yoga there. Just out of town, the bus broke down and I walked back to the ashram because I saw it as an obvious sign that I was meant to remain there.

As a last example, once in Perth, Western Australia, a friend brought me to Murdoch University where she taught and according to her had the best bookshop in Australia. Just as I was telling her that apart from some books about the Path and Yoga I no longer read

any, two students passed by, and one told the other: “Ok, now let’s go to the bookshop!” and followed them there. As I entered it fell into a bit of a trance, went straight to its end, picked up a thin book from a top shelf without even looking at the title, and bought it. It turned out to be the ancient Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh in verses, more than a thousand years before the Bible, and in it I found some verses that touched me so deeply that if I had not read them my life would have been very different.

**Imagine being in a country that you never visited before
with no map to guide you to your destination.**

This country is the dreamworld, and in it, the Divine has set some signs about how to reach where you are meant to go, but some of them might not be easy to interpret, therefore to understand their true meaning silence your mind and be open to the subtle whispers of your intuition. Rumi’s advice is:

“These signposts along the Way are for the traveler who at every moment in the desert (representing the dreamworld) becomes lost. Everything is painted with the brush of the invisible one;

follow the hidden signs *and find the Painter!*”

30. Equanimity

Equanimity does not mean indifference, insensitivity, or emotional coldness but being aware that all the circumstances and events in our life, even those that may seem to us the worst, are covertly for our best - not to satisfy our desires and expectations but to make us grow inwardly. With true equanimity, we can deal with whatever life brings to us with a profound balance and peace. Then we will not be discouraged by any difficulties and trust that notwithstanding the appearances everything is unfolding as it should. To those on the Path Mère said: “And who has such a great aim as to unite to the Divine and to manifest Him,

**how can he be affected by all the futilities,
all the inanities of life?”**

Equanimity is the unshakable foundation to best deal with the sometimes stormy waves of our lives and learn how to surf them. First of all, we must accept everything with perfect equanimity, the painful as well as the pleasant, success or failure, praise or blame, and then if needed endeavor to change it.

Through it, we can turn adversities into opportunities, realize our full potential, and remain centered whatever happens.

Once when the camel barn of the Kabuli's Zawiya burned down some dervishes were worried about how the money for a new one could be found, but he rebuked them thus:

“You have no equanimity at all! Have you forgotten that nothing ever happens which isn't according to Allah's will? Do you think that by letting our barn burn He made a mistake, or what?”

With a perfect equanimity, we no longer have any negative reactions to anyone or anything, deal with love and compassion even those who offend or try to harm us, and feel as if we were quietly seated on a mountain peak. But to remain permanently in this

state we must let go of all attachments, including the one to a Teacher or guru, a preferred spiritual practice, or a kind of Yoga.

**Who we truly are, our higher Self
never has any attachments at all.**

Once I met Mohan, a disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj and he told me - I might not remember his exact words - that according to his guru equanimity is a greatly underestimated asset and for those of us on the Path is the mark of our progress on it, He also told me that once when he was going through a difficult time Nisargadatta Maharaj gave him this reassurance which I wrote in my journal:

“Once you realize that there is nothing in this world that you can call your own, you will look at it from outside it as if was a play on a theater the stage or a movie on the screen, admiring and enjoying, perhaps suffering, but deep down quite unmoved.”

**It is by an unwavering equanimity that you can best
deal with whatever adversities may come to you.**

If you find it difficult to remain calm in situations that you previously managed well is probably because unresolved issues from your past are emerging, challenging your ability to maintain the same level of equanimity. Then follow this advice from Mère:

“See how all the external circumstances have little importance. Why tense and strain yourself to attempt to realize your conception of the truth? Be more flexible, more trustful. The only duty is not to let oneself be troubled by anything.

**When you meet with a hardship take it as a grace
from the Lord and indeed will become so.”**

31. Acceptance – Self Acceptance

A note: this chapter is about accepting ourselves and the circumstances of our life until it might be time to change them, but not condoning or ignoring the dreamworld's many ills and suffering.

Acceptance is a higher level of equanimity because means that we agree with something because we feel that it is right, while equanimity may just mean acquiescing to it when there is no good alternative. Through acceptance, we can perceive reality as it truly is without the projection of our wishful thinking. We cannot change anything that we have not first accepted because it is the key to unlocking our transformation and it is by accepting the present that we can shape our future. As Rumi said,

“This being human is a guesthouse, with every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a bad mood, are your unexpected visitors; give a warm welcome to them all! Even if they're a mob of sorrows violently sweeping your house out, still treat each guest hospitably: He may be clearing you out for some higher delight.

**Be grateful for whatever comes, for each was sent
to you as a messenger from the beyond”**

The difficulty to accept suffering often stems from our resistance to the natural fluctuations of life, making it more difficult to find peace in challenging times. As Sri Aurobindo advised, first of all, we must accept everything as coming from the Divine's will; accept all without regret, without getting upset or impatient, and only after that we can say, now let's get to work to change it.

With perfect acceptance, we become aware that all the wars, extreme poverty, and the other horrors in the dreamworld are not real but like nightmares in the collective slumber

of humanity. The advice of the Ashtavakra Ghita is

Let the waves of the universe rise and fall as they will.

You have nothing to gain or lose. You are the ocean.

About self-acceptance, accepting ourselves completely with whatever flaws we may still have enhances our aliveness, positive emotions, and well-being. In a culture that pressures us to conform to its narrow standards of success, self-acceptance is a revolutionary act, a radical declaration that our worth does not depend on validations from others, and we want to live on our terms. As Nisargadatta Maharaj said,

“The first steps in self-acceptance are not at all pleasant, for what one sees is not a happy sight. One needs all the courage to go further. What helps is silence. Look at yourself in total silence, do not describe yourself.

**Look at the being you believe you are and remember
that you are not what you see.**

When I first learned the importance of acceptance on the Path I disagreed and thought that of course we should never accept fascism, dictatorships, racism, extreme poverty, and all the other awful things in the dreamworld.

When I joined the Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, I deemed several things there outright unacceptable and I asked Beehar why Mère tolerated them and he told me:

“Ah, so you naively expected our ashram to be already perfect? This shows that the true vision eludes you still: what upsets you about such things corresponds to some parts of you that you have not yet recognized and accepted until you can change them.” I forcefully objected:

“Wait a moment now: the two things I hate most are fascism and child molesters. Which part of me are they supposed to correspond to? And did you say that I should *accept them*?

He laughed, unfazed by my outburst, and then said:

“In our conversations, you often expressed your convictions with an intransigence not unlike fascism, if you can forgive me for saying so. The correspondence with child molesting is not evident, but it could be said that you have done to the small child that you were something not unlike molesting by letting your overactive mind cover up his innocence and spontaneity ”

**Acceptance is our way to inner peace and a fulfilling life
whatever the circumstances of our life may be.**

If your circumstances cannot yet be changed serenely accept them, even those which your mind sees as not good because until changing them is possible their reality must be accepted as it is, not as you wish that they were. By never forgetting that everything in your life however difficult may seem been carefully planned by the Divine to gradually bring you back to Itself, there will be nothing that you cannot accept with a serene heart. Therefore not accepting it means believing that you know better than the Divine what is best for you. Ask yourself this essential question of Wu Hsin:

“Can you accept all things as they are and allow whatever movement is required to occur? What do you offer so much resistance to life? Has not Wu Hsin told you that resistance only extends and intensifies your pain and discomfort?

**There is a word which, when used with sincerity,
aligns you with all of life. That word is Yes.”**

32. Gratitude

Gratitude is the most underestimated virtue and does not just mean being grateful for what we have or receive but seeing everything in our life, the good or the apparently bad is a gift from the Divine. We take for granted that we exist and the Divine loves us, for which we will never be grateful adequately, and often do not appreciate enough the many blessings enriching our lives. By expressing a heartfelt gratitude for them they increase, while ignoring them hinders their flow to us. Mère spoke of it thus:

“One hears a bird sing, sees a lovely flower, looks at a little child, observes an act of generosity, reads a beautiful sentence, looks at the setting sun, no matter what, suddenly this comes upon you, this kind of emotion – indeed so deep, so intense that

**there is something behind the world
which is the Divine.”**

Gratitude is a powerful transformative force because by being grateful for what we have we shift from a sense of lack and need to one of abundance that opens the door to even more gifts. The German philosopher Kant said that ingratitude is the very essence of vileness, and Shakespeare went as far as calling it monstrous. When someone does something for us of course we should thank this person so that is not offended or find us ungrateful, but it is to the Divine that we should be thankful because it is covertly That who helped us through this person.

Like most, I also did not feel much gratitude for what I enjoyed until I found the Path through a book by Krishnamurti and then felt grateful to him and the friend who gave it

to me. But now when someone does something for me my gratitude goes directly to the Divine who caused them to do so.

When someone expressed his gratitude to the Kabuli for his teachings he often replied: “No, it is me who must be grateful to you for giving me the opportunity of doing Allah’s work!”

Since I was told this, when someone thanks me I often say the same thing, only using the term Divine instead of Allah.

**What you must be very grateful that you are on the Path
and do not live a hollow, ordinary life like most do.**

Be grateful also for the hardships in your life because they also help your inner journey by increasing your inner strength and revealing the potential that you were not conscious of. With gratitude your perspective of everything changes; you begin to feel that every breath you take, every beat of your heart, every sunrise and sunset is a miracle. Feel gratitude as Mère did:

“That kind of sense of gratitude that the Divine exists; that feeling of a marveling thankfulness which truly fills you with a sublime joy at the fact that the Divine exists, and every time that the least thing puts you either directly or indirectly in contact with this sublime Reality of divine existence,

**the heart is filled with a so intense,
so marvelous a joy.”**

33. Happiness – Joy

Even when our circumstances are difficult, potentially we can always feel happiness and joy because they are always there in our depths. The problem is that can only be intensely felt by our inward I which is not entranced with the dreamworld like the outward one. Happiness and joy arise in us when there is love in our hearts, help someone in need, and above all by a deep contact with our inner being. But most of us have lost the ability to feel it and is essential to reestablish it because we can never be satisfied with the small amount of happiness and joy which can be found in the dreamworld. Moreover, they can easily be lost because of an illness, a quarrel with a partner, a financial loss, etc.

Even more than happiness, joy is as much a need as food and shelter because without it our life is like a flower without perfume or a wingless bird, often dull and burdensome. As Mère speaking from the standpoint of the Divine said:

“I am only present in joy. Joy is the secret. Learn joy and you will learn God.

**The reality of the universe is what we call God,
and God is essentially joy.”**

As the recent French theologian Teilhard de Chardin affirmed, joy is the most infallible sign of God’s Presence, and when the Kabuli was asked which is the shortest way to Allah he replied with this Sufi advice:

“As a beginner, just be genuinely happy. When you are a little more advanced, be joyful. Nearer to His door, remain in a state of ecstasy. The Compassionate will do the rest.”

Even before finding the Path, I should have been happy because I had various adventures and interesting experiences, and although usually had little money somehow most of what I really needed was often there, and yet happiness kept eluding me. I began to understand why when in a small community of Flower Children near Amsterdam where I lived for a while I met their leader, Aleida, and she asked me why I never looked happy. I don't remember my reply, only that she didn't like it and scolded me:

“How would you feel if you gave someone a very precious gift but it was not appreciated? God donated to you your life, consciousness, and even the greatest gift of all, His immense love, *and you aren't happy?*”

When I asked her how I could become happier she told me about an ancient saying stating that to be allowed to enter paradise we must answer a sincere yes to two questions:

“Have you felt much joy in your life? Have you given joy to others?”

My answer was:

“Your Honour, I did not. I plead guilty on both counts and appeal to the mercy of the court!”

But she disliked it and severely replied:

“A day might come when you look back to your life and sadly regret the opportunities which you had to be happy but didn't! You ought to make a firm commitment to be always happy whatever happens!”

My problem was that I had always believed that only consciousness matters and mere happiness was something for...ordinary sleepwalkers, ha ha ha.

But then one night had several nightmares in a row. In the first one, I was with the Nada commando in Spain, was caught by Franco's fascists, horribly tortured, and then garroted; in the next was a junkie who died of an overdose; in another was still a child exploring the streets around our house, but when I returned to it the whole block with our

home was no longer there; it began to get dark and cold and I didn't know where to go or what to do. In another, I married, had a very ordinary life, a well-paid but boring office job, and died without really living it as my poor uncle Angelo did. In the last nightmare, I came to India and soon met a sadhu (itinerant Hindu monk) who initiated me into his sect and became a sadhu too. For years I wandered all over India begging for my food, going from temple to temple and ashram to ashram, but never found my Teacher, Mère. Then one day a policeman asked for my passport that I had lost long before, and as I had overstayed my tourist visa by years was expelled from India and never allowed to return. After waking up from these nightmares I was overwhelmed by a wave of happiness because instead of such lives despite some hard times after finding the Path I had a rewarding and fulfilling life with many spiritual experiences and visions, met some great Teachers, found my wonderful soulmate Prema Devi, and above all had the immense privilege of meeting Mère.

Once after I gave a talk about Integral Yoga in Milan, Italy, someone in the audience asked me if what he had heard about the extreme poverty in India was true. I mentioned the appalling conditions of the slums around all major Indian cities where millions live in shelters whose roofs are mostly made of palm or coconut leaves, plastic sheets, or corrugated metal. The few public toilets, if any, are unspeakably filthy; many women spend a long time every day in a waiting line to get a bucket of water, but when I went there most people were friendly, smiled, looked me in the eyes, and I often was offered a cup of tea.

Then I added that in the morning I had a walk in the center of Milan but did not see even one smile, and if I looked someone in the eyes the response was unease or even fear. Notwithstanding their extreme poverty, many of India's destitute have much more aliveness, and several of them looked happier than Westerners with a good house, a car, and money in the bank.

**The Divine enjoys all things through us, and by being
aware of this you can find joy in them as well.**

Feel how the Divine enjoys seeing through you everything that you look at, the taste of what you eat or drink, every emotion or sensation like the warmth of the sun on your skin, the sound of laughter, a gentle breeze, the vibrant colors of flowers. Consider these words of Wu Hsin:

“Man's search for happiness arises out of a skewed perception: ”I am not happy but obtaining this and that will make me happy". It is like trying to fill an assumed hole in oneself.

**A happiness that comes, will go. Only the happiness
that is immanent will never leave.”**

34. Relationships

A note: Relationships are often a distraction from the Path, but this chapter is included in the section on the Helpers on the Path because, with the right attitude through them, we can learn valuable lessons about love, empathy, selflessness, a greater equanimity, and feel a deeper range of emotions enriching our life.

Relationships are often like mirrors reflecting some aspects of ourselves of which we were not aware. We should love, respect, and accept those we love by fostering their higher aspirations, hopes, and dreams even if they are in contrast with ours. But to be truly fulfilling our relationships must always keep evolving, never become stagnant but dynamic, full of aliveness, more intense, and wonderful. Ideally, we should expand the love we feel for our partners to everyone else and feel the divine Presence in them under the mask of what they seem to be. As Mère advised:

“When we talk to someone, we should talk to the spirit, never to the body only; not even to the spirit,

**we should address ourselves to the Divine
in him or her, and be aware only of That.”**

We never find our partners by mere chance but the Divine orchestrates how we encounter those meant for us. Indeed many relationships are conflictual and unsatisfying, but the Divine assigns those to us to give us the tests that we must pass to grow inwardly by confronting our insecurities, vulnerabilities, and unmet needs.

Ideally, relationships foster our inner growth and in them, we share our best qualities and what we learned in our life, not just with words but also by how we respond to the challenges of life. But if one of us does not grow inwardly, or not enough in rapport with

the other first or later we won't have almost anything to learn from each other, and then our relationship can be said to be dead even if we keep living together out of habit, fear of loneliness, etc. The advice of Krishnamurti to those in a dysfunctional relationship is: "Watch how you change your mask. Look at your greed, look at your jealousies, your fear, your anxieties, possessiveness - go on looking and watching."

The main obstacles to having fulfilling, long-lasting relationships are the cultural and societal norms pressuring us to conform to the image of an ideal partner, fear of being rejected, and a commitment limiting our freedom.

Another major obstacle is that our relationships are often based on the image that we have of our partners rather than who they truly are. We unconsciously create this image by admiring a character from a movie or a novel and may fall in love with someone who has or appears to have, similar qualities. We then overestimate the qualities that match our idealized image of our loved one and underestimate or just ignore those that don't. But first or later reality brutally steps in and forces us to recognize the discrepancies we had disregarded, and then conflicts and frustrations are inevitable. This can also cause an unreasonable resentment as if our partner had intentionally deceived us by not being what we expected him or her to be.

Because I did not have much love in my heart my relationships had not been very harmonious, and only in my late twenties had my first deep, intense one, and then wondered why I had to wait so long for it. Eventually, I realized that my relationships had been unfulfilling because they were based on the outer I who is incapable of real love. Then I followed this advice of Ramana Maharshi:

"The greatest relationship you can have is with your own Self. Dive deep within yourself and discover the eternal source of love and joy that resides within you. Once you establish this relationship, all others will fall into their rightful place."

**In a relationship, ask yourself whether it helps
both of you to grow inwardly or not.**

If your partner wants you to do something which is not in harmony with the truth of your being never agree for fear of losing this person because it will bring about more suffering than the separation would have caused. Above all, let our partner be entirely free, including free of leaving you if it has to be.

Let us call who you love Andrea, a genderless name. Did you ever ask yourself what is that you love in this person? Loving Andrea's body is like admiring the facade of the house where lives. Loving Andrea's personality or brilliant mind is better, but over time they are likely to change and then where will your love for Andrea be? Only your love for who Andrea is can be permanent. As Mère pointed out,

“True relationships are established only in true understanding. If there is no understanding, there is no relationship. If you want to have real and lasting relationships with others,

**you must have a real and lasting
relationship with your Self.”**

35. Love

Besides being the key to a wonderful life, real, deep love is a major help on the Path because without it in our hearts is more difficult to have contact with our Self and the Divine. Love is an essential part of our original nature, but the materialistic atmosphere of the Western culture prevents most of us from deeply feeling it, and in the last decades has been taking over Eastern cultures as well.

As there is a wide spectrum of light and sound, so there is a broad range of expressions of love. Its highest level is the unconditional, boundless one of the Divine (mentioned in a further chapter), and human love is just a tiny spark of it. As Nisargadatta Maharaj remarked:

“In a dream, you love some and not others. Awakening you will discover that you are Love itself embracing all.

**Personal love, no matter how intense and genuine, inevitably
ties us up: love in freedom is the love of all.”**

Ordinary human love is a murky amalgam of desires and biological drives and is mostly or even entirely selfish, an attraction to the physical appearance of the loved one, and is a bit like being in love with the clothes that our loved ones wear instead of with who they really are under the surface of their personality and apparent individuality and then love it to the utmost. Most assume that love is not selfish because we wish the best for those we love, but usually, if our love is not responded we stop loving them, which shows that it is not real.

The lowest level of love, if it can be called that, is the egocentric kind which is only, or almost only, based on sexuality, attachments, the need for a companion not to feel alone,

and for many has so little trust that requires a marriage in front of a priest or in a town hall,

However, all how we express our love, even the most shallow and transient, are important because they are unconscious attempts to find the love of the Divine, and by experiencing even just a hint of it we are filled with wonder. In the Bible there is this warning:

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and knowledge, have a faith that can move mountains but have not love, *I am nothing.*”

One of the Puranas, (ancient religious and philosophical Hindu texts), of which I did not record the name affirmed the same thing:

“Fruitless is knowledge of love devoid, fruitless religion itself if loveless, all struggle for a spiritual life vain if there is no love in our heart.” Rumi’s advice is:

“Do not look for Love, look for the one looking for Love and find the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

**Except for Love nothing you see
will remain forever.”**

The one looking for love is our inward I, and the main barriers against it are a negative self-image that we do not deserve to be loved, and the ego that opposes it because demands prioritizing the needs of those we love instead of ours.

Until my mid-twenties, I could not deeply love but was so focused on trying to find out who I was and the meaning of my life that didn’t care. I became concerned about my lack of it when in one of his Talks I heard Krishnamurti saying:

“If you have no love, do what you will - go after all the gods on earth, do social activities,

help the poor, get into politics, write books, write poems – **you** are a dead human being.”

I was shocked by these words because I had the impression

that he said them while looking at me. *Was I a dead human being?*

There is no more heartbreaking feeling than the thought of being inwardly dead in a living body.

Some years later when I read these words of Mère: “Of all the forces acting in the universe love is the most powerful, the most irresistible, and in its essence and origin it is like a white flame obliterating all resistances”, I asked myself why it had not yet eradicated mine and realized that it was because

**I was not yet myself, not yet “this one
beside me walking whom I do not see”**

One day I talked about love with Eileen Caddy, a co-founder of Findhorn, an eco/spiritual community in Scotland, and she told me that it is not just an emotion or a feeling but a state of being, the unspoiled nature of our soul, so we must constantly ensure that it grows and evolves or decreases and fades away.

When I asked her how I could open my heart to love she told me that like we learn to swim by swimming so we learn to love by loving, but to truly love others first of all we must love ourselves, which doesn’t mean selfishness but never forget that we are all children of God.

We were silent for a while I considered this, then she asked me to what extent I loved myself. When I admitted that it wasn’t much she said that as I am a part of God not loving myself is like not loving Him, which is an essential prerequisite in our spiritual journey, and gave me this advice:

“Never forget that you deserve to love yourself no less than you love others because loving yourself mirrors God’s love for you..”

But it was only after I found my beloved soulmate Prema Devi that through her help I could begin to widen the love that I felt for Mère and her to everyone.

**Dear reader, you do not need to seek love because
is and has always been there in your depths.**

But it is only by giving it joyfully and unconditionally to all that you can reach its highest peaks. Open your heart always more to love and overcome whatever in you resist it even if brings about an inner conflict, for it is a very small price to pay for it. Rumi’s advice is:

“Would you become a pilgrim on the road to love? The first condition is to make yourself humble as dust and ashes. Be drunk with love because in it there is everything that exists.

**Without the fullness of love and its sharing
*there is no other way to God.”***

36. The Two Tigers Koan

Note: A Zen koan is a question that has no rational answer which Zen Masters sometimes use to make a Zen monk go beyond his mind and reach a state called Satori, a kind of partial enlightenment.

In this koan you are pursued by a tiger, reach a big tree at the edge of a deep precipice, and one of its roots descends over its edge. You go down this root so that the tiger cannot catch you, but at its bottom, another one is hungrily waiting for you to fall down. As if this wasn't bad enough, a white and a black mouse come and start gnawing the root to which you are holding. The question of this koan is:

What will you do?

Any rational answer, like for instance calling a helicopter with your mobile, pray, seeing the Divine in the tiger, lovingly talking to it, etc, is always wrong. A Zen Master gave an incorrect answer about it in his book, probably to test who would fall for it:

"I see a nice wild strawberry on the precipice's wall, so hold to the root with my left hand and take it with my right, ate it and so delicious it is!"

But eating the strawberry cannot be the real answer because it is what almost everyone is already doing most of their lives: the strawberry of entertainment, sex, food, intellectual pursuits, etc.

Now, put this book aside a moment, close your eyes, silence your mind as much as possible, and feel as if you were *right now* hanging on that root with a vortex of fear in your solar plexus,

OMG, *I am going to die!*

Then let the answer come from your intuition. Try this for a few days, then if you haven't yet found it read these hints about it:

The tiger on top represents the birth of your body and the one at the bottom of the precipice its death, and the white and black mice chewing the root that you are holding on symbolize Chronos, the all-devouring time, your days and nights running out to the end of your life.

What will you do?

Do not give up if it takes a long time to discover the answer and don't Google it to find it because would not have the liberating power of finding it by yourself. Now, probably you don't have access to a Zen Master who could confirm if the answer that came to you is the right one or not, but when is true you should sense it with a very strong 'Eureka!' feeling.

The answer long ago I found and then
in my meditative state time stopped.
To that root, my body is holding still
but no fear of falling have I; hungry tigers
and gnawing mice illusions are all;
enough strawberries I ate in the past,
so now just enjoy the view, and talk to you.

BOOK 2

1. The Divine

Even the words of the greatest spiritual Teachers cannot reveal who this elusive entity that most call God is; they only give us hints of it through their visions, insights, and personal experiences. Even our more intense glimpses of the Divine can only be small intimations of That, like our shadow on the ground, is no clue of who we are. As a version of the Kena, one of the most important Upanishads affirmed:

“There the eye goes not, nor words or mind. We know not, cannot understand how He could be explained: above the known and the unknown He is. That which is not comprehended by the mind, but through which the mind comprehends. Know That alone as Brahman (the Divine) not what people here worship.”

The Sufi mystic and saint Rabia’a said the same thing:

“How could we define the true essence of this Entity in which we live and lives in us, a witness of our journey?”

Suppose you went to one of the last uncivilized tribes in the Amazon and showed its natives a video on your laptop. If they asked you how it works, you could not explain it to them even if you had learned their language because terms such as microchips

and so on are not there. Similarly, we cannot convey our experience of the Divine to others only with words.

The Sanscrit term Satchitananda is probably the best definition of the Divine: Sat means existence and truth; Chit, mind and consciousness; and Ananda, bliss. Other aspects often attributed to That are love, peace, bliss, light, etc, but even they are inadequate, just as describing the ocean merely as a lot of water.

It has been affirmed that the Divine appeared from non-being, but “appearing” is something that occurs in the dimension of time and space, and of course, That is far beyond them. It was also said that It is the total sum of all selves, every one of us, which is true enough, but the Divine is infinitely more than it, limitless, without beginning nor end. It has no visible form of its own but dwells in all those in the dreamworld. The advice of Rumi, speaking from the Divine’s standpoint, is:

“Study me as much as you like, you will never know Me, for I differ a hundred ways from what you assume me to be.

**Put yourself behind my eyes,
and see me as I see myself.”**

Many already know the ancient metaphor about the blind men and the elephant, but I mention it for those who don’t because it makes such a clear point. Several blind men heard that an elephant had been brought to their village and wished to find out what it was. One touched its tail and said that it was a snake, another felt its side and to him was a curved wall; the third touched its ear and asserted that it was a large hand fan; the fourth grasped its leg and declared it a tree trunk; the fifth held its tusk and said that it was a weapon and so on. Each was so sure of being the only one right,

and this partial perception of the truth is what brought about the differences in religions and philosophies. Sri Aurobindo spoke of the Divine thus:

“What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden. He is the Maker and the world he made, He is the vision and he is the Seer;

He is himself the actor and the act, the knower and the known;

He is Himself the dreamer and the dream.

When a disciple told Mère that he wanted to know the Divine, She replied: “You don’t need to know what the Divine is: *you must become Him instead.*”

To many the notion of becoming the Divine would seem absurd or even blasphemous, but it means realizing that in our depths we are already one with That and have always been.

When I read these words of the recent Austrian writer Hermann Broch: “In the most unknown, the most invisible, unutterable, there ruled one *whose shadow was the light*, always sensed, never known, the utterly hidden.” It reminded me

This reminded me that Rumi had this experience:

**“Once in a glimpse I saw that we are His shadow,
and our shadow is the world.”**

Right now, as I am writing this chapter, a tiny insect is wandering very fast all over the monitor as if desperately seeking something and it made me feel that just like it could not know what I am writing on it, so I could not fathom the essence of the Divine.

Dear reader, how do you imagine the Divine?

As an immensity of peace and love? A radiant sunrise dissolving away all that in you should no longer be? A dazzlingly beautiful being in a halo of golden light emanating a profound serenity? An eternal flame burning brightly in your heart, or how?

Just like every neuron of your brain has its specific function but is an integral part of it, or drops of seawater are part of the sea, so are we in rapport with the Divine. Mère's advice is:

“Never seek support elsewhere than in the Divine...Never seek the satisfaction of your needs in anyone else than the Divine – never, for anything at all. All your needs can be satisfied only by the Divine. All your weaknesses can be borne and healed only by the Divine.

**“He alone can give you what you need
in everything, always.”**

2. The Unanswered Question II

Once, when I visited Pandiji I stayed in his puja (a Hindu ritual) room as all the others were occupied. In it, the energy was so powerful that in my early morning meditation, I had this vision: I was in an amusement park where my parents had brought me. I had been fascinated by the picture on a camper's side of a mysterious gypsy-looking woman with a crystal sphere in her hand. Below her, there was this sign:

LET THE CLAIRVOYANT ZAIRA TELL YOUR FUTURE!

You will be amazed!

I looked for that camper, but when I found it, she did not resemble her picture on its side at all: she looked very ordinary, her dress was drab, and she had no crystal sphere. I suddenly realized that I had no money to pay her, but when I told her, she shrugged it off and gestured for me to sit on the chair in front of her. She said that I could ask her three questions, and I replied that I only needed the answer to one, but it was the Unanswered one, "Who am I?"

Then she warmly smiled, and her face turned into the one of a much older, beautiful, and wise woman. She pretended to be surprised by my question and said, "What? The Unanswered Question? But you already know the answer!"

Was she making fun of me? I replied:

"Madame Zaira, indeed I know that who I really am is my higher Self, but just being aware of this cannot be the real Answer until I have deeply experienced it, and I haven't yet!"

She looked deeply into my eyes for a moment before saying:

“To find the Answer you must first of all recognize that although you are less inwardly asleep than most are still in the ambiguous twilight between sleep and true wakefulness.”

Then she was silent for a moment before saying with great intensity:

“Our conversation is taking place in a dream within another dream, the one of you being Vijay.”

While I considered this a big black cat with bright blue eyes jumped on her lap and started loudly purring while staring at me. After a while, I told her with such strong emotion that I stammered:

“I know that Vijay is but a dream, but how can I awake from it and become the one that Jimenez called “this one beside me walking whom I do not see”?”

She nodded her approval while saying:

“This is the best question you could ask, but if I answered it would lack the liberating power that discovering it by yourself will have. Keep asking it again and again, and if you are persistent enough eventually the answer is bound to come to you.”

I then asked her who she was. Again she deeply looked into my eyes before replying. I heard the background sounds of the amusement park which I had not noticed before. The cat stopped purring, closed its eyes, and fell asleep. Then she gestured for me to come closer to her and spoke in a whisper as if she didn’t want to be overheard:

“I am a messenger from the part of you who already knows the answer or, more precisely, *IS the Answer*.”

A few days after this vision I read this passage by Mère about finding the Answer:

“You must go very deeply in yourself and realize the most important fact of all: *that you do not exist*. There is only one thing that exists, and it is the Divine.”

I already knew that “Vijay” is only a mixture of various aspects many of whom belong to the outer I, but Her words made me realize that

**in the measure that I am still identified
with the outer *I do not quite exist.***

There can be no more bewildering feeling.

But if I don't exist, who or what is trying to discover who I am? Is everything always a bewildering enigma? To truly exist I must reach the Great Awakening before my body dies, and this made me feel like a man who had been condemned to death but whose execution date had not yet been decided being told that if he managed to do a certain inner work his death sentence would be revoked.

Finding the answer to the “Who Am I” question is the most important thing of all and you should seek it with the utmost intensity.

In your meditations or whenever have some spare time, keep asking it without letting anything distract you from it. The answer is not meant to make us understand who we are but to bring about a direct, personal experience of it. As Ramana Maharshi said,

“When the mind comes to an end of its resources and stands baffled by the Unanswered Question, then a higher power takes charge of the mind and the Self stands revealed as the real, the wonderful.”

Then you will realize that as he said

**“The Unanswered Question is not meant to be answered
with words but to transcend the questioner.”**

3. The Self

A note: In Hinduism and Buddhism, the Self is called Atman or Atma, and in the West soul, Higher Self, or a capitalized Self, while by the non-capitalized self is meant the outer I and apparent individuality.

The only thing constant in us is our Self which life after life wears different bodies and minds but essentially remains the same. The main aim of the Path is to become one with our Self and the Divine, but actually is not a matter of becoming it but to realize and deeply experience that *we are and have always been one with them.*

But although the Self dwells deep in us cannot easily be discerned because it is the subject of perception itself, and like the Divine has no visible image or tangible form of its own. Just like we can observe the negative effects of anger on our body and mind but not anger in itself, see so many beautiful things but not beauty apart from them, likewise

**we can begin to perceive the Self through the peace,
ecstasy and unconditional love that emanates.**

This passage which has been attributed to one of the most important texts of Hinduism, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad affirms that:

“You cannot see the seer of seeing; you cannot hear the hearer of hearing; you cannot think the thinker of thinking; you cannot know the knower of knowing. *This is your Self that is within everything.*”

The Self has been compared to a crystal that when set on a red cloth looks red, on a green one green, etc, and since the cinema was invented also been likened to the screen on which a movie is projected which remains unaffected by even the worst horrors that might be projected upon it.

It has also been correlated to the light of a lamp that illuminates a room without changing anything in it, but the Self is not just a passive observer and can affect some of our thoughts, feelings, and actions indirectly, through its influence and energy rather than any overt actions, therefore its impact often goes unnoticed.

When asked Beehar why although I had practiced Integral Yoga for several years I still felt far from finding my Self, he told me that it was because as the Katha Upanishad affirmed the Self-existent (the Divine) has opened the doors of our senses outwards, therefore we look outwards, not within, see external things but not the Self. Once I did a lot of research about it gathered many definitions of it from various sources, and summarized them thus:

The Self is the one who is awake in those who sleep, the true identity of the individual transcending the limitations of the ego and outer I. There is only one universal Self who is one with the Divine, an eternally, infinite consciousness. The Self does not die when our body does and like the sky is undisturbed by the weather remains unaffected by the external world and our actions in it. It is the basis of all existence and the source of our deepest insights and visions.

But when I showed this to Beehar he laughed, mockingly bowed to me said:

“Ah, yes, indeed you got the essence of it, and I am not sarcastic, mind you, I mean it! But may I ask to which extent knowing all this has brought you closer to your Self-realization?”

Alas, all the knowledge that I had acquired hadn't, but eventually I began to have some hints of the Self that came to me unexpectedly. My mind became very quiet, time seemed to stop still, a profound sense of joy and boundless peace enveloped me.

**Like a lotus blossoms from a muddy pond unstained by its mud
so the Self is untouched by the dreamworld's flaws.**

Besides surrendering to the Divine, to have a first hint of the Self, if you haven't already, begin by observing your thoughts and feelings without judgment, practice mindfulness, meditate often, and feel its boundless peace, ecstasy, and unconditional love. This will bring about in you a very intense longing to become free from all the limitations of the outer I and merge with your Self. Follow also the advice of Nisargadatta Maharaj:

“You are the Self, nothing but the Self, anything else is just imagination, so BE it here and now, and as the Self you are nothing perceivable, even imaginable; whatever your name or aspect might be has nothing to do with you. Just only give up the false ideas you have about yourself.

**Meet your Self, be with it, listen to it, cherish it, keep
it in mind endlessly. You need no other guide.”**

Please stop a moment reading to contemplate this.

4. The Self - Experiencing It

Every experience that we may have of our Self is very subjective. To give a few examples of it, Yogananda felt it thus: “My body was filled with tremendous joy, an unbroken thrill in every cell. With closed eyes, I could see the universe, far beyond the limits of the mortal frame.” Ramana Maharshi described its own as the vision of a radiant, self-luminous, bodiless being, and the contemporary Jamaican Teacher Mooji experienced it as awareness: “I saw that I was not my thoughts, my body, or my feelings;

**I was the pure awareness in which
they arise and subside.”**

Although I was still a beginner on the Path, soon after joining the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and even before I met Mère I had my first experience of the Self. It was my greatest life-changing moment apart from when I realized that my whole life must change through a book of Krishnamurti.

It happened on a moonless and cloudless night while I meditated on a parapet very close to the sea. After several hours of sitting cross-legged, I had a cramp in a leg and laid on this parapet gazing at the immense ocean of stars above me. as my mind became utterly silent and I entered a timeless inner state in which I realized that

**all those stars were not far above me as they seemed
but within the limitless vastness of my Self.**

Now my life seemed to me like a movie which I had seen long ago and could only vaguely remember. Everything I ever did, enjoyed, suffered, the poetry and music I liked had been a dream, and as I perceived them so had been my parents, friends, the

women I loved, and everyone I had known. But, alas, my ego and vital made me feel that I was already enlightened, ha ha ha. I floated upon exhilaration's clouds for about a week and after getting over it felt that I was no longer Vijay but had become someone else.

Someone else but who?

Although nowhere as intensely, I had experienced similar dissociations before when my self-image changed from the one of a philosopher to a revolutionary, then a Flower Child, etc; but now almost nothing seemed to be left that I could call myself apart from my yearning to awaken from the dream of my life and feel one with my Self.

**To experience your Self, focus all your consciousness
on the timeless instant called the Here and Now.**

Establish yourself firmly in it; quieten the chatter of your mind and be fully present to yourself, feel the sensations and emotions that may arise without judgment, let go of the compulsion to understand everything, and then spontaneously you will experience it. Keep also in mind that as the contemporary Jamaican Teacher Mooji said:

“To experience the Self is to recognize that you are not merely a separate individual, but an interconnected part of the vast web of existence. It is the realization that your true nature is infinite and boundless, beyond the limitations of the ego-mind.

**Dive into the depths of your awareness, and you
will awaken to the eternal presence of the Self.”**

5. The Psychic

A note: I capitalize the term Psychic to emphasize that is a conscious entity and to distinguish it from the non-capitalized one which is often associated with the so-called occult, clairvoyants, séances, ouija boards, etc.

Besides our Self, the Psychic is the part of us closer to the Divine and is naturally drawn to That like a bee to a flower and a sunflower to the sun, and through it we can feel that we have always been and will eternally be one with it and the Divine.

At first, the very intense energy of the Self is too overwhelming to be borne by our nervous system which must gradually become accustomed to it through the milder one of our Psychic who is like a halfway station between us and the Self, like to climb the Everest a base camp at its feet is needed to prepare for its ascension.

It is the Psychic that can be reborn in a new body when we die. It may carry from the present life into the next one our talent for some kind of art, a healing power, or some and other ones that show up at a very young age. Sri Aurobindo called it the traveler between birth and death and said that through every incarnation keeps developing until

**at a certain level of our evolution becomes fully developed
and acquires a conscious individuality.**

But even before that according to the extent of our receptivity to its influence, the Psychic will guide us on our inner journey by making us meet those who can help us

on it, find the books that we need to read, and by bringing about insights steering us in the right direction.

The Psychic is never deceived by the dreamworld's illusions and never loses its contact with the Divine. Is it that maintains a sense of continuity and some coherence in our lives although our thoughts, emotions, and concerns keep changing. Without it, we would remain dominated by the ego and never find out who we truly are.

Every glimmer of aspiration, upward striving, and feeling of unconditional love are due to its influence, and it is through it that at times for no apparent reason we can feel a deep joy that is very intense but at the same time calm and profound.

When I joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and learned about the Psychic I realized that this verse of Jimenez which had touched me so deeply "I am not I. I am this one beside me walking whom I do not see..." was about it. It had been my Psychic that in that moment in the kindergarten mentioned at the beginning of this text that had made me wonder who I was.

One day while going through a very difficult time when I had no joy at all came upon this passage from Mère which helped me to come out of it:

"In your Psychic, joy is constantly there. It has nothing to do with pleasure: it is a kind of inner delight. But one is rarely in a state to feel it unless one has become fully conscious of one's Psychic."

**It is by a firm contact with the Psychic that we can become
perfect instruments for the Divine's Manifestation.**

By becoming more receptive to its intimations you can acquire a profound inner peace, a clarity guiding you through life's challenges, a serenity transcending all

external circumstances, and a quiet confidence guiding your every step. See the Psychic as Mère did:

“A flame born out of the Divine always alight within us, burning in the midst of a great darkness, a delegate of the Divine in the earth life, the part of us which is already given to the Divine,

**contains the Divine, is the vehicle,
the habitation of the Divine.”**

6. The Psychic - A Vision

One evening while I was listening to the rapturous music of Sunil, a great composer in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I had this vision: the room where I was suddenly vanished and I found myself floating above the Earth. I saw its landscapes, oceans, forests, mountains, deserts, and cities as if they were painted upon a thin veil. A mighty wind swept it away and at first nothing seemed to be left, but soon I was flooded by so many images and sensations switching so fast from one to another that most were just a blur. After this vision was over I wrote in my journal some of those which I remembered:

“I saw so many men, women, and children doing all sorts of things, streets, highways, railway stations, airports, Vijay’s face in the mirror talking to himself while shaving; a large clear crystal with several smaller ones around it, Mère as Vijay saw Her for the first time, a very beautiful child with intense blue eyes, long hair, and a shy smile, a furious crowd of demonstrators fighting with men in military uniforms, a glorious green oasis in the desert, a young oriental woman in the throes of an orgasm, a black van with a coffin in it followed by a procession of sad people, a tree with its branches laden with mangoes and felt their taste and the one of green tea, smelled the perfume of an amber-scented incense stick, so many things...”

Every moment of Vijay’s life flashed by in my vision like a speeded-up movie and I felt again all the emotions, suffering, and happiness that he had. Then I remembered how I guided him to the Path, which had not been easy because he had such a strong ego, an unruly vital, and very stubborn mind. Several times I had given him various opportunities to take his first step on it but he ignored them all until I finally managed to make him read the book by Krishnamurti which brought him to the Path.

When this vision ended, I realized that I had talked about myself from the viewpoint of my Psychic, and although already knew that essentially am one with it I became more aware of this in a much more concrete and vivid way. Now I see my Psychic as Satprem did:

“It is light, nothing is a burden to it, as if the whole world were its playground; it is invulnerable, nothing can touch it, as if it were forever beyond all tragedies, already saved from all accidents; it is a seer, it sees; it is calm,

**so calm, a tiny breath in the depths of the being; and vast,
as vast as the eternal sea itself. Indeed, it is eternal.”**

7. Individuality

Most people assume that individuality consists of our personality, beliefs, thoughts, way of living, etc, but they are no more ourselves than the clothes that we wear. We have been accustomed for so long to consider ourselves individuals separate from all others and the Divine that realizing that we aren't is no easy feat.

A true individuality is not a birthright but a conquest, and until the necessary inner work to achieve it is done we are not yet individuals but consist of many I's striving to take us over and manifest in our lives. Moreover, as Wu Hsin said the entire Manifestation is one unitary functioning, and as such

**there is no room for an individual
separated from the whole.**

Many believe that it is us as individuals who reincarnate in a next life. But if we remember having been a Zen monk in a previous life, for instance, we could only be considered to be the same individual if we had identical inclinations, feelings, beliefs, etc, but we don't because in our incarnations we are never given the same set of qualities. The Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Marie Rilke spoke of the apparent individuality thus:

“If we think of an individual's existence as a larger or smaller room, clearly most learn to know only a corner of their room, like a place by the window or a strip of floor on which they walk up and down. Thus they have a certain security.”

Well, let's say that they have the illusion of it.

As Wu Hsin said, “The illusion of individuality is the source of all others, and recognizing it as such does not necessarily end it. However, it ends the involvement with it. This is enough.”

Well, not always quite enough, but at least closer to it.

Through the Path is possible to become true individuals, but while doing some research for this chapter I came upon many denials of it. For instance, Wu Hsin affirmed that Self-realization is the death of individuality, the Ashtavarka Ghita that we cannot see God and retain it, and the Buddha that events happen, actions are done, but there is no individual doing them.

This is true in the case of most, but not all: potentially we can achieve a true individuality that is not the apparent one of the outer I but the one of our real being. But as the German-born conferencier and author of spiritual books Eckhart Tolle said,

“Only by discovering and embracing your individuality can you transcend the ego and become aligned with the higher consciousness. True individuality is not a matter of cultivating a unique image but of uncovering the authentic self, unburdened by past conditioning and societal expectations.”

**Ask yourself this question: “What is it that
makes me feel that I am an individual?”**

See how your thoughts and emotions kept changing all the time; you are not quite the same individual as you were just a day ago, and will not be quite the same tomorrow. This constant fluctuation reveals that we are not yet definite

individuals but rather ever-evolving beings in a state of perpetual becoming. As Mère said,

“The Psychic being is the real individuality of the true and divine individual within you and is not until you feel it as yourself that you can be an individual; for it is the true Self in you.

**Before the true Self is known, you are
a public place, not a being.”**

8. Na'ham - What We Are Not

Na'ham is a Sanskrit term meaning "not I", and implies that to discover who we truly are we must first of all find out all that we aren't, our body, mind, beliefs, personality, emotions, etc. All of them together add up to the outer I which most harbor, cherish, and sustain as if it were us, but to be truly ourselves we must no longer be identified with it. But most do not want to let the outer I go because it is all that they know and provides them with a false sense of security which keeps them in a comfort zone that stunts their personal and spiritual growth.

An actor playing Hamlet while on the stage is completely identified with his anger and desperation as if he were him, and only after the play ends remembers that he is not Hamlet. In a way, we are all like actors playing our roles on the stage of the dreamworld and as Wu Hsin said:

“My dear children, you are not what you think you are.

**What you think you are is a shadow of what you are, just as
the moon reflected on the lake water is not the moon.”**

To find out our true being is sufficient to know what we are not; there is no need to know it mentally. To experience it instead of strenuous efforts, austerities, asceticism, etc, we should simply observe with great clarity, without judgment what we seem to be in the awareness that it is not us but only the result of the unexamined forces of our life. The Buddha's advice is:

“One cannot rightly say “This is mine alone; this I am; this is myself about what is transient. Therefore whatever may arise, keep telling yourself: this does not belong to me; it is not me, not my Self.”

When Jan Klein told me about Na'ham I asked him how I could become free of all that I wasn't and he taught me some yogic techniques to do so, but they required a discipline which was not my strong point. After practicing them unsuccessfully for some time I asked him what else I could do and he told me that whenever I had any impulse to do something I should immediately stop, center myself, and check whether it originated from my Self or not, and if it didn't immediately reject it.

This was more effective and I was shocked to realize how many things in myself originated from my ego and outer I and I had been living as if on autopilot with no control over my thoughts and actions, taken over by unconscious patterns of behavior hampering my inner work on the Path.

The belief that you are this or that traps you in a false self-image of yourself which is not who you really are.

To discover all that you are not, which in most is almost all they seem to be, let go of all your mental formations, systems of belief, and every conditioning until only your Self is left. The advice of Nisargadatta Maharaj is:

“Discover all you are not: the body, feelings, thoughts, ideas, time, space, etc, this or that - nothing concrete or abstract you can point out to is truly you; the very act of perceiving shows that you are not what you perceive. A mere verbal statement will not do - you may repeat a formula endlessly without any result whatsoever. You must watch yourself continuously - particularly your mind - moment by moment, missing nothing.”

He also said that

“You are nothing perceivable, or imaginable. Whatever your name or aspect may be, has nothing to do with you.”

9. The Self-image

A note: The ancient symbol of Narcissus, who loved so much his image that drowned while trying to embrace it in a pond where was reflected symbolizes the entrancement with the self-image that we have of ourselves, and the “pond” in which we drown is the dreamworld.

Our self-image is an intricate, multilayered composite of so many things, preferences and aversions, deeply ingrained beliefs, familiar thought patterns, longstanding habits, etc, which determine how we interact with the dreamworld. Besides our main self-image, we have also some minor ones which normally are not conscious, and at times they can make us behave in different ways than usual.

To a great extent, it is our self-image that prevents us from discovering who we truly are, and yet so many spend a lot of time and energy to improve it to make it fit into the molds that society values, but this makes them more estranged from themselves.

The reason that we have a certain self-image instead of another is due to many factors: our upbringing, education, those we met, the books we read, movies and videos we watched, and the influence of our culture in general. Of course, if we were born in another country, family, religion,

**our self-image would be very different and we would
not be the same person that we are now.**

We cannot say that we have chosen our self-image because it was created subconsciously by so many factors of which normally are not aware. When I told this

to someone, often their response was more or less like: “Okay, but even if I did not choose my self-image as you say, now it is who I am, and must make the best of it.”

While this attitude is better than just feeling bad about it, we must be aware that limits us in so many ways and prevents us from accessing our full potential. Moreover when it is negative may to bring about unhappiness, chronic discontent, a lack of self-confidence, and a feeling of inadequacy which makes it difficult to have a real communication with others and harmonious relationships. Wu Hsin suggests a way out of such a dismal condition:

“When one no longer believes what one imagines oneself to be the cell door opens and the realization dawns that

**a life filled with being somebody (our self-image)
is an empty existence.”**

I had my first hint about the self-image through Ambrogio, a friend of my cousin Gianni. Most of the time he wore a beard and then was always so serious, never joked or laughed as befitted his self-image of a wise philosopher. But about once a year a secondary self-image of himself as a jolly fellow took him over, and then shaved off his beard and behaved as someone else altogether. He told dumb, unfunny, or even obscene jokes, and laughed like mad at them, played silly pranks, etc, but eventually grew his beard again and reverted to his self-image of a thoughtful philosopher.

As a child, my self-image was the one of an outsider, a stranger in a world where I felt that would never belong. In my early teens was of an intellectual and a philosopher; in my late ones of a revolutionary and a freedom fighter, and then of being one of the Flower Children (now called hippies). When I gave up this self-image I was left without a meaning for my life and did not know what to do with my life.

Every time that I shifted from one self-image to another believed that at last had found who I was meant to be. What a joke! All of them had merely been roles that I had enacted in the confused dream of my life. My last self-image had been of a great,

ha ha ha ha, yogi, but although much better than the previous ones had also been a mask.

One day as I moved a flower pot in the garden a colony of tiny ants under it went berserk, frantically swarming all over the place where the roof of their home suddenly disappeared. This reminded me of when I let go of my last self-image as a yogi: it fell apart into many fragments desperately trying to remain with me, and manifest through me, but they were already fading away.

Our self-image is a chemical-electrical activity in the neural networks of our brain and has no other reality at all.

By identifying with your self-image over the years, you have reaffirmed and energized it until became very strong and hard to change. To become free of it observe its thoughts, beliefs, habits, and inclinations and realize that most of them have nothing, or very little, to do with who you really are. At first, being without a self-image can bring about a confused period of transition, but afterwards you will feel like been born anew. As Wu Hsin said:

“This narrative of a self (self as the self-image) is a collection of past experiences and encounters that are selectively filtered and reframed to maintain a persistent characterization of who we think we are. Although the image of ourselves changes over time,

something subtle remains unchanged. Rabid pursuit of this yields a final understanding.”

What remains unchanged is our Self.

10. The Mind

A note: the mind has many positive aspects but has been included in the Na'ham section about what we are not because in most of us is based on the outer I. Indeed is through it that we can write poems, create various kinds of art, explore the intricacies of science and philosophy, etc, but is from our depths that they originate and the mind is only a channel for their expression.

We have six main senses, no five, and the sixth is the mind. Just like eyes see things and ears hear sounds, the mind perceives thoughts. The mind can be a very good instrument but may also bring about a lot of confusion, suffering, and all sorts of limitations. Even when has a brilliant intellect it can only know what can conceptualize, which is usually restricted by its framework of beliefs and biases filtered through the boundaries of language, a construct shaped by our conditionings rather than by what is real. According to Einstein:

"The intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, then the solution comes to you and you don't know how or why. All great discoveries are made in this way." He also said that he did not discover the fundamental laws of the universe through his mind.

The most important things such as deep contact with our Self and the Divine, love, joy, and inner peace, remain always far beyond the mind.

**Just as we cannot put the Himalayas in our pockets,
so the mind cannot grasp what is most essential.**

A metaphor that has been made about it is that just like water takes the shape of the container in which is poured so the mind takes the form of our thoughts. Also

according to Patanjali, the spiritual Teacher who wrote his famous Aphorisms About Yoga, the mind is modified by everything that comes before it and transformed into them.

To a considerable extent, it operates like a computer does through the programs installed in the neural networks of our brain, and tends to reject anything which is not according to our convictions while overestimating those confirming them, which brings about a very distorted perception of reality.

As the Italian friar, astronomer, and philosopher Giordano Bruno affirmed, we have relinquished the reins of our existence to a fallacious and lying mind, our own, that makes and maintains us slaves. But he also said that

**“One day we will awaken from oblivion, make the mind’s
veils fall, and at last, understand who we really are.”**

Just like while going somewhere we move in a space with roads, buildings, people, etc, when we have thoughts or memories we are traveling in the mind. Already at primary school, we should be taught about the nature of the mind and how to use it efficiently because until we master it can never be at peace.

As our body needs a shower when sweaty or dirty, so the mind needs meditation or contemplation to clear away any negative or disturbed energies. Most care much more about their appearance than the condition of their mind, but this is akin to keeping the outside of our home clean but leaving it dirty inside. If some revealed the state of their minds through their faces they would look very ugly, and the worst even like the zombies in a horror movie, and is not an exaggeration.

I used to be so identified with my mind that I was shocked when I realized to which extent dominated me. An ancient Chinese saying affirms that the mind is the emperor of the body, but to me was more like a tyrant and an invisible prison very hard to

escape because I carried with me wherever I went. But now has become a quiet, mostly reliable assistant who reminds me of such things as taking my pills, answering emails, watering the garden; and above all it can use what I have learned about the Path and my own experiences over fifty years on the Path to write this book.

**The mind can make a fantastic, amazing
adventure of your life or a nightmare.**

Unless you are one of the rare exceptions, you have invested a lot of energy and consciousness in identifying yourself with your mind, and now is crucial that you train it to ignore all its superficial, inane thoughts like you would pay no attention to a faraway barking of dogs. To master it, if you haven't yet, begin by observing how is always busy with something or other, constantly finding so many things for you to do; not let its distractions take you over by focusing it inwardly. Consider also this advice from Nisargadatta Maharaj:

“How can an unsteady mind make itself steady? Of course, it cannot. It is the nature of the mind to roam about. All you can do is shift the focus of consciousness beyond the mind.

**Ignore the mind the way that you disregard
the crowd you encounter in the streets.”**

Actually, it is possible, albeit not easy, to make it steady by achieving a state of total mental silence, but not many are able to.

11. The Mind and the Heart

Besides the illusive separation one from our Self and the Divine, the worst one is between the mind and our heart. They often are like adversaries locked in a perpetual rivalry, constantly striving to take us over.

The mind, logical and rational, is the custodian of reason and intellect, seeks knowledge, order, and security. Ever cautious, with its calculated steps builds up walls of logic to protect us from whatever dangers might lie ahead.

The heart is passionate and impulsive, an unyielding rebel, wanderer, and fearless adventurer; is not afraid to take risks, and brings us into the unpredictable currents of our emotions. The mind ignores its whispers as foolish and naïve, but the heart is the gateway to a deeper understanding, happiness, and a more fulfilling life.

**The mind fears the unknown but to the heart
it is a wonderful, never-ending adventure.**

Shifting the focus of our consciousness from the mind to the heart can cause a conflict between what we are what we would like doing and what we think that we ought to do which often arises from societal expectations, cultural norms, and the outer I's worldly ambitions contrasting with our emotional and spiritual needs.

I first heard about this conflict in one of Krishnamurti's talks in Paris. He said that the mind often brings about so much confusion in our lives because it holds onto its beliefs and prejudices while our heart wants to be free, intensely feel love, and embrace everything.

This reminded me that one day when a dervish told the Kabuli that had been thinking about a certain hadith (saying of the prophet Muhammad) but could not understand it, the Kabuli reprimanded him thus:

“You call yourself a dervish and don’t even know that the sacred hadiths cannot be understood with the mind but only with our heart?”

Once I met a famous astrologer who usually charged a lot for a consultation but volunteered to do mine for free. I accepted just out of curiosity because at the time did not believe in astrology (and as is mostly practiced nowadays still don’t.)

She said that because I am a Gemini with multiple planets in it, my heart and mind are out of sync, and allowing my mind to guide me hinders my spiritual progress, therefore I should follow my heart instead, shed the armor of rationality, and embrace the realm of feeling.

**See how often your mind gets you entangled in a web of thoughts
and transient concerns hindering your inner peace.**

To be free of them focus in your heart which perceives everything directly beyond all thought, knows no boundaries, and speaks its own language transcending mere intellectual comprehension. As Mère said:

“The heart is the seat of the soul. It is the divine spark within us, the flame that connects us to the infinite. When the heart is awakened and opens its doors, we become channels of love, compassion, and harmony.

**It is through the heart that we can transform
ourselves and the world around us.”**

12. Thoughts

There is a widespread assumption that we make up our thoughts, but we don't; they originate from the collective mental atmosphere encompassing the whole of humanity. This atmosphere has been given various names: the collective subconscious by Jung; the Akashic Records by Theosophy, the Universal Consciousness by Vivekananda, and the Noosphere by the recent French Jesuit theologian Teilhard de Chardin.

In this mental atmosphere there is a vast range of thoughts, from the worst to the highest, and which ones come to our mind depends on countless extremely complex factors of which usually we are not aware.

The mind is like a switchboard that transmits our thoughts from this atmosphere to our brain according to its programs based on our beliefs, expectations, and fears. Just like when we breathe there is no breather as an entity,

**when we think there is no “thinker”
but only the thoughts.**

The thoughts that we perceive are but the tip of the iceberg: underneath them, there is a restless crowd, a countless number of them, and each is connected with many others and can bring always more of them to our mind. Being unable to keep our mind silent for as long as we want is a serious handicap but so widespread that almost everyone considers it normal.

A main requisite on the Path is the capacity to keep our mind utterly devoid of thoughts because most of them are a constant distraction, a waste of time, and their perpetual chatter can be an addiction like the one to drugs. Moreover, they carry all

sorts of energies, and the negative ones can be very harmful. As the famous recent Quantum physics scientist David Bohm noted,

“Thought is constantly creating problems and then trying to solve them. But as it tries to solve them it makes it worse because it doesn’t notice that is creating them, and the more it thinks the more problems it creates.

**We do not see what is actually happening when
we are engaged in the activity of thinking.”**

Most assume that only what we do or say really matters, not our thoughts, but apart from the very practical or scientific ones they either bring us closer to our inner being or away from it. This famous assertion of the French philosopher Descartes: “I think, therefore I am”, should instead be “I think, therefore *thought* is.” The problem is that to quite an extent we tend to become what we think; Vivekananda also said that we are what our thoughts make us, and in the Bible, there is this saying:

“As a man thinketh in his heart so will he be”

As Mère warned us:

“What we think becomes what we feel, what we feel becomes what we do, which then becomes the inner home where we live our whole lives, and we should make sure that its roof doesn’t cave in.”

The roof caving in symbolizes the collapse or deterioration of one's mental or emotional well-being and in many cases even of the body.

Since my early teens, I had been identified with my thoughts which were for me a treasure trove of ideas and interesting theories. This began to change when I read these two sentences of the recent French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry:

“At times I think and at times I am” and “Every time that I think I am not.”

I then realized that when I was immersed in my thoughts, which was most of the time, *only they were there, not me*. Since then whenever I was unable to silence the flood of thoughts I often inwardly used this invocation of Rumi:

“Don’t hand me over to the monster of my thoughts.

They are another trap, another waiting vampire.”

Comparing thoughts to vampires may seem an exaggeration, but as they have no energy of their own they can only exist by taking over some of ours.

One day I asked Beehar how could I become free of all unessential thoughts and he told me that there are several yogic techniques to do so but they require a steady discipline which I lacked, therefore until I had acquired it I should just observe how my thoughts arise in my mind without any judgment or reaction, and focus on who or what in me is observing them.

Dear reader, may I suggest that you

also follow Beehar’s advice.

Instead of paying attention to what your thoughts say concentrate on who in you perceives them. If you still believe that what you think is up to you, stop a moment reading this book and ask yourself how you “choose” one thought rather than another, and will realize that what you think is not under your control.

Allowing too many thoughts in your mind is just a bad habit:

discard them like you would a soiled paper handkerchief.

13. Mental Silence

The power to keep our mind utterly silent is a very underestimated asset because only then we can have the clarity to perceive everything without our mind distorting it with its projections, expectations, likes and dislikes, etc. Achieving mental silence is essential because as Mère said:

“Silence is the only vibration that can express the inexpressible, the unknowable. It is the very substance of truth, the very essence of love, and it is only in silence that true progress can be made; only in silence we can rectify a wrong movement; only in silence we can best help others.”

But we have lost the capacity for it under a flood of always more mass media and distractions of all kinds which leave us few opportunities to quieten our mind, meditate, or be creative. Every moment of profound mental silence is more precious than a diamond because we cannot take it with us when our body dies, but these moments accumulate until at a certain point

**they form a firm contact with our Self that
not even death can take away from us.**

Besides love, nothing is closer to the Divine than silence, and since ancient times in India Teachers regarded it as the most profound Upadesh (spiritual teaching). Rumi said that silence is God’s language and all else a poor translation of it, Nisargadatta Maharaj that being without thoughts in the waking state is the greatest worship, the German philosopher and mystic Meister Eckhart that there is nothing in creation that is so much like God as silence, and the Spanish visionary nun St. Teresa of Avila that it is only by remaining in a deep silence that we can come upon God within ourselves.

Just like resting or sleeping refreshes our body, a deep mental silence reinvigorates the mind, but as it is not accustomed to being inactive, at first while trying to quieten it we may give it something to be occupied with, like focusing on the ingoing and outgoing breath, repeating a mantra, putting on a relaxing music at a low volume, etc, but eventually such things will no longer be necessary. Nisargadatta Maharaj's advice is: "Like when you walk in a crowd you don't fight every man you meet but find your way between them,

**simply turn on the other side, look between
the thoughts rather than to them."**

The other side is our inward I. By focusing on the gaps between thoughts and prolonging them as much as possible they become longer and longer until none will be left and we can reach a state of pure awareness free from their constraints.

When we first experience a very deep mental silence it may seem just a void and most start thinking again, but this is akin to finding a book with the answers we need but reading only the first page because they are not yet in it.

One day when a dervish spoke at length to the Kabuli about a problem in the Zawiya, after a while he refused to listen about it any further and told him:

**Masoud, the real problem is that
you have again been thinking!**

The first time that I saw Mère, I intended to ask Her several questions, but when I was in front of Her my mind became blank, without any thoughts at all. She knew the questions in my heart but gave me the supreme gift: Her Silence.

In my first efforts to achieve the mental silence I could not stop the flood of thoughts and memories and they were to me like bothering flies, mosquitoes, and some even like aggressive hornets buzzing around my head. When I came back to myself after having been taken over by a sequence of thoughts I felt as if emerging from a muddy swamp and felt a great relief. But, alas, first or later a thought would come or the memory, for instance, of a film that I saw which made me remember another one, then a friend with whom I watched it, and so forth until I found myself in a thought or memory not knowing how I ended up in it. This question of Nisargadatta Maharaj kept echoing in my mind:

“At present, you meekly accept whatever the mind dictates as your own. If the mind goes into silence, *where and what are you?*”

I already knew that who I am is my Self and where I am is in the Vastness where it blissfully dwells, but it was only after achieving the mental silence that I could fully realize, experience this.

**Do you find it normal that thoughts can take
over your mind as they please?**

The more familiar ones are accustomed to finding the door of our mind wide open, or even with a nice WELCOME mat in front of it. Moreover, some of them may be like squatters, drunks, or vandals in your home. But instead of feeling discouraged when again a thought arises and saying, for example,

“Oh no! Again another thought came! Will I ever achieve the mental silence?”
rejoice that you became aware that it took you over against your will and you should reject it; most never do. Rumi’s advice is:

“This silence, this moment, every moment, if it’s genuinely inside you, brings what you need. There’s nothing to believe. Your old life was a frantic running away from silence. Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking. Live in silence. Keep silence so that the Spirit may speak to you.

**Keep silence so that thou may hear Him speaking
words unutterable by tongue in speech.**

14. A Way to Mental Silence and Beyond It

This is a technique to achieve mental silence which should be done for at least half an hour a day, preferably one or more. If sometimes cannot be done is okay but should not happen too often. Practice it at a time when you will not be disturbed, switch off your mobile, relax your body and mind as much as possible, and close your eyes.

1. Monitoring The Thoughts

Keep a notebook and pen at hand and when a thought, memory, or visual image arises in your mind do not pay attention to it but make a mark in the notebook by feeling it with your hand. If you wish, now and then you can count the marks and will find that even after just a week or two your thoughts will already be less. You will also become more aware of which kinds of thoughts come to your mind, and of which effect they have on you so that when you are not practicing this technique you can let in your mind only the positive, uplifting ones.

2. Deeper Thoughts and Insights

Now making marks on your notebook is no longer necessary. When you will have only a few thoughts, those which still come are much more interesting, and you may have some profound insights as well. For instance, you could realize something about yourself or someone else that you were not aware of; a poet might get verses of high poetry, a scientist a formula that had eluded him for a long time, etc. This is because the habitual, banal thoughts occupy most of the space of our mind and do not leave enough for the deeper ones. It is a bit like at night we can hear a bird singing but during the day its song is smothered by louder sounds.

3. The Energy of Thoughts

When not only the ordinary thoughts but also the deeper, interesting ones have ceased, or almost, you may begin to perceive the energies of thoughts before they are translated into words. Of course, then you will not know what they say, but with some practice you will become aware of their basic nature and prevent the negative ones from entering your mind.

4. Visions

As the mind becomes more silent, some visions may come to you, but no matter how fascinating they may be to achieve a perfect mental silence you should leave even them behind. At first, you are likely to indulge in them as almost everyone does, like I also did, but not for too long because your journey is not yet completed. It is only when you have left behind all thoughts, perceiving their energy, and even visions that the mental silence has been achieved, and for many this is enough, but not all. What about you?

5. Beyond the Mental Silence

For those ready for it, the mental silence is not the end of our inner journey because as Pema Chödrön affirmed:

“The path of spiritual awakening leads you through the void of nothingness, where you shed the layers of egocentric conditionings and surrender to your true nature. It is in this surrender that you find true peace and liberation.”

What she called the void of nothingness is the Vastness (mentioned in a further chapter) but when we begin to go beyond the mental silence nothing seems to be left, and this may bring about an anguishing feeling that in it we would be no ,more.

The first times that you go beyond this apparent nothingness you may fall asleep or a fear might arise and bring you back to your normal state of consciousness, but by

fearlessly going into it eventually you will find yourself in the Vastness, a state of boundless peace, constant wonder and love which is the Source of all things and the antechamber to the Divine.

After I went beyond the mental silence I tried to communicate to others what I found in the Vastness but was unable to express it adequately with words, only offering this hint of it:

Beyond the mental silence, you will emerge from the chrysalis of your comfort zone, ready to take flight with newfound wings into a realm where each moment is imbued with profound meanings,

**the boundaries of the outer I fade away and you will begin
to merge always more with your inner being.**

15. The Unknown

By going beyond the mental silence into the vast unknown we embark on a quest of self-discovery and spiritual awakening without any expectations or assumptions about it. But it is not possible to seek the unknown in the same way as we usually pursue everything because seeking requires a foundation of prior knowledge and experiences stored in our memory. To recognize something, we must have already encountered it or something similar before,

**otherwise when the unknown is found
we could not distinguish it.**

Most are creatures of habit, weaving a comforting cocoon of the familiar known around themselves, and will not let go of it even if it is unpleasant because it provides them with a sense of predictability and apparent security. The reason that many fear the unknown is that they regard letting go of the known as a loss, while instead is a liberating renewal of our lives and an adventurous ascent into amazing wonders.

The way to the unknown is to be open to whatever lies ahead in it, trust the Divine guidance, and let go, of any fears that may bind you to the familiar known. As Sri Aurobindo said:

“The unknown is the origin and the end of all things, the origin of all that is new and wonderful, of all progress and evolution, the power that shatters the limitations of the past and opens up new vistas and possibilities.”

The unknown expands our horizons into the magic realm from which all kinds of insights, revelations, and spiritual experiences originate.

I became interested in the unknown when I read this passage from Krishnamurti:

”We cannot think about the unknown, thought cannot measure it. It is not measurable by the known and if we try to we only get caught in words. Time cannot encompass the timeless; our minds are bound to the yardstick of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and with that yardstick we cannot approach the unknown.”

However, the unknown is not unknowable and does not need to remain unknown forever, but to find it we must delve into our depths, question all our beliefs, confront our fears and insecurities, and have no expectations about it.

**Do not fear the unknown; it is the known that
is dangerous because it is mostly an illusion.**

Fearlessly allow the unknown to lead you to always vaster, boundless horizons in which can manifest your full potential. Do not regret losing sight of the known but deeply silence your mind, go deep within, and the unknown will come to you when you are ready for it. This advice that has been attributed to the Hindu scripture Vijnana Bhairava Tantra is:

“Toss aside your map of the world, all your beliefs and mental constructs, and dare the wild unknown. Here in this terrifying freedom, naked before the universe,

**commune with the One who knows all from the inside,
the invisible power pervading everything.”**

16. The Path as Coming Home

We are all travelers who meandered for so long in the illusions of the dreamworld until we are ready to come back to our Source which is our real home through a journey of self-discovery and transformation.

We call home the house where we live and can be with someone we love, but psychologically we reside more in the familiar patterns of our thoughts, memories, habits, and beliefs, but not even them all together can be our true home because they keep changing over time.

Our desires for the attractions of the dreamworld are all covert yearnings to return to the inner home within us where we dwell in a state of serenity, harmony, and inner peace. Ultimately,

**our home is the Vastness in which our Self dwells
in bliss and boundless peace far beyond time and space**

Nisargadatta Maharaj said this about it:

“A beautiful sanctuary exists within you. A place of total calm. A temple of sacredness, peace, beauty, and love. Once you are truly in this infinite inner place, your true home, you will be at home anywhere, at any time, with anyone. A place where infinite possibilities exist and a connection to stillness.”

As a Greek visionary philosopher of whom I forgot the name said:

“So lasting this world appears and yet merely is the sleeper’s dream who, at the appointed Day’s dawn from the dark imaginings haunting him will escape

**and laugh about his phantom griefs upon
beholding his everlasting home.”**

In the sixties, I often listened to a famous song by Bob Dylan because I liked its refrain:

“How does it feel, how does it feel? To be without a home. Like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone. How does it feel, ah, how does it feel? To be on your own, with no direction home?”

It touched me deeply because since that fateful day when in the kindergarten felt that neither my parents' apartment nor the world was my true home. Most of what I did before finding the Path, including losing myself in several dead ends, was because of my trying to find where I belonged. When I read this advice someone attributed to Rumi I felt as if had been written just for me:

“Break off all your bounds, for the final flight prepare; from this weird world your last journey make,

**soar up to the peaks where no more separation
is there between you and your true home.”**

One day while I was hitchhiking to India, near Multan in Pakistan, the lorry in which I was stopped in a small township. I walked around a bit, turned a corner, and saw a Hindu temple, a tiny Indian island in the Muslim sea. It was small but had its customary square wall around it with at each corner a big Nandi, the holy cow, its central gopuram (tower), two dragons at the entrance sides, and a cheerful, potbellied Ganesh, the elephant god above it.

A Brahmin with a white Nehru cap and three women wearing colorful saris and a small garland of jasmines in their hair gave me a surprised look wondering what this Westerner could be doing there. Some old sadhus (itinerant monks) in their ochre or saffron colored robes and wearing necklaces of rudraksha (seeds reputed sacred) were smoking a chillum of hashish and gestured for me to join them.

So intimately familiar such a scene was to me, a strange déjà-vu; I felt that my true home was India and I would no longer feel like a stranger wherever I went. But ultimately not even India was my home because it is within us. Once in Australia one of its aboriginals told me this saying from their culture:

“We are all visitors of this time and this place and all that we are doing is to pass through them.

Our task here is to observe, learn, grow, and love.

Afterward we will return home.”

A dear friend of mine had the right attitude in a letter that she sent me:

”Again I do not have a home. I bought a second-hand bicycle and am cycling through Indonesia, seldom staying more than one night anywhere. All my luggage is in a plastic bucket on the back of my bicycle, and I also use it to wash my few clothes. Every evening I meditate for a long time, and this meditation has become my home.”

**After finding your true home in our Source you will
always remain in it wherever your body may be.**

To find it you must confront the ghosts of unresolved inner conflicts from the past, old fears, and the haunting remnants of emotional scars, but do not see them only as obstacles because they also are crucial steps to discover it. Have the same attitude as Rumi here:

“Far too long already in empty buildings we wandered. Yes, tempted am I to stay, meet those new fellows, quite sensible is to remain the night with them, *but I want to go home.*”

I assume that you have already begun your journey home, but to those who have not yet found it the recent controversial book “A Course In Miracles” says:

“You will undertake a journey because you are not at home in the world. And you will search for your home whether you realize it or not. If you believe it is outside your search will be futile, for you will be searching where it is not.

**It is a journey without distance to a goal
which has never changed.”**

17. The Awakening Ascent

The Awakening ascent consists of shifting the focus of our consciousness from the outer I to our inward one and when we are ready for it merge it to the Self and the Divine. This cannot be done only by listening to Teachers and or reading books about the Path but by practicing what they teach and incorporating it into our lives. In Yoga the Awakening Ascent is called Sadhana and Mère defined it thus:

“Sadhana means the conscious effort to make one’s whole being into a perfect instrument of the Divine. It is a process of integral self-discovery, self-purification, and self-mastery, a journey of the soul to the Divine, a merging of the individual self with the universal Self.”

As Jung said, those who look outside dream, but who look inside awaken, therefore

**the Awakening ascent's first step is to fully realize that
we are still entranced in the dream of our life.**

This is essential because in every moment of our life we either begin to wake up from this dream or remain mesmerized by it, far from our true being. To most what is important is our physical appearance, social status, how much money we have, our family, etc; but what is essential is whether we have already begun our Awakening ascent or not, and if we did to which extent. In it, we must confront and overcome the resistance of various parts of the outer I that oppose it because they do not want to change and give up their familiar ways of living.

An example of this resistance is this: if was possible to offer a chimpanzee in the jungle to become a human being and tell it all its advantages, how his life would become so much more interesting, rich with new experiences and enjoyments,

the chimpanzee would probably refuse such a great opportunity because it enjoys so much being a monkey and doesn't want to renounce the fun of going up and down trees and jumping from a branch to another.

Likewise, we would be much better off giving up all that we have ever been to merge with our Self and enjoy all its love, peace, and bliss, but the outer I and the ego resist this transformation because they are afraid of it like darkness fears the light and cannot withstand it.

**Until we overcome this resistance we will remain
bound by our limitations like the chimpanzee.**

Another example of this is the ancient metaphor about a fish who had earned a lot of good karma in his past life, so God tells him about the wonders of the ocean like the coral reefs, and offers to bring it there. The fish replies that although its aquarium is small and boring is such a safe place; there are no sharks or other predatory fishes in it, and food is regularly and abundantly provided; so he asks for a guarantee that the ocean is truly so wonderful, but God is no longer listening to it.

The equivalent of its aquarium is our comfort zone with its familiar habits, ways of thinking and living, and not many are willing to leave them for the ascent on the Path about which they may have read or heard something about but not been ready for the radical changes that would bring to their lives. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, there is this injunction:

“Awake, o sleeper, and rise from the dead.”

It says rise *from the dead*, not just from the dream of our life because a very deep inward sleep seems so close to being dead that there is not much difference between them. To awaken from this dream Rumi's advice is:

“Take the cotton out of your ears, the cotton of comforts, so that you can hear the music of the spheres. Be patient. Respond to every call that uplifts your spirit. Ignore those that make you fearful and sad, that degrade you back towards disease and death.”

In the Zoroastrian and Persian mythology there is a bird called Homa which dwells high above the clouds, far from the noise and confusion of the world. There it makes an egg which begins to hatch from such a height that the newborn chick develops its wings while falling down and before reaching the ground begins to fly upwards.

As since our birth we begin to fall towards the ground called “death”, this bird symbolizes those of us who accomplish the Awakening ascent before the death of our body.

Over the years I had gathered a lot of quotes about the Path and Yoga from various sources to foster my Awakening ascent, but one night I had a dream that changed how I felt about them.

I was exploring the ruins of an ancient civilization and there I found amazingly beautiful handicrafts made of crystals and gemstones set in bright copper; I gathered many of them in my backpack but never got full. Then I saw a Japanese stone garden in which its bigger stones were engraved with writings in an unknown language but somehow could understand it, and I felt as if they had been written just for me.

I then became aware that was dreaming and should wake up and write them down before I forgot them. But, alas, I couldn’t resist the temptation to get some more of those marvelous handicrafts, and indeed after waking up I only remembered two of them and deeply regretted it. The first was:

“In your depths there is a sacred flame, a beacon of the Divine guiding you on the Path: raise it always higher and with it burn to ashes everything in you which ought no longer be.”

The second was:

“Vividly imagine how you would speak, behave, and act if you were already fully enlightened, and by being very persistent in doing so gradually will become your permanent state.”

Those handicrafts symbolized the quotes about the Path that I kept gathering although I already had so many, and the writings in the Japanese garden represented the insights and intimations from my depths. Since then I strove to become more receptive to them instead of accumulating more knowledge.

**Unless you are one of the rare exceptions, you must
still wake up from the so-called waking state.**

Realizing this can be very unsettling, and your mind might try to deny or ignore it, but you cannot progress much on the Path until you have acknowledged this. Every moment in which you are aware of not being yet inwardly awake brings you a step closer to the Great Awakening. As the book “A Course in Miracles” affirmed:

“You have chosen a sleep in which you had bad dreams, but the sleep is not real and God calls you to awake.

**There will be nothing left of your dream when
you hear Him, *for then you will be awake.***

18. Remembering

Besides the Divine, what should always be remembered is that we are not what we seem to be but are our Self because forgetting it is the main cause of our problems, difficulties, and suffering. Without this remembrance, we remain in a quagmire of illusions, endlessly trying to find our fulfillment in external things instead of all the peace and joy which are always deep within us. The advice of Ramana Maharshi is:

“In all manner of ways possible one should gradually endeavor not to forget one’s Self that is God. If that is accomplished, all will be accomplished.”

Note that he said that all *will* be accomplished, not that already is because in most cases some inner work is still needed to reach the Great Awakening.

Whenever we have some time, like when are waiting for something, instead of distracting ourselves with our mobile or becoming impatient we should remind ourselves that

**we should not live as if we were the outer I
but as who we really are, our Self.**

Mère’s also said that whenever we have some spare time we should tell ourselves:

“At last, I have some time to concentrate, to collect myself, to relive the purpose of my life, to offer myself to the True and the Eternal.”

In Sufism, there is the term Dhikr which means the practice of a constant remembrance of Allah, and this saying of the Prophet Muhammad emphasizes its importance thus:

"The difference between those who remember our Lord and those who do not remember Him is like the one between the living and the dead."

One day in the Kabuli's zawiya two dervishes were heatedly arguing because had a different memory of something in the past and the Kabuli reprimanded them thus:

“If you are so concerned about what happened in the past what are you doing here in the Zawiya?

**There is only one thing worth
remembering, Allah!”**

For some time I practiced several yogic techniques to remember always more the Divine but were not of much help and could not understand why until I read Gurdjieff's metaphor of our I as a group of people in a bus taking turns at the driving wheel: when I did not remember it was because one of them took it away from me. To prevent them from doing this I followed the advice of Vivekananda:

“Say “Soham, Soham” (“I am That”) whatever comes. Tell yourself this even while eating, walking, and suffering. Tell the mind this incessantly, that what we see does not exist, there is only “I” and then - flash – *the dream will break!*”

To remember I used Soham like a mantra, and it kept echoing in my mind, reminding me that only the Divine exists and, how utterly amazing, essentially I also am one with That.

**Every time that you Remember reconquer a part
of yourself that had been usurped by the outer I.**

As Rumi said, asleep or awake, writing or reading, whatever you do, you must never be without the remembrance of the Divine.

Ideally, your remembering should arise naturally and spontaneously, but until it does there are many ways to bring it about. For example, stop a moment to center yourself every time that you finish doing one thing and before starting another, when you open or close a door, sit down or get up, answer an email, drink a glass of water, etc. When you forget to do so don't waste time regretting it but center yourself inwardly and remember the Divine. As Mère said:

“But it is Him! There is no other thing than Him! It is that which we ought to repeat from the morning to the evening, from the evening to the morning, because we forget it all the time. There is only Him, there is nothing else but Him,

**nothing exists but Him, there is no existence
without Him, there is only Him!”**

19. Letting Go

We are accustomed to obtain what we want by doing something about it, but on the Path is much more important to let go of everything that is not essential and focus as much as possible of our consciousness, time, and energy on our inner work.

What we should let go of is all our attachments, unexamined beliefs, resentments, fears, worries, every negative emotion, an excessive need for comfort, and ideally our whole self-image. About letting go of our mundane desires, Wu Hsin pointed out that:

“First you will strive to get it. Then you will strive to keep it. Once lost, you will strive to reclaim it.

**This is the wheel of striving. Its grip is tight,
but it is you who must let it go.”**

As the Path is a long journey we should carry with us as little baggage as possible, and sometimes letting go of something that we thought we would never part from can be the best we can do. For instance, once I found it very difficult to let go of a woman who I loved very much but hindered my progress on the Path, but if I hadn't would not have found my wonderful soulmate Prema Devi. The advice of the Indian Buddhist monk is:

“Let go of what has passed, of what may come, of what is happening now, don't try to figure it out; don't try to make anything happen: relax right now and rest.”

By not trying to make anything happen, he meant trusting the Divine to bring us what we truly need instead of trying to obtain it through our efforts.

Most believe that letting go of their major desires and attachments requires too great an effort, but this is often a suggestion from the ego and outer I which don't want to give them up. The author of pseudo-spiritual novels Carlos Castaneda was not a Teacher but made his shaman Don Juan speak like one by saying that

**we can cut anything out of our lives,
anytime, in the blink of an eye.**

If this seems unlikely, hard to believe, it is because we have been conditioned to believe that many things are essential even when they aren't.

Regarding the attachment to our possessions, one of the requirements to become a murid (disciple) in the Kabuli's Zawiya was to donate everything one has to it. Once when a very rich man wishing to join it asked if he could keep at least some of his wealth the Kabuli pretended to get angry and told him:

"You cannot bargain with Allah! But He is very merciful and with His grace a thief may steal all your tomans (money coins), a fire burn down your fine house, a myriad of locusts devour your crops, and then perhaps you might be ready to join us!"

Once when I visited Pandiji he was talking with his disciples about letting go of all that hinders our progress in the Yoga, and one of them said that he had tried to give up his worldly desires for years but had found it too difficult. Pandiji replied:

"No Arun, it doesn't need to be so arduous! Just let go of the belief that cannot renounce them because it is mainly what prevents you from forswearing them!"

As Arun didn't look satisfied with this answer, Pandiji gave him this advice:

“Vividly remember a moment in your life when you had a contact with your Atman (the Self) and felt a little of its immense bliss; then compare it with the petty gratifications that satisfying your desires gives you!”

Now about letting go I feel like Rumi did when he said that it is good to leave each day behind, like flowing water, free of sadness; yesterday is gone and its tale told; today new seeds are growing.

**Let go of everything that is not part of who you truly are
and keeps you entangled in the dreamworld’s illusions.**

Let go of every regret about what happened in the past, of the tendency, if you still have it, of busying yourself with so many transient things, and focus your consciousness inwardly. This is how Mère expressed how we will feel after we have let them all go.

“Then you shall understand the vanity and childishness of your meager satisfactions, foolish quarrels, and petty passions. You shall see the dissolution of your little faults, the crumbling of the last entrenchments of your limited personality and obtuse egoism.

**You shall feel the current of true spirituality which will
deliver you from your narrow limits and bounds.”**

20. Being Tested

Many of our difficulties and hardships are tests meant to make us aware of what we should change in ourselves or become free from. The Divine assigns these tests to us precisely graduated according to our capacity to deal with them, and never gives us any that we cannot overcome. As every time we pass one we make a progress, they should not be seen as just negative but as opportunities to grow inwardly. Indeed some may be very hard to bear, but as Vivekananda said “Blows are what awaken us and help to break the dream.

**They show us the insufficiency of this world
and make us long to escape, to be free.”**

Sometimes it is the tests that seem discouraging setbacks that can help us most. Just like to be faceted a gemstone must be worked upon a grinding wheel and all its parts with some flaws cut out, sometimes we cannot progress on the Path without passing through some hardships. About the test given to us by others, Gurdjieff gave us this injunction which he claimed to have translated from ancient Aramaic but probably just made up himself:

“Always remember you come here having already understood the necessity of struggling with yourself,

**only with yourself, therefore thank everyone
who gives you this opportunity.”**

If we were thrown a stone we would react to the person who threw it, not to the stone; likewise, when someone insults or harms us we should see him or her as the “stone” through which the Divine wants to teach us something. By reacting with

anger or resentment we would fail this test, so we should consider that probably this person had a lot of suffering and hardships in his life to behave in such a manner and tell ourselves something like:

“Interesting! The Divine who is infinite love, now through this person appears to insult or try to harm me – what must I learn from it? Is perchance my equanimity been tested or what?”

In many cases, this person needed to discharge some unbearable sorrow or desperation, so the Divine arranged that he unloaded it on someone like you who would not react as most would but with understanding, compassion, and love.

Once when I assumed that I had enough equanimity and little could any longer disturb me I was given this test: although I lived in a street near the ashram which was quiet most of the time one day a lot of noise bothered me while I tried to meditate. Then a gang of angry crows loudly screeched their *craa craa craa* near to my window. When they finally flew off there was a power cut, so a neighbor put on a cranky, very noisy generator. Eventually the electricity came back but then another neighbor furiously shouted at his wife who screamed back louder than him. A van with a powerful loudspeaker stopped at the corner of the street and deafeningly blasted out some political propaganda.

When I realized that all those noises had been arranged by the Divine to show me that my equanimity was far from perfect they soon ceased and the street was again quiet because I had passed my test.

Another example of being tested for those on the Path is the one of Bruno, a friend of mine who had lived several years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in a very ascetic way. He had a “holier than thou” attitude towards those who didn’t, but had not transcended his vital desires, merely suppressed them in his subconscious. But one day he met some flower children – he had been one of them – and failed his test by not resisting the temptation to smoke a joint with them. But then the dam of his asceticism collapsed: he was almost kicked out of the ashram because besides smoking

weed he got drunk and made his domestic helper pregnant. Eventually, he resumed a disciplined life but in a more authentic, less extreme way because had understood the lesson of this test.

**Be grateful for the tests allotted to you because they challenge
your limitations and help you to overcome them.**

If you happen to fail a test it might be because the Divine has allowed this failure because ultimately will lead to something better than what succeeding could have brought you. Mère's advice is:

“Each time you receive a blow from life, tell yourself immediately, “Ah, I have to make a progress”; then the blow becomes a blessing. Instead of tucking your head between your shoulders, you lift it up with joy and say,

**“What is it that I have to learn? I want to know.
What do I have to change? I want to know.”**

21. The Hostile Forces

A note: In this chapter subtle entities are mentioned. They are entities beyond the physical realm but can interact with it. They are called subtle because are not detectable by the physical senses but can be perceived by our inner sight when is enough developed, through altered states of consciousness or by psychedelic drugs.

They originated from the primordial darkness from which the dreamworld was created, and to quite an extent it is still under their influence, but although they may seem formidable are not invincible. They oppose our personal and collective evolution because are aware that when we will have reached a certain level of it they will be dissolved.

The Divine tolerates them because of their useful function in testing our sincerity and commitment to the Path. Often is they who give us our most difficult tests,

**but can do so only when there is something
in us that resonates with them.**

Satprem made this very important point about them:

“The hostile forces have been given all sorts of devilish and “negative” names through the world’s spiritual history as if their sole aim was to damn the seeker and give decent people a hard time. The reality is somewhat different, for *where is the devil if not in God?*”

Whenever we are attacked by them we should immediately silence our mind, not react to them emotionally, not be afraid, and put ourselves under the protection of our Teacher if we have one or, even better, under the one of the Divine. Unless we

can do so wholeheartedly and intensely enough they might not immediately cease to attack us, but at least will be weakened and lose some of their power over us. Another way to become free of them is to focus on the Ananda, the bliss of the Divine, because as Mère said

“The diamond light of Bliss has the power to melt all hostile forces. Nothing can resist it, no consciousness, no being, no hostile can draw near it without immediately being dissolved, for it is the Divine light in its pure creative power.

In a period when I was strongly attacked by them I asked Beehar what I should do about it and he told me:

“Vijay, we spoke about this before, the problem is again your rebellious vital that still craves what can no longer be had here in the ashram, and it is it that opens a door to them.”

Then he asked me how they attacked me and I replied that they began by making me feel unhappy and despondent for no apparent reason until nothing seemed to have any meaning anymore, and sent me discouraging suggestions such as I would never be able to...He interrupted me with:

“I understand. You cannot get out of such a dismal state because they have deprived you of the energy that you would need to get rid of them directly. Therefore keep reminding yourself that they can only affect the most superficial part of your being and center yourself in your Psychic being over which they have no power at all.”

He then added that when an ashramite he knew was strongly attacked by the hostile forces Mère told him not to think too much about them because it tends to increase their power over us and gave him a powerful mantra of protection: “Sri Aravinda sharannam mama” He advised me to use it when they bothered me and I found it very effective.

**Be always on your guard because the hostile forces
constantly try to hinder our Awakening ascent.**

If there is a flaw in you that you are not conscious of or have underestimated, the hostile forces will take advantage of it and of any moment of vulnerability and weakness to take you over. But every time that you overcome one of them you will become stronger and better able to deal with the others. Mère's advice is:

“When the hostile forces come instead of becoming overwhelmed or taken by surprise observe closely what was the thing within you that vibrated with them; then you can catch it and say to it: “Go away with your friends, I don't want you anymore!” You send away the two together,

**the part that attracted and the thing it attracted; they
are sent away and you are absolutely clear.”**

22. Suffering

Suffering is another way through which we can be tested. Just like physical pain warns us that something in our body should be taken care of, suffering shows us what we should change in ourselves, and for some of those who are in a deep inner slumber, it may be the only thing that can make them feel a little bit alive. In most cases some suffering cannot be avoided, but instead of just enduring it while waiting for it to be over should be regarded as a test that we must pass. The capacity to no longer suffer whatever happens is proportional to our inner growth and the extent to which we are aware that

**suffering is not real but more like a nightmare
in our so-called waking state.**

Most think that to not suffer we must not be subject to illnesses, poverty, hardships, etc, but even when they are not there our lower vital can bring about suffering through the insatiable pursuit of its unsatisfied desires. Most suffering is not caused by external circumstances but by how we react to them, an excessive concern with transient things, and wishing that all should always be as we like. In those who suffered a lot in their childhood, the vital can bring about what has been called the “Body of Pain”, an addiction to suffering that makes us indulge in self-pity and negative emotions.

According to many religious texts, suffering helps us to grow spiritually and indeed it might, but as joy and ecstasy are an integral part of the Divine it also increases the sense of separation from That. According to a Buddhist monk I knew, the Buddha’s injunction is:

“Ho! You who suffer still! Be aware that from yourselves

alone your suffering arises: none else forces you to.”

Once when Nisargadatta Maharaj said that everything that happens is always according to God's will a visitor asked him how he dared say this considering all the suffering in the world he replied that: “All sufferings are man-made, and is in man's power to end them. God helps man by putting him in front of the results of his actions and demands that re-establish the balance.”

This visitor also asked him what he was doing to relieve some of the world's suffering and he replied:

**“I look at it through the eyes of God
and find that all is well.”**

All is well for our inward I, not for the outward one, but it is not a definite entity, only an ephemeral construct conjured up by the mind, a shifting shadow made of transient concerns, beliefs and fears, lacking substance, flickering on the surface of our consciousness. The great recent Indian Teacher Anandamayi Ma asked:

“Who is it that loves and who suffers? It is God who stages a play with Himself; who exists save Him? The individual suffers because perceives duality which is the cause of all sorrow and grief.” Her advice is:

**“Find the One everywhere and in everything
and there will be an end to all suffering.”**

A question that I was often asked is: “But it is not inevitable to suffer when someone we love dies?”

No, it is not inevitable, but to not suffer because of it we must be aware that our loved ones are their immortal Self, and after their body dies enter a new chapter of their

existence. It is extremely selfish, even cruel, to wish that they remain in a deteriorating and painful old body when the time has come to leave it.

My suffering had mostly consisted of being unable to find who I was and the meaning of my life but after I was on the Path realized that who we really are, our Self, never suffers at all, and through a permanent contact with it all suffering soon ceases I then began to follow Sri Aurobindo's advice:

“The tragedies of the heart and the body are the weeping of children over their little griefs and their broken toys. Smile within thyself, but comfort the children; join also, if thou canst, in their play.”

**If you still suffer, be aware that you have been deceived because
joy and the divine Ananda are part of your real nature.**

Even if the root of suffering in you is deeply entrenched, don't postpone being happy until all suffering has been eradicated. To do so keep reminding yourself that a your Self never suffers at all, and focus your consciousness on it. Instead of saying something like: “OMG, why is this happening to me?” ask yourself what you should learn from it. Sri Aurobindo sums it all up thus:

"The way to escape from suffering is to rise above life and look at it from a higher standpoint. When you stand above life, you see that it is full of light and joy as well as pain and sorrow. You will see that suffering is only a passing phase, a necessary experience for the growth of the soul. And when you see this,

**you are no longer afraid of suffering, but you
accept it as a part of life and learn from it."**

23. The Dangers on the Path – Hubris

At the beginning of the Path, the main danger is the tendency to seek it to improve the dream of one's life instead of striving to awaken from it, but this is like decorating a prison cell to feel more comfortable in it instead of trying to escape from it.

For the more advanced seekers there is the peril that after some very intense yogic experiences they might be taken over by a sense of spiritual superiority “holier than thou” attitude magnifying their ego, lose contact with reality, and risk to become mentally unbalanced.

But the greatest danger on the Path is hubris, the “occupational hazard” of seekers, especially for those who wish to gain great yogic powers before being ready for them and expose themselves to more powerful energies than they can bear as once happened to me.

Hubris can bring about a dangerous overconfidence, a sense of invincibility that causes us to ignore or underestimate our vulnerability. It clouds our judgment, traps us in a tapestry of illusions distorting our perception of everything, and makes us ignore the possible consequences of our actions. As Pema Chödrön said:

“The danger of hubris is ever-present on the path of spiritual enlightenment. It is a constant battle between the ego's desire for grandeur and the soul's yearning for truth.

**Only through humility and self-awareness
can we navigate this treacherous terrain.”**

For various reasons, once I went to Ceylon and as I had some time to spare visited the famous Yellow Temple in Kandy where they have a tooth reputed to be from the Buddha. I went there at dawn when nobody was yet there and meditated for a long time in front of the inner sanctum and there I began to feel some immensely powerful energies hovering above me. When I got back to my room they became even more extremely intense and my ego and vital wanted them. For a moment I remembered this warning of Mère:

“We say to people who do not have a strong and firm and capacious basis in the body, the vital, and the mind: “Do not try to pull at the forces of the Divine, but wait in peace and calmness, for they would not be able to bear the descent.”

But in my arrogance told myself that surely this didn’t apply to a great, ha ha ha ha, yogi like myself and pulled them to me.

A thunderbolt of searing fire descended through my spinal cord with such fierce pain that I blanked out. When I regained consciousness the pain was still there and something like a steel hand was crushing my neck. The walls of the room seemed to intersect at impossible angles with the floor and the ceiling through such an alien geometry that I feared going mad.

Then I had a very vivid hallucination in which a woman in a black robe and a shaved head like a Buddhist nun smiling took my hand. I assumed that she meant to help me, but then her smile turned into an evil sneer and I realized that she was death, my death. I shook her hand off and jumped back as a vertiginous abyss opened right under our feet, but only she precipitated into it. Then more bleak hallucinations haunted me: a Japanese stone garden in which the stones were freshly sprinkled with blood, a newspaper in the gutter announcing in huge letters **THE END OF THE WORLD HAS COME**; a dance hall where all dancers were naked rotting corpses, etc.

In the last hallucination, I saw the Earth spinning away from me and desperately tried to follow it but it went so far that I could no longer see it. Then I found myself in my subtle body and saw my physical one walking away from me in a two-dimensional space like a cartoon. My body went into a pharmacy to get some tranquilizers but could not speak, and then an ambulance came and took it away.

I came back to myself to a pandemonium of noises, loud voices, rough music at high volume, hawkers of food shouting something about it, etc. I had been brought to the government hospital in Colombo and was in a bed amongst about a hundred others under a huge asbestos roof. Several doctors did various tests but could not find what was wrong with me, and I only vaguely remember how I managed to leave this hospital and return to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

I paid such a high price for my hubris: a lot of my nervous system was burned out, and for over a year I found loud noises unbearable; waited all day for the night and the relief of sleep but in it had nightmares. This is an extreme case of the dangers on the Path, but I mentioned it for those who might be tempted to acquire such powerful energies before being ready for them.

Hubris can also give us the illusion that we are already enlightened. Once when I was in Auroville, the international city based on Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga near Puducherry in south India, a friend of mine went out to do some shopping, came back without it, and told me that she got enlightened. When I asked her how it happened she said:

“Oh, I had about enough of my dumb ego, so I dumped it in a garbage can; prayed to Sri Aurobindo to make me enlightened and immediately he did! Now I am one with the divine Mother! No, I AM the divine Mother! From now on first thing in the

morning you must bring me some flowers, light some sandal incense sticks in front of me, and put your head on my feet so that I can bless you!”

When I tried to make her realize that she wasn’t yet enlightened after all she just got up and left leaving all her things behind. Fare well, dear Peggy, and might you get enlightened for real one day!

**I hope that hubris is not a danger to you,
but if might be follow Mère’s advice:**

“Take great care not to attempt to pull the forces towards you. Give yourself, open yourself with as much disinterestedness as you can attain through a constant self-forgetfulness, increase your receptivity to the utmost, but never try to pull them towards you, for wanting to pull is already a dangerous egoism. You may aspire,

**you may open yourself, you may give yourself,
but never seek to take.”**

24. The Fair Inn

Another danger on the Path is finding our Awakening ascent too strenuous and discontinuing it to rest for a while. Indeed sometimes is necessary to do so, but should not happen too often because the time that we have to reach the Great Awakening in this lifetime is limited. About this, there is The Fair Inn, an ancient metaphor about the attractions waylaying us from the Path:

“How do most men act? As a man who journeyed to return to his Native Land and meant to spend just one night in an inn, but liked it so much that did not leave it. A wise man told him:

“Friend, you have forgotten your original aim! This inn was meant to be only a passing stage, not your destination!”

His reply was: “Maybe so, but it is such a good place!” The wise man then asked him: “And on your way on, how many more nice inns will be there?”

**Your goal is to return home to your Native Land
and fulfill your destiny.”**

Besides worldly pleasures and comfort, the Fair Inn can also be a very intense ecstasy in our meditation because we might be tempted to never come out of it.

As an example of this, in Homer’s epic *Odyssey* there is the land of the Lotus Eaters whose natives ate this flower that induced a state of ecstatic lethargy. Ulysses sent some sailors there to get water, but after eating a few of those lotuses they forgot about getting the water and remained there eating them. Many of those addicted to alcohol or drugs are a bit like them.

Another example of the Fair Inn is this warning that has been attributed to the recent Punjabi Sufi mystic Iqbal:

“The traveler who knows the secret of journeying is more afraid of the cool oasis than of the murderous brigands infesting the caravan routes.”

Once in some Arab countries traveling through the desert was by camel caravans, and not only was terribly hot but water was strictly rationed, so one was always thirsty. Reaching an oasis meant plenty of water to drink at last, fresh food, being able to wash and enjoy the shade of palms, so coming from the torrid desert it was like a paradise. If we linger for too long in the equivalent of an oasis in our lives we run the risk to remain in it forever and never discover what lies beyond it.

The most common kind of the Fair Inn is our comfort zone where we can relax and feel safe and secure, but if we indulge in it for too long we may become stagnant and inwardly decay, unable to use our full potential, and then it can become like a self-imposed prison preventing us from enjoining all the experiences that lay outside it. But most do not want to step out of their comfort zone because they fear what may be there outside it, the changes and challenges that might bring to their lives.

In my early thirties, for about a year and a half I left Auroville and lived with Bhavana, my wonderful partner at the time, in Western Australia. We stayed in Belvedere, a community of about fifteen people in a forest of hundreds of years old trees in a long, narrow peninsula between the sea and a large estuary. In the hot season, which was most of the year, we did not wear clothes; there was a windmill like we had in Auroville and a vegetable garden sometimes visited by a friendly family of kangaroos. I fished in the estuary and caught many fishes that I shared with everyone there. We lived very simply and saved most of the money that we earned by Bhavana making leather items and my working as an assistant surveyor in the bush to bring it to Auroville and extend the forest that I planted in it. We were very happy there but

eventually realized that it was the equivalent of a Fair Inn because we were not making enough progress on the Path, so we returned to Auroville.

**Most inner progress takes place outside our comfort zone
and any attachment to it perpetuates our limitations.**

The more at ease you feel in your comfort zone the more becomes a snare stifling your creativity and suffocating your dreams and higher aspirations. This warning of Rumi may well not apply to you, but ought to concern many seekers:

“Half-heartedness doesn’t reach into majesty. You set out to find God, but then you keep stopping for long in mean-spirited roadhouses.

It takes courage to step outside of your comfort zone, and dare what lies beyond it which might be risky or unsafe, but it is essential for your inner transformation. As Mère said,

"The comfort zone is a place of fear. It is a place where we hide from the unknown, from the challenges, from the risks. But in the truth

**the unknown is where the real adventure lies. It is where
we can discover our true selves, our true potential."**

25. The Fear of the Light and Awakening

The fear of the Light and the one of Awakening are similar and both are brought about by the ego and most of the outer I who know that will be dissolved by them. To overcome these fears permanently requires a profound introspection and a willingness to confront them because if we ignore them just grow stronger and increase their hold upon our lives.

Ultimately, both fears are caused by our resistance to recognizing that we are our inner being because then we can no longer live as we like as we are accustomed to and few are ready for such a radical change

**but it is only by overcoming these fears that
we can fully live as who we are meant to be.**

The main reason that we fear the Light is because it reveals all our flaws, prejudices, falsehoods, and inadequacies. But as the contemporary American spiritual leader and activist Marianne Williamson affirmed,

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate but that we are powerful beyond measure. *It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.* We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.”

About the fear of the Light, there is an ancient tale from the times when India consisted of many small kingdoms. In one of them, a terrible crime was committed, and a young man was wrongly convicted of it and cast in a dark dungeon cell for the rest of his life. But then one day the real culprit of that crime on his deathbed confessed that had been him who did it, so the king had the prisoner freed and told him:

“Although I am the king, it is not in my power to give you back your life, your youth. Nothing could ever be enough compensation for such a loss, but ask for whatever you want and I will grant it to you.”

This man replied: “Great king, all that I want is to be put back in my dungeon because after a lifetime in the dark this blinding light hurts my poor eyes too much!”

The king did not know what to say, but his guru told him:

“Yes, of course after a lifetime in the dark, the light hurts your eyes, but will only do so for a little time, and then you will be able to see the sky, the stars, sunrises, and sunsets, flowers, the smiles of children, all the wonderful beauty of the world...”

About the fear of Awakening,

**Imagine that you are dreaming that you are Napoleon
and enjoying being such a powerful emperor,**

ordering your victorious army all over Europe. But as you begin to wake up from this dream realize that you are not him after all but, say, Andrea, and then the part of you dreaming of being Napoleon will have this fearful thought

“What will happen to me, Napoleon, when Andrea wakes up? *I will be no more!*”

But emerging from the dream of your life is not your end but the realization of who you truly are. While writing this chapter I felt like the Persian poet and mystic Hafez Shirazi did when he said:

**“I wish I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness
the astonishing light of your own being.”**

26. The Shadow

The Shadow is the total sum of everything that we did not dare to confront about ourselves, were ashamed of, and pretended that weren't there. But by denying or suppressing them they do not disappear but sink into our subconscious from where they may suddenly reemerge with unpredictable consequences. Mère's advice is:

“To overcome the shadow, we must bring light into the darkness, which means increasing our awareness and shining the light of our higher Self onto the shadowy parts of our being.”

As Jung noted, everyone carries a shadow, and the deeper it is under the surface of our consciousness the blacker and denser becomes. The brighter the light, the darker will be the shadow, and until we make our unconscious conscious will keep directing the course of our lives and we will call it fate.

However, although in our shadow lurk our darkest desires and fears can also reveal to us what we should become free from. Whatever form it may take our shadow is part of the collective one of all humanity, therefore

**healing our shadow helps not only us but also
the Divine's Manifestation on Earth.**

The first time that I heard about the shadow was from this quote attributed to Rumi that someone forwarded to me in WhatsApp:

“However fast you may run, your shadow will keep up, even be in front of you at times! Only the full high sun reduces your shadow. But that shadow has been helping you! What hurts you also blesses you.

**We are all the shadow of God
and our shadow is the world”**

This has deep layers of meaning that I am still exploring in my meditations.

After I had done Integral Yoga for some years I assumed that no longer had a shadow, but one day something made me overreact with anger and I became aware that after all some of it was still in my subconscious. My beloved soulmate Prema Devi offered to guide me in a visualization that I had invented to heal the shadow of some of those who came to our healing center:

The subject is guided down... down... down... down...into the subconscious to find the shadow. Each sees it one's way: as a tiger, a filthy huge rat, a big spider, a vampire, etc; but they are all transliterations of the basic nature and energy of our shadow.

The best is to heal it and transform its energy into a positive one, but when it is not possible we must get rid of it by, for example, visualizing it burning to ashes, exploding, melting down, just vanishing, etc. This can be effective because for the subconscious there is almost no difference between the so-called real and what is vividly imagined.

When I did this visualization after descending very deep in my subconscious I finally found a cave dimly lit by a phosphorescent moss on its walls, and sitting in it was that child who in a kindergarten had wondered who he was and wished to return from where he came from. *My shadow was myself.*

Children can be very cruel to those who are different from them and not interested in the things they like. As I wasn't playing with them and not even talking to them, they bullied and tormented me in many ways until I just wanted to be left alone so that I would not suffer anymore and found refuge in an inner space that my subconscious visualized as this cave.

I tried to convince him to leave it and come with us to Auroville, but he just shook his head and gave me a hateful look. After many efforts to persuade him to come, it was thanks to the love and tenderness with which Prema Devi spoke to him that he finally threw himself into my arms and merged with me.

The major change that healing my shadow brought about was on the emotional level: in the past I had been told that I had no emotions, but at the time considered them a distraction from the Path. But this experience made me aware that this emotional coldness was not mine but belonged to my shadow, and at last allowed myself to feel my emotions more deeply.

**The nature of your shadow reveals
what you must change or let go of**

For instance, if your shadow consists of anger or resentment, indicates that you should cultivate a greater equanimity; if it is based on selfishness you should be more generous and do something to help others; if manifests as insecurity indicates the need to increase your self-confidence or change the negative aspects of your self-image, etc. Mère offers these two piece of advice about it:

“If you discover a very black hole, a thick shadow, be sure that somewhere in you there is a great light. It is up to you to know how to use one to realize the other.”

“Each time there is a shadow, small or big, in one form or another, immediately tell yourself:

**“Look! The enemy is there!”
And cast the Light upon it.”**

27. The Paradox of Seeking the Self

Many Teachers and ancient texts affirmed that it is the Self whom we are searching for that seeks itself through us. This may seem to make no sense, and yet through the ages affirmed it: for instance, Ibn Arabi, a Sufi philosopher and poet said that the one who seeks is the one who is sought; Nisargadatta Maharaj that the seeking itself is God; Jean Klein said that the seeker will discover that he is what he seeks which is the source of his inquiry; and the Sufi mystic Abu al-Qasim that

**to seek the Self is as if the ocean was trying
to find itself through each of its waves.**

In the divine Play of Lila (mentioned in a further chapter), the Divine in us appears to search itself in the dreamworld as if had forgotten Itself. We also do not remember who we are and must retrieve it, and to do so we must focus our consciousness on what in us is seeking. According to Wu Hsin: “This ends all seeking and the seeker. The goal of seeking is never attained. Instead, *the seeker dissolves.*”

As the seeker is mostly our inward I and in some the best part of the outer one, its dissolution is like the one of a doll made of salt in an ancient Hindu metaphor who searched the ocean, but when finally found it merged and became one with it. Even some Christian mystics agree, like St. Teresa of Avila who compared our merging with the Divine to a raindrop that by falling into a river mixes with its water and can never again be separated from it. Our seeking ends when we experience this.

**The ultimate paradox is that in a way
we should seek without seeking**

This is because at times seeking can lead us astray in a labyrinth of theories and assumptions covering up the whispers of the subtle voice guiding us. But how will you seek without seeking? The best way is by being in a state of openness and receptivity without any expectations about what you will find. This state has been called the Here and Now, and in it many insights and revelations will come to you spontaneously without the need of intentional seeking. Let your seeking be more like a preparation to be found and follow Rumi's advice:

“He is with you in your search; look for Him in your looking itself, because

He is closer to you than you are to yourself: Why run elsewhere?

Melt like snow, wash yourself of yourself.”

28. The Center and the Circumference

Once I had a very intense vision while contemplating a thangka (mandala) of the Bhavachakra, the Wheel of Life, which is the symbol of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in Buddhist cosmology. In its center there was a serene looking Buddha with dragons, various animals, monks in meditation, etc around him Suddenly my eyesight blurred, I closed my eyes for a moment, and when I opened them again instead of the Buddha there was a radiant point of golden light with a wide circumference of flames revolving around it.

Contemplating this golden light I felt an immense peace, but somehow my gaze was forcefully dragged away from it and I found myself whirled around the circumference of flames. I desperately tried to escape it but was unable to and felt as if in a nightmare from which could not awaken. But just when it became too unbearable I suddenly was out of it and immediately plunged into the golden point of light, and then for a few unforgettable, eternal moments felt utterly one with the Divine.

After this vision ended I realized that the point of golden light represented our Self and the circumference of flames the outer I's endless pursuit of its desires.

It is their energy that whirls us around the circumference, and when one of them is satisfied we think that we are happy because we got it, but the real reason is that when this desire is satisfied its energy no longer carries us around the circumference, and then we come a bit closer to our center where we have always been happy. But, alas, soon another desire spins us around the circumference again. Spinning around it is much easier than resisting our desires and remaining firmly in our center but of course doesn't lead anywhere.

**Dear reader, there is in you a subliminal memory of the time
when you still dwelt consciously in the Divine**

In it you did not need to read books about the Path or listen to Teachers to learn what you need to know, an embrace to feel loved, eat to acquire the energy you need; there was nothing that you might wish which did not already have. Sometimes when your mind is very quiet and silent you can feel it, don't you?

Is this subliminal memory that makes you feel the lack of something that you can never find; it is as if there was a bottomless hole in you that whatever you may acquire in the dreamworld can never be filled. Of course, the only cure for this is to always remain in your center in which you never have any needs. As Sri Aurobindo said,

“The soul is the center, the core of our being, our true Self. It is the luminous fountain of our existence, the wellspring of our higher aspirations, the silent knower of Truth. Its light is the light of the Spirit, its power is the power of Love.

**It is the link between the finite and the Infinite,
the ephemeral and the Eternal.”**

29. Centering

The center of our being is where our Self dwells in a peaceful, serene space never disturbed by anything, and has often been compared to the eye of the cyclone which is always calm and still no matter how violently tumultuous the cyclone around it can be. Ramana Maharshi called our center the Mansion of the Heart and his advice is:

“No longer eat mere hot sand (ephemeral pleasures) in the arid desert of the non-self (the dreamworld) but dwell in the Mansion of the Heart, calm, vast, serene, and there feast on the bliss of the Self.”

Whatever problems, difficulties, or suffering may come to us, we should always center ourselves before dealing with them. Even if we have many things to do, by taking a little time to be centered we can deal with them more quickly and efficiently. In it, we have greater clarity, a deeper awareness, and feel much more intensely all the wonder of everything,

**while outside it we are like a boat with no rudder,
tossed around by the forces of our life.**

According to Sufism, our center is like a heavenly oasis, the meeting place of heaven and earth and the very essence of our soul, but the Spanish mystic saint John of the Cross said that our center is not just the soul but God. The motto of the alchemists is “Ambula ab Intra” (journey from within), from the center of our being. A good way to do so is to follow this injunction from the Zen: “Be wholly fixed on That like an arrow on its target.”

However, after being firmly established in our center we should turn our gaze back to the dreamworld and help to transform it in the divine’s Manifestation. As Sri Aurobindo noted:

“This center is our connection to the Divine, the anchor of our existence. However, life’s true purpose is not solely contained in it;

**It is in the circumference of our actions and experiences
that we can manifest the Divine in the world.**

Once I met a ninety-two year old man who most of his life set up reforestation programs in deserts and wastelands. He liked me because I was planting so many trees in Auroville, and told me that a forest had given him this message for all of us which to me is the very essence of Centering:

“Stand firm, grip hard, (be always grounded)
Always thrust upwards to the sky (the Divine)
Bend to the winds of Heaven (unavoidable difficulties)
And learn tranquility.”

His advice to me was that we should be like a big tree trunk that remains undisturbed even when its branches are shaken by a hurricane, and this inspired me to write this haiku (a poem of four lines) about it:

A rock by a whirlwind’s fury swept:
the rock am I, forever calm and still,
and in my boundless inner silence
I never was the whirlwind.

Since then when something tried to trouble me I often envisioned it as a whirlwind and myself as a rock untroubled by it.

**It is in the immense peace and stillness of your center
that you will become who are meant to be**

To dwell permanently in it, you must gather them back to your center the parts of your consciousness that you have dispersed in the dreamworld and the vagaries of your mind. There are no two ways about it: either you are in your center enjoying all its peace, ecstasy, and love, or outside it, exposed to all sorts of illusions and limitations.

When in your center, at first you may feel very alone because unless you live in a truly spiritual community most of those around you, or even all, will still be outside it. This loneliness must be borne because only in your center you can replace illusions with reality, the sense of separateness with oneness, and the mind's restlessness with peace. These verses from Sri Aurobindo's great epic Savitri perfectly convey the feeling of finding the center of our being and taking our refuge in it:

“As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
Recover the lost habit of happiness...”

30. The Short and the Long Path

A note: the terms Long Path and Short Path were popularized in the 20th century by the British author of spiritual books Paul Brunton, but they are used in various spiritual books. These two versions of the Path are not mutually exclusive but complement each other, but the borderline between them is blurred, and while in the Long Path former we may have some intimations of the latter, or conversely from the Short one we might momentarily fall back in the Long one.

The Short Path consists of a swift and direct realization of the ultimate reality through the awareness of the non-duality of all things and taking an inward leap transcending our ego and the physical and mental realms, entering into a state of pure being.

Ramana Maharshi called the Short one the “direct Path” of Atman Vichara (self-inquiry) as a way to self-realization instead of all the long practices of yogic disciplines (the Long Path). In most cases, we cannot access the Short Path without first having gone through the Long one like we cannot go to the university before completing our primary and secondary schooling, or like before erecting a building a strong foundation must be made for it. Gurdjieff referred to the Short Path as "the Way," and warned about the misconception that it starts at the same level as everyday life, whereas it begins at a much higher one which is thought to be much easier than it is. The way that Mère put it is:

“The general mistake is to believe that one must begin from outside and reach within. It is not like that.

**One must begin within and reach outside
afterward, when one is ready within.”**

The semi-legendary Indian Buddhist monk Bodhidharma meant the Short Path when he affirmed that there is no need to go anywhere, no need to do anything, just close your eyes, look within, and the kingdom of God is ours, and Vivekananda said when it is found we have nothing left to do but fold our arms and let its tide carry us to freedom.

Well, there may be nothing left to do *on a personal level*, but something still needs to be accomplished to fulfill the task that the Divine has allotted us in the Manifestation. To be on the Short Path the Bhagavad Ghita advised:

**“Abandon all dharmas, all principles and laws, all rules
of conduct, and take refuge in the Divine alone.”**

The Long Path is like a preparation for the Short one through various methods and techniques which involves a consistent effort, studying ancient texts, following a set of rules, and other long-established practices aimed at purifying the mind and vital.

One of its hindrances is the widespread belief from the old spirituality that the Path requires renouncing too many things, but there is no harm in enjoying the gifts that life brings to us provided that we do not get attached or dependent on them. The image of the Buddha in a loincloth with ribs sticking out from emaciated flesh is a symbol of asceticism, but he affirmed that dressing in rough and dirty garments, letting one's hair grow matted, abstaining from eating meat or fish, does not lead to liberation from suffering or enlightenment.

There are many seekers in traditional ashrams who have been doing Yoga for a long time without making much progress in it, lost most of their aspirations, and look unhappy or even depressed. They attribute various reasons for it, but the main one is that they are still on the Long Path and believe their guru's teaching like most believers of a religion do, without really experiencing, living it.

Since I learned about the Short Path of course I wanted to be in it, but all the techniques and practices I knew belonged to the Long one. The breakthrough occurred one day when I remembered something that Jean Klein had told me years before but had the time I had not resonated with it:

“One day you will discover that you already are what you seek, which is in itself the source of your seeking.”

I then had an OMG, “Oh My God” exhilarating moment which was my first step on the Short Path – oh well, short if compared to the Long one - and realized that

**to be on it I should no longer identify myself
with “Vijay” but with who is seeking in me.**

Soon after realizing this, I came upon this advice of the Japanese Zen master Taisen Deshimaru who in the last century brought Zen Buddhism to France:

“If you want to reach the true path beyond all doubts place yourself in the same freedom as the sky: eyes open, without winking, at once become absolutely free.”
Being in the same freedom as the sky means dwelling in the vastness within us where our Self resides, and there is a further chapter about it.

**If you're still on the Long Path, don't be discouraged but see it
as a necessary preparation for transitioning to the Short one.**

Then in it you will reach an effortless state in which you are always in perfect alignment with your Self, your life flows naturally without any resistance, and joy and

peace permeate all you do i. Mère offers this advice in which She calls the Short Path the Inner Sun:

“We only have to go deep enough into ourselves to find the inner Sun and let ourselves be bathed in it. Then everything is but a cascade of harmonious, luminous, sun-filled laughter that leaves no room for shadow and pain. This Sun - the Sun of divine laughter –

is the core of everything; it is the truth of everything.

what is needed is to learn to see it, feel it, live it.”

31. Meditation

A note: This chapter is about meditation for those on the Path, but can also be practiced by everyone else just to relieve anxiety, depression, stress, high blood pressure, calm too strong emotions, have a more restful sleep, and acquire some peace of mind. According to several neurologists, those proficient in meditation use brain regions and cognitive processes normally not accessible to all, have a greater emotional stability, and can deal better with worries and anxiety.

The main aim of meditation should be to find the answer to the “Who am I” question by realizing, not just knowing or believing, that we are our Self who is one with the Divine.

There are two main kinds of meditation, with or without an object which corresponds to the Long and the Short Path. In the one with an object, we concentrate on such things as a symbol of the Divine, our Teacher if we have one, a mantra, a point of intense white or golden light, the breath flowing in and out, a flame in our heart, a crystal, etc.

The one without an object, which I recommend, consists of utterly silencing the mind by the rigorous rejection of all thoughts and focusing on who in us perceives them. But as Wu Hsin pointed out:

“Wu Hsin does not doubt that if one meditates long and correctly there will be results of one sort or another,

**but until meditation has eliminated the meditator
its goal has not yet been achieved.”**

I still feel like laughing when I remember that once when I told this to someone he replied: “But this is utterly insane, stark raving mad! Did you actually say that I should meditate *to eliminate myself?*”

Of course, what has to be eliminated or transcended is not us but only the outer I. When we begin to meditate at first it may seem that our mind is flooded by many more thoughts than usual, but actually they have always been there and we only become conscious of them when we started meditating.

The Prophet Mohammed said that meditating for one hour is better than a year of worship; this is an exaggeration but emphasizes its importance. Some seekers expect to gain some extraordinary experiences through it, but this shows that they are still dominated by their ego and vital. It has been said that when the Buddha was asked what he had gained from his meditation he replied that he had not gained anything

**but had lost all anger, anxiety, insecurity
and the fear of old age and death.**

When I was a teenager did not know anything about meditation but sometimes entered a state just like it while listening to a symphony of Beethoven or was intensely engaged in my creative writing; it was as if I was no longer there and only the music or the writing flowing through me were left. Now I feel about meditation like this passage that someone attributed to Yogananda:

“Meditation is like giving a hug to ourselves, getting in touch with the awesome depths in us, and while meditating we feel a deep sense of intimacy with the Divine, a love that is inexplicable.

**Consider what you want most apart from
the accomplishment of the Path,**

for instance an ideal partner, a better house or job, a great holiday, winning the national lottery, etc. How would you feel if you got it? Happy? Overjoyed? Thrilled? Fulfilled? Well, by practicing meditation regularly you can feel more so than by having what you wished for.

At first in your meditation, you might find it difficult to stop the flow of thoughts, but eventually, you will enjoy being free of them so much that silencing your mind will become much easier, and then you will be able to do everything, even the most common chores, in a meditative state. Mère's advice is:

“Concentrate in the heart. Go into it as far, as deeply as possible. Withdraw back all the spread-out threads of your dispersed consciousness, gather them back, and dive into the silence of your inward I. When you sit in meditation you must be as candid and simple as a child, not interfering with your external mind,

**expecting nothing, insisting on nothing. Once this condition is there,
all the rest depends upon the aspiration deep within you.”**

32. The Yoga

A note: Yoga is not about sitting cross-legged, levitating, acquiring supernatural powers, etc. There are many self-improvement centers giving Yoga courses that merely consist of some easy asanas, generalities about meditation, and finding peace of mind. Many are interested in Yoga because they are unhappy, unfulfilled, and hope that it will improve their lives, but even this can be a first step on their inner journey of self-discovery and transformation.

The term Yoga derives from the Sanskrit yuj, which means to join. What should be joined is the surface “I” with our Self, and we should have the same urgency to merge with it as we would seek water if we were dying of thirst.

Yoga is a science, 99% practice and 1% theory, and can be done by those belonging to any religion or system of belief, and even better by the ones without them. Patanjali, the yogi and guru who wrote the famous Yoga Sutras, aphorisms about Yoga, gave what is probably its best definition with just three Sanskrit words,

**“Yoga Cittavritti Nirodha” which means
the cessation of the mind’s fluctuations.**

The first step in Yoga is realizing that we do not know who we truly are and our conditionings determine most or almost all of what we think, feel, and do. To become free of them we must overcome the resistance of our ego and outer I which might send us such thoughts as, for instance: “I am not ready”...“What if Yoga and even the Divine are just a phantasy?”...“My ego is too powerful”, etc. Instead of listening to them,

**we should trust that we are guided and will be provided
with everything that we need to progress on it.**

To those who find Yoga difficult, Nisargadatta Maharaj offers this reassurance:

“Nobody ever fails in Yoga. It is all a matter of the rate of progress. It is slow in the beginning and rapid in the end, and when one is fully matured, self-realization is explosive. It takes place spontaneously or at the slightest hint.”

That nobody fails in Yoga seems unlikely: countless seekers practice it but few achieve the Great Awakening. The answer is in the words “when one is fully matured” because not many are.

As Ramakrishna said, there are two main ways of Yoga. One is the way of the baby monkey who must hold onto his mother or will fall, which means relying mainly on our efforts in the Long Path. The other is the one of the baby cat who is carried around by its mother by its neck like the Divine carries us in the Short one. The main kinds of Yoga are:

Ashtanga Yoga and Hatha Yoga are similar and mainly consist of making our physical body a perfect tool through asanas and pranayama (control of the breath) to put it at the service of the Divine.

Bhakti Yoga is based on a deep devotion, worship, and love for the Divine.

Integral Yoga as taught by Sri Aurobindo and Mère combines Jnana, Bhakti, and Karma Yoga to achieve a holistic and evolutionary state of being which they called the Divine Life.

Jnana Yoga is based on practicing “Atma Vichara” (self-inquiry) to find our Self and merge with it through meditation, introspection, and the study of spiritual texts.

Karma Yoga is the path of service in which apart from taking care of our basic needs we no longer do anything for our benefit but only for a Teacher, a guru, or directly for the Divine.

Kriya Yoga combines introspection, pranayama, meditation, and the repetition of mantras aimed at purifying the mind and body.

Raja Yoga focuses on mind control, meditation, calming the mind, and attaining inner peace to achieve Self-realization.

Tantra Yoga aims to integrate the male and female energies symbolized by Shiva and Shakti to transcend the ordinary consciousness through rituals, visualizations, breathing exercises, and sometimes by harnessing the sexual energy,

There are also several less known kinds of Yoga so that everyone can find the one most suited for oneself, but this quote from the Bhagavad Ghita applies to them all:

He who can withdraw his senses from their objects as the tortoise draws its limbs within its shell, is firmly fixed in perfect yoga."

When I first began practicing Integral Yoga in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram I found it so difficult that before meeting Mère even considered leaving it to join the one of Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai and do Jinana Yoga there. When I mentioned this to Beehar he told me:

“It is the hostile forces that are trying to make you leave our ashram. In Ramana’s ashram or any other you will still be confronted by unresolved issues from your past, childhood traumas and painful memories deeply ingrained in your mind. You have not left them behind as you optimistically assume, just dumped them in your subconscious, and to confront them do not need to go anywhere.

Dear reader, Mère asked: “Do you want the Yoga for the sake of the Divine? Is the Divine the supreme fact of your life, so much that is impossible for you to do without it?”

If your answer is a sincere yes you will surely reach the Great Awakening, but whether it will be in this life or a next one depends on the degree of your aspiration, sincerity, determination, and to which extent you surrender to the Divine.

Whatever kind of Yoga you practice, you will have to transcend your ego and outer I and be prepared to confront their resistance, because they will oppose it to the utmost. Mère’s warning is:

“When you come to the Yoga, you must be ready to have all your mental buildings and vital scaffoldings shattered to pieces. Are you ready for this? You must be prepared to be suspended in the air with nothing to support you except your faith. You will have to forget your past self and its clings altogether,

pluck it out of your consciousness and be born anew, free from every kind of bondage.”

33. Teachers and gurus

A note: the main difference between spiritual Teachers and gurus is that gurus have an ashram and take disciples while Teachers don't, but some exceptions as there. For instance, Sri Aurobindo and Mère had an ashram and took disciples, but I refer to them as Teachers because they taught so many seekers all over the world through their writings. In the word guru, Gu means darkness and Ru dispelling, therefore means one who drives away the darkness, but so do all real Teachers.

True Teachers and gurus are like lakes of pure water: how much of it we can take depends on whether we go to them with a small cup or a big bucket, but we should not rely only upon them because ultimately we are responsible for our inner journey and overreliance can hinder our progress on the Path. Most seekers wish to find a guru who helps them on the Path but often neglect to ask themselves if they are ready to be taught. For instance, when a disciple of Ramana Maharshi asked him to be given his high state of consciousness he replied:

“I can give, but can you take?”

Although the knowledge that Teachers and gurus can give us is very valuable, what is more important is that they help us to step out of our comfort zone, confront and give up our limiting beliefs, preconceived notions, and deeply ingrained habits and ways of living. But sometimes to free us from them they must do to us like a gemstone cutter facets a piece of rough mineral into a gemstone: cut off all its parts with some flaws, which can be a very painful process. True Teachers and gurus are like signposts on our way and becoming too attached hinders our progress. To emphasize this, Wu

Hsin made the example of a Taoist Teacher who one day looked at his disciples in a hall worshipping him and told them:

“I wonder why you all here are worshipping the teapot instead of drinking the tea! Do not look at me, look at the sun” (the Divine). As a last example, the philosopher Socrates said that he was not a teacher, but a midwife helping to give birth to the divine light, give birth to the divine child in us.

The true Teachers of gurus are not easy to find but can be recognized by the peace of mind and serenity that we feel when we are near them. By the power of their presence, a radical shift occurs within us which is not a violent upheaval, but a gentle unfolding in which we can begin to be free from the chains of our conditionings.

About the false gurus, some famous ones had a myriad of disciples but were pretenders who wore very good disguises making them appear even better than the real ones. I still remember a young man who came to our healing center for help because of his many problems and during his consultation revealed a disgusting sewer of negativity in him. As he kept complaining about his boring office job I asked him what he would like to do instead and he replied:

“I have read a lot of books on Yoga and attended many conferences about it, so I am thinking of becoming a Yoga teacher.”

No comment, as the diplomats say.

However, the Divine also uses false gurus to help us on the Path because they rephrase the words of the real ones and texts like the Vedas and the Upanishads, so much of what they say is actually true. I met many seekers who started on the Path through a fake guru but eventually left him for a real one.

About which one is the best for us, for those who prefer meditation and introspection a Jinani (nondual) like Ramana Maharshi or Nisargadatta Maharaj is right, while those more prone to devotion and worship a Bhakti Yoga Guru is best; those inclined to do selfless service should find a Karma Yoga one like Vivekananda.

The first Teacher I met was Krishnamurti. He did not want to be labeled a Teacher and above all not as a Guru, but their main function is to help us to find who we really are and reach our self-realization, and this is what he did all his life. He traveled all over the world giving talks about the meaning of life, the limitations of thoughts and the mind, the nature of psychological freedom, etc. He spoke sitting on a platform about a meter tall, dressed in Western clothes and on a chair in the West and wearing white cotton clothes and sitting cross-legged on a platform when in India. I can still vividly see him as if he was in front of me right now saying:

“This platform is not a sign of authority; is only there so that you can see the speaker and the speaker can see you...”

In his Talks never used the term I. He knew several languages fluently and when in one of his Talks he was asked a question by someone with a poor command of English told them to ask their questions in their native language, which then translated into English for the audience. One of the things that he said that touched me most was that the truth is a pathless land and no Guru, no credo or ideology can lead us to it.

Although he often said more or less the same things I attended many of his Talks because he spoke with such intensity as if he had just realized them.

The second one that I met was Jean Klein, a Frenchman who after living many years in India returned to Europe to teach what he had learned and realized there. He

received me in a bare room with only a table with a notebook and a pen on it, three chairs, bare white walls, and an open window with a glorious view of the Luxemburg gardens. The energy in this room was so intense that for a while I could not speak and felt very close to “this one beside me walking whom I do not see”.

Besides what he told me about the non-dualistic Advaita Vedanta which affirms the oneness of our Self with Bhraman (the Divine), he taught me a lot by just being firmly established in his Self and the very mindful way in which he lived. I still have a very vivid memory of him walking with me on the boulevard of St. Michel in Paris, looking at everything with the hint of a smile, equally observing some clouds rapidly moving in the sky as to a crushed can in the gutter. He radiated joy and happiness just by being alive and being himself on this sunny spring morning.

A question that I was sometimes asked was why some Teachers and gurus contradict what others taught. For instance, according to Krishnamurti we must find the ultimate truth in ourselves and not follow any guru, but Bodhidharma affirmed that only a seeker in a million becomes enlightened without one. Vivekananda emphasized the importance of work while other gurus advised to just meditate or worship. The reason for such apparent contradictions is that the Divine talks to us through various standpoints because each expounds a particular version of the Path so that we can find the one best for us.

Before I was on the Path, Krishnamurti was the only Teacher that I would have listened to but eventually found that Sri Aurobindo and Mère were the ones meant for me. As I could not see Her often because had thousands of ashramites to take care of plus many visitors all the time, I wished to meet some other gurus (I was not yet using the term Teachers) and when I first met Pandiji asked him where I could find some true ones. My request made him laugh, then he took a pinch of snuff as he did every

few minutes, which did not correspond to the image that I had of a guru at all, and then told me:

“Gurus? Where to find them? There are crores (millions) of them everywhere; it is rather genuine, truly sincere seekers that are rare, I have not met many in my life. With the right attitude even a rickshaw wallah (driver), a beggar, a tea shack attendant, may be like a guru for you!”

**If you do not have a living Teacher or guru
your life itself can be like one for you,**

give you the “learning lessons” that you need to progress on the Path through all sorts of circumstances, encounters, and experiences that come to you when are ready for them. But ultimately as Nisargadatta Maharaj affirmed, it is your inner guru (also called Sadguru) who will walk with you to the goal, for he IS the goal.

**He is the ultimate guru; the outer ones
are just milestones showing the way.**

34. Mère

The affectionate term Mère (Mother) used by many of her devotees refers to an aspect of the Divine, the Shakti, a dynamic universal feminine energy that created the dreamworld and fosters our evolution. According to Sri Aurobindo, “The one whom we adore as the Mother is the divine conscious energy that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow Her movement in the universe is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence.

**The Mother is the consciousness and force of the
Supreme and far above all that She creates.”**

Since Sri Aurobindo left the body in 1950 the ashram had been managed by a French woman called Mother or Mère whose framed photo, often beside the one of Sri Aurobindo, was in every ashram place. By the time I joined it, She only came out of her room for a few minutes four times a year to appear on a balcony to be seen by a crowd of ashramites and visitors in the street below and at the windows and the terrace of the opposite building.

As the ashram had over three thousand members who would have liked to see Her very often normally at first newcomers like me could only have but a few minutes with Her once a year on our birthday. When mine came up an interview for me was arranged, but I was unprepared for such an overwhelming experience of which I can only express some vague hints.

A body in an embroidered white silk sari was there, a luminous smile and the most intense eyes that I had ever seen. My first impression was that She was like a wide

open window to such a boundless vastness making me feel that I had lived my life as if in a matchbox.

She could see all that I ever did, including the worst, without any judgment like the sun casts its rays upon all things, dirty slums, wondrous gardens, battlefields, and quiet meadows alike.

I put my head on Her feet and She gave me a red rose. She was looking at me with such a tender smile, and I felt an ocean of Her love, wave after wave of it engulfing me, and had an overwhelming feeling that translated into words that would be

**Now in the embrace of Your everlasting
love forever safe I will be.**

But at the same time, I felt so unworthy of Her love, my eyes filled with tears, and I inwardly cried out to Her:

“Mère, you can see all the selfishness still in me, how I made suffer even some of those who loved me; forgive me for defiling your room by coming here, for who You are I knew not...”

She kept smiling at me with infinite love, the world faded away, and for a moment short by the watch seemed eternal and is still there in my depths. But suddenly I could not see Her anymore; Her attendant Champlakal was telling me something but it made no sense to me. The next day he explained that when my allotted time with Her was over he told me that I must leave, but I remained unaware of him even when he shook me, so he and the ashramite who had arranged my interview carried me out of Her room.

I then understood why She is called Mère, Mother:

**My biological mother gave me the body I wear,
but She is literally the mother of my being.**

In His epic Savitri Sri Aurobindo spoke of Her thus:

“Thou hast come down into a struggling world
To aid a blind and suffering mortal race,
To open to Light the eyes that could not see,
To bring down bliss into the heart of grief,
To make thy life a bridge twixt earth and heaven...”

35. Visions

Visions can reveal to us something too difficult or even impossible to express with mere words, an opening to the immense, mostly unexplored realm in our depths from where our intuition and insights arise. By going beyond the mind's logic and reason, they can reveal previously unknown aspects of ourselves and bridge the gap between the conscious and subconscious.

Not all are genuine because our mind can indulge in all sorts of fantasies and imageries, but the true ones can be recognized from their profound emotional impact and the way they resonate with our highest values and aspirations, while those made up by our mind are more fleeting and have no depth. It is possible to have visions through psychedelic drugs like LSD, which Mère called the spirituality of the poor, but they are but a hint of the authentic ones that originate from our inner being, and they

**bring about a transformative shift in our consciousness
through a profound sense of mystery and wonder.**

There is also a state of heightened awareness which has a similar nature to visions, and through it blade of grass is no less wonderful than a rose. The recent American/English poet T.S. Eliot conveyed how it feels thus:

“If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.”

About visions of the Divine, when Ramana Maharshi was asked if we can see God through them he replied that the vision of God is always there but is veiled by mental

activities, but when the mind is still His vision is clear, and by abiding in the Self there is no need for any particular vision.”

According to Sufism, visions come from our Baaten (Higher Self), but as he does not speak Farsi or any other human language conveys them through the images that we are familiar with. Imagine that an entity whose energy is boundless love but has no image of its own manifests to us through a vision. Our mind will search for its image and as isn't there our subconscious will present to us one corresponding to its energy, therefore a Buddhist is likely to see the Buddha, a Christian the Christ, a Hindu Krishna, etc.

There is a strange sentence in the Gospel of Matthew:

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

This single eye has been called the “Third Eye” and corresponds to the Ajna chakra (a center of energy in our subtle body) located between the eyebrows. Is mostly through it that we have visions, and those whose Ajna chakra is an open and active are like a one-eyed man amongst the blind. The advice of Rumi is:

**“Close your eyes so the heart may become your eye,
and with that vision look upon another world.”**

This other world is already there in the Divine's cosmic Design, and in the course of our evolution the dreamworld is gradually being transformed into it.

Some mistrust visions because they associate them with the occult and paranormal, but as the recent Lebanese-American mystic and poet Khalil Gibran warned if we see

only what the light reveals and hear only what is announced by the sound, then in reality we do not see and do not hear.

Wishing that our visions be high and dazzling is only natural, but at times some are meant to shake us up from our comfort zone and can be upsetting or even frightening. For example, once I had one of them which I wrote in my diary and this is its abridged version:

“This morning in my meditation a kaleidoscope of images flickered very fast rapidly before my eyes like fragments of a feverish dream: a futuristic metropolis like in a science fiction movie, an impossibly crowded supermarket where the aisles seemed to be closing all around me, a frenzied traffic jam with a deafening chaos of horns, claustrophobically small office cubicles where thin, anorexic women typed on keyboards, their fingers a blur, their eyes a blank.

Then all streets and highways together formed the deeply wrinkled forehead of Maya, the Great Illusion; all doors, gates, and windows gathered in her hungry-looking mouth; light bulbs, neon tubes, the headlights of cars, fireworks, the tiny glow of matches etc, made up her terrifying eyes staring right into mine.

But just when I feared going mad there was a flash like a lighting, and suddenly where she had been there was now an ethereal bridge of vibrant energies that led to the heavenly new world awaiting us.

**True visions bring you into a dimension of wonders,
an amazing kaleidoscope of energies,**

a realm of hidden forces in constant transformation, mysterious subtle entities, the hidden co-players of your life, and then you will see everything in a very different way.

To understand them correctly you should not have any beliefs or ideologies and not assign to them a meaning based on wishful thinking. You may find some of them difficult to interpret because they emerge from deep layers of the subconscious mind and may use unfamiliar symbols, therefore instead of trying to grasp them with the intellect rely more on your intuition and insights. Rumi's advice is:

“Fix your eyes on God and about what's invisible speak not, so that another look in your eyes may He cast. In the physical eyes' vision no invisible or secret thing is left: when towards God's Light the eye is turned what could remain hidden under it?

**Close your eyes so the heart may become your eye,
and with that vision look upon another world.”**

36. What Are We Waiting For?

Several Teachers and texts along the ages affirmed that achieving our Self-realization does not need long and arduous practices, and potentially can be attained right here and now.

Indeed this seems unlikely, and yet through the Short Path is possible by becoming aware that we are our Self which is already realized. About this, I was sometimes asked why then so few attain it. The reason is that to be fully aware that we are one with it is not an easy feat because requires transcending the ego and outer I, and not many can. After reading this injunction of Rumi:

“A voice out of this world calls on our souls to not wait anymore, get ready to return to our original home...don’t wait any longer...dive in the ocean (of the Self) and let it be you!”

I asked myself this question:

What am I waiting for to dive into it?

The same evening I had this vision: I was walking on a footpath lined with orchids and flowered vines on both sides leading to a marvelous golden temple. From its gate came a very bright light and a very beautiful young woman was sitting beside it making a garland of jasmines invited me to go in with a gesture. She was wearing an immaculate white sari which made me aware that my clothes were not very clean; how could I enter such a splendid temple dressed like this? She understood why I hesitated to enter it and told me with a playfully scolding voice:

“Never mind your clothes, is about time you came home at last! You have wandered away from it far too long already!”

I still hesitated, but she pointed to the gate and asked:

“What are you waiting for to go in?”

I then entered it but the light inside was so overwhelming that I blanked out and the vision ended.

This temple symbolizes the Source which is our true home, and the woman at its gate our Psychic. Blanking out as I entered its gate meant that to go in I must first purify myself of the flaws of the outer I represented by my unclean clothes. Of course, would be easier to enter this temple without the outer I but until it has been transcended we are too intertwined with it.

**Dear reader, I assume that you already had some enchanting
contacts with your Psychic and/or the Divine**

while, for instance, gazing contemplating with a silent mind a flower, the smile of a child, a sunset, etc. The reasons that you could not yet remain in such a blissful state permanently have been mentioned in previous chapters about the obstacles on the Path, but you do not have to wait for your Great Awakening until you have overcome them all because as Sri Aurobindo who called it Self-realization said:

"Self-realization is not a thing to be attained by any yogic practice or any set form of knowledge. It is a state of consciousness that can come at any time, by any path, through any door. It may come suddenly, like a lightning flash, illuminating the whole being in a moment."

If you could be offered a life-changing vision of the Divine, the love of someone you are in love with, the best medicine for a crucial illness, money that you badly need, etc, you would not hesitate to accept them, so if it is possible to achieve our Great Awakening right now, why would you hesitate to accept it? Consider this question of Wu Hsin:

“The very next second holds the possibility that you disengage from your enchantment with the story of your life and enter into the realm of complete peace. Wu Hsin wants to know,

what are you waiting for?”

BOOK THREE

1. The Divine

A note: In a previous chapter about the Divine has been mentioned that even the greatest Teachers could not quite reveal what That is, only offer some clues about It from their visions, insights, and spiritual experiences. However, when one day Alexis, an old friend of mine, brought about a dozen members from his Yoga association in Lyon to Auroville and asked me to give them a talk in French about the Divine I was inwardly told to do so. He made a video of it this is a shortened version of it. I began by quoting these words of Mère:

“You must go very deep in yourself and make a most important discovery: it is that *you do not exist*. There I only one thing that exists, and is it the Divine who is the only reality and apart from Him there is nothing at all. You think that there is the Divine and then there is yourself, but *there is only Him*.

**There isn't the Divine and then the world, the universe,
karma, samsara, and what not, there is only Him!”**

But after saying this, my mind became blank, and I could not say more. Soon, I could talk again, but it was someone or something else speaking through my voice.

“You do not even know who you truly are, so how will you know the Divine with your mind? Just silence it as much as possible and feel its Presence within you, in the light through which you see, in your upward strivings, and in the unconditional love that

you may feel. Although the Divine is unfathomable and unimaginable, these assertions from the ancient Vedas and Upanishads offer a hint of That:

The Divine is love, light, joy, peace, the ultimate truth, the only reality, eternal, infinite, unborn, all-pervading, formless but dwelling in all forms in the world. It is the creator of all which exists, both the knower and the known, the Seer and the seen, the Dreamer and Its cosmic dream.”

Then this voice paused a moment to emphasize its next words:

“According to Sri Aurobindo, the Divine is the higher Self in us, the secret Being in the core of all existence, the Light and the Guide, the All-Beautiful and All-Blissful, more marvelous than all wonders, an eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden, a smiling and luminous immensity. His advice is: ”Imagine the endlessness of Time, realize the boundlessness of Space; and then remember that when these worlds were not He was, the same as now, and when these are not, He shall be, still the same.”

This voice was again silent a while before adding:

“As Mère said, only the Divine exists, which seems to imply that the world and everything in it, including yourselves do not. Indeed, the surface “I” with which you are so identified is but a dream no more real than those you have at night. However, your inner Self is not a dream and truly exists, but how many of you have had contact with it, or experienced it? If you made a list of everything to which you put most of your time, energy, and consciousness, would the Divine be on the top or the bottom of it?

It is your not being aware of being one with your Self and the Divine which brings about almost all your troubles, unhappiness, and suffering, which are like a nightmare from which you must awaken from.

After a pause, this voice became more intense, full of such passionate emotion that I deeply resonated with

“Did you ever wonder how the Divine came into being? He always was. It has always existed because if it had been created by another entity, it could only have been by a greater one, but then who or what could have created it? This only brings us to an endless regression leading nowhere.

Without the Divine, there would have been nothing at all: no human beings, no children, no animals. No mountains, rivers, oceans, or forests. No music, poetry, paintings, or dance. No emotions or feelings, thoughts or memories, no happiness or joy. You would never have known what falling in love means. There would have been no Path, no spiritual experiences or visions, nor the ecstasy of feeling Its Presence in you and all around you.

You would not have existed.”

Then this voice spoke no more, but I could talk speak again and read to them this passage from a book by Mère:

“The relation that one has with Him is unique. But if you deeply feel that there is no division between what you call God and what you call creation; if you say: *they are exactly the same thing* – if you could feel that when you suffer, He suffers; when you ignore He ignores. Outside the Divine, all is falsehood and illusion, mournful obscurity. In the Divine is life, light, and joy; in the Divine, there is the sovereign peace. You are always part of Him and

**He experiences the world through your eyes; He is
all you see, all that which is around you.”**

2. The Vastness

A note: The Vastness has similar connotations as Samadhi, but the term Vastness is more appropriate as there are several versions of Samadhi, the main ones being Nirvikalpa and Savikalpa, while the Vastness is one. In Buddhism, it is often associated with Nirvana, a state of perfect peace and liberation from suffering and the cycle of birth and death, but the Vastness is much more than this. The Chinese Teacher Lao Tzu is reputed to be the founder of Taoism called the Vastness Tao and said that it is nameless, formless, and unchanging, the source of all things and infinite possibilities.

The Vastness is like an antechamber to the Divine, the background from which everything originates; we were in it before being born and to it return when our body dies. The span of our ephemeral lives is hardly a second compared to its eternity.

The Vastness reminds us how limited we are and that there is so much that we might never understand. In our first glimpses of it, it is often perceived merely as a void, but not looking deeper into it would be like taking some steps toward the Himalayas and then turning back because we have not yet reached them.

In the Vastness, there is such a blissful peace, ecstasy, and love that we may be tempted to never return to the dreamworld, but we must do so to help the divine Manifestation in it. Through the ages, many yogis did not resist it and let their bodies wither and die, but this is the old, obsolete spirituality. Nisargadatta Maharaj spoke of the Vastness thus:

“There is a Vastness beyond the farthest reaches of the mind.

That Vastness is my home, is myself and also love.”

This Vastness is also in you.

During one of my meditations, I found myself in the Vastness for the first time and saw that it is not made of space but of an unearthly dimension that our mind cannot envision. While in it, I no longer had any desires, regrets, fears, or expectations, and since then, I have never lost the certainty that whatever concerns I may still have apart from those about the Path or helping others are mostly irrelevant.

While immersed in it, I feel that there is not me as Vijay but my Self experiencing it through me, and it is not my imagination because nothing that the mind may make up can have the power of such a feeling.

**In the Vastness, you will no longer be identified with the outer I,
this fragment of very limited and conditioned consciousness**

and feel part of something infinitely greater in which you are aware of being one with all that exists and feel a deep peace and the immense, unconditional love permeating the fabric of the universe. Follow this advice attributed to the recent Tibetan Buddhist yogi and poet Shabkar:

“You must remain in the Vastness, alert and lucid, letting one's gaze encompass the infinity of the sky

**as though seated on the summit of
a mountain to all horizons open.”**

3. A Way to the Vastness

Once, someone told me about a visualization from the book “A Course in Miracles,” which gave me the idea for a guided meditation to give a hint of the Vastness to those ready for it. It has four parts marked by the sound of a small gong and an essential question at the end. Those who do it are given a few minutes to reflect upon each part until the gong announces the next one. If you like, you can read it on your mobile and do this meditation by listening to it.

Sound of the gong.

For most of your life, you were focused on the external world, but now direct your consciousness in the opposite direction, into your depths.

Beyond the world, the sun, and the stars, beyond all that you can remember and what you forget, everything that you ever imagined, lived, suffered, enjoyed

there is an arc of very intense white light.

It is like the light of a thousand suns but doesn't hurt your eyes; it has wondrous rainbows at its edges and is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. In it, there is all the highest music and poetry, every kind of art, the glory of flowers, the joyous smiles of children, the splendor of sunrises and sunsets, mountains, forests, oceans...It is as if through it the Divine was telling you: “See how beautiful I am? Come back to Me...”

You are irresistibly drawn to this arc of light, and as you enter, it expands all around you and becomes

a wide circle of this wonderful light
full of infinite peace.

You are in its center, and it rotates clockwise calmly, majestically, as if it had all eternity to complete one turn. Nothing can ever disturb its peace, and you become aware that under the turbulence of your mind and the turmoils of your emotions, deep within, this peace was always there and forever will be. Feel it permeating every cell of your body, the neurons of your brain, dissolving all sorrows, painful memories, worries, any fears that you might have, and healing your whole being.

Sound of the gong.

You would like to remain in this circle of peace forever but must continue your journey. Now, this circle expands all around you and becomes

an immense sphere of this wondrous light
that besides peace is also full of ecstasy.

You are in its center and feel that all the enjoyments that you ever had compared to this ecstasy are shallow and trivial.

Ecstasy is even more healing than peace, and you feel that all the atom of your body is connected to the ones of everyone else and the whole universe by filaments of bliss. You then realize that even when you suffered the most, this ecstasy was always there in your depths.

Sound of the gong.

Now, this sphere of light expands to your right and your left, in front of you and behind you, above and below you

in all directions into a boundless, infinite Vastness.

In it, all the peace and ecstasy are still there, but it is also full of the absolute, unconditional love of the Divine. You feel like crying with joy that there is not only this world full of so much suffering under the shadow of death but also this marvelous divine love, which is even more healing than peace and ecstasy.

Sound of the gong.

Previously, you were in the arc of light, and at the center of the circle and of the sphere of light, *but where are you now in this Vastness?*

In it, there is no reference point, no up and down, no right or left, in a realm where directions no longer have any meaning. Then you find yourself beyond the boundaries of space and time in the stillness of eternity, floating in an ocean of primordial, eternal silence where the concept of orientation makes no sense.

Sound of the gong.

The reason that you could not find where you are in the Vastness is that

you are not in it, you ARE this Vastness.

Contemplate the ineffable wonder that you are this Vastness for a while time with a mind as silent as possible.

Whenever you might pass through a hardship or must make a decision, immerse yourself in the Vastness and deal with it from its standpoint.

Sometimes after doing this guided meditation, someone asks me:

“But where is now all the peace, ecstasy, and love that I felt while in it?”

Even when we cannot feel them, they are still there in the Vastness, waiting for us to come back to it when we are ready for them. As the contemporary German conferencier and author of spiritual books Eckhart Tolle said,

“Beyond the mind, there is a limitless space where the boundaries of self dissolve, and we become one with the universe.

**It is in this vastness that we discover the profound oneness
of all things transcending the limitations of thought."**

4. Consciousness

Consciousness is a highly intricate, multifaceted concept tied to our ability to perceive ourselves and the dream world through our senses, emotions, and experiences. Besides, our Self and the Divine is the greatest mystery of all, and trying to comprehend it with our mind would be like attempting to understand how the computer works by only looking at the monitor.

According to several neuroscientists, consciousness comes from the complex interactions of billions of neurons in the brain. By sending electrical and chemical signals to each other, they create extremely complex networks that process information and shape how we experience and understand almost everything. Although this has not yet been scientifically proved

**consciousness is there even in the atoms
and their subatomic particles.**

There are many degrees of consciousness, and the human one is but a very thin layer between two vaster ones, the subconscious and the superconscious, a heightened, transcendental awareness associated with intuition, inspiration, and spiritual insight whose heights we will reach in the course of our evolution. Until then, we are never fully conscious or unconscious but somewhere in between.

Wikipedia defines consciousness as the sentience of our existence, but as sentience means being aware of emotions and sensations, it is synonymous with it. According to the Vedas, consciousness is an integral, universal principle rather than merely a function of the individual mind. Wu Hsin gave one of its best definitions: Mind is the screen on which the stream of phenomena appears, and consciousness is the light illuminating it, and Nisargadatta Maharaj affirmed something similar:

“The light of consciousness passes through the film of memory and throws pictures

on the brain, but because of its disordered state our perception is distorted and colored by feelings of like and dislike.”

He also said that consciousness is the greatest painter and the world is a picture, but we separate the Painter from the picture and look for Him outside it. *The Painter is in the picture.*”

Just like while looking at something, we are not aware of the light enabling us to see it, so we perceive our thoughts, memories, sensations, etc, but not the consciousness on which they are based. Consciousness has mostly been researched as everything else, but it is based on a different, more fundamental dimension altogether; it is not simply a byproduct of neural activity but a primary, non-material reality that exists independently of physical structures. Most think that we “have” consciousness, but instead is that it has us by influencing our thoughts, emotions, and how we live in ways of which we usually are not aware.

According to existentialist philosophers like Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Heidegger, consciousness is the subjective perception of our existence. I looked up existence in a dictionary (computers and search programs were still in the future) and read that it defined it as the inherent property of everything real. I then looked up reality and read that it is the property of everything that exists! What a joke! But eventually realized that:

**To understand consciousness I should first of all
find out who or what in me is conscious.**

I used to value consciousness above all and felt that I was only truly alive to the extent that I was conscious, and when I read about this dream of the Swiss psychiatrist Jung, I felt like he did:

“I was walking slowly and painfully against a strong wind in the midst of a dense fog with my hands cupped around a tiny light that threatened to go out at any time. All

depended on my keeping this tiny light alive, and after awakening knew that this light was my consciousness.”

But then one day Beehar read to me this passage from Nisargadatta Maharaj which radically changed how I regarded it:

“Consciousness is extremely powerful: it ties you up, chains you to its games, throws you here and there as if you were a ball. Consciousness is the first illusion, the greatest force: it catches and keeps you in its trap.”

This made me aware that I had dissipated so many fragments of my own into so many things, and gathering them back was a daunting task that took many years.

**Never let some of your consciousness become identified
with anything apart from your Self and the Divine**

because by focusing it on your mind, self-image, and external circumstances, you will remain dominated by their specific laws and imprisoned in them. As Mère said, "Consciousness is a vast ocean, from the most material consciousness to the highest spiritual consciousness. It is this ocean that we have to cross. We begin with the little, limited consciousness of the physical being, the vital being, the mental being, and we have to rise higher and higher, wider and wider,

**until we reach the vast, universal Consciousness
which is everywhere and in all."**

5. Awareness

Consciousness and awareness are often used as if they were synonymous but they refer to subtly different aspects of experience. Awareness is the space in which consciousness arises and has often been compared to the sky in which the clouds come and go, but remain the same, and also correlated to the ocean that is undisturbed by the waves that rise and fall in it. Awareness is timeless, eternal, unchanging, based on the oneness of all things, beyond the mind, while consciousness keeps changing, is fragmented and differentiates, tied to the mind and body, and thus subject to time.

In a state of full awareness, every step is a pilgrimage, each breath a prayer, and we feel one with everyone and the Divine. In this famous saying by Jung “Who looks outside dreams and who looks inside awakens”

**who looks outside is the consciousness
and who looks inside is the awareness.**

As Nisargadatta Maharaj said, “Consciousness does not shine by itself but by a light from beyond it. This light is awareness, which can never become an object of observation *because it is the subject itself who observes all.*”

In such a state there is no longer any separation between the observer and what is observed, no judgments, only a profound stillness in which the forces of our lives begin to lose their power over us. Without awareness, no matter how many books about the Path and Yoga we may study or the Teachers or gurus we listen to will be of limited use.

When I still considered myself as an intellectual my consciousness was interested in so many things, but my awareness was low. What helped me to increase it was this advice from Mère:

“There is one extremely simple – perhaps too simple for most! The solution to all our problems: to stop misperceiving oneself as the limited awareness of a separate ego, and identify oneself with awareness itself.”

Then through it I began to observe the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that came to me without getting entangled in them.

May I suggest that you ask yourself this fundamental question of Wu Hsin:

**“Your only asset is the presence of awareness. With it,
you are everything, *without it, what are you?*”**

Please stop a moment to read this book to focus on this question and listen to Ramana Maharshi's advice:

“You are awareness, therefore you don’t need to attain or cultivate it: all you have to do is give up being aware of other things, that is, the non-Self.

**If one gives up being aware of them, then pure
awareness alone remains, and that is the Self.”**

6. Being Aware in the Dreamworld

To interact with the dreamworld in a state of full awareness we must no longer interpret our experiences on the basis of what happened in the past. To do so we should focus on the present instant which has been called the Here and Now and be aware that as Wu Hsin said:

“The background assumption of every moment is that there is something somewhere better than this, here, now. Through this,

**one becomes deeply habituated to the unconscious process
of constantly dislocating from this, here, now.”**

Recently I went for a check-up at the cardiological hospital where my body had a heart operation a few years ago. Before leaving I centered myself in the Vastness, and when the taxi came felt the Presence in the driver although he was totally immersed in his dream of being a taxi driver.

On the way, I stopped at the Auroville town hall to withdraw some money from its financial service. A few people greeted me, asked how I was, or said that had not seen me since long - I don't go out much.

Then I met a woman with whom I had shared a very intense spiritual experience, and we had a long hug while looking deeply into our eyes. There is much love between us, but no need to express it more than this, and all I know about her is her name, nationality, and that she works in the town hall.

On the way to the hospital, I passed through Iranchavadi, a village where I lived for about a year at the beginning of Auroville. At that time was extremely poor and until Auroville made a well for them the only water they had for drinking and cooking

came from a very dirty pond with buffaloes in it with their noses and horns out of the water; children swam and women washed clothes in it. By now they have water from the tap, a few little shops have sprung up, even an ATM and the houses and huts have a toilet. Some memories of when I lived there vividly came to my mind but I only briefly recollected them.

On the highway to Puducherry, there was a lot of traffic, lorries, buses, cars, and many mopeds and motorcycles. Looking at their riders I intensely felt my oneness with them notwithstanding how different our lives are.

The taxi turned a corner where usually a middle-aged woman sits on the ground with a basket of guavas in front of her and sometimes I bought some, but today she wasn't there. I felt much empathy and compassion for her, smiled, and told her some friendly words but she never responded and remained unreachable in the closed world of her poverty.

The cardiologic hospital has a large glass door at the entrance, a wide, well-ventilated hall with a reception desk on one side, and several rows of chairs where patients wait for their turn. They were quiet, mostly silent, their expressions a bit dull, but I could feel their worry about what would happen to their children and families if they died. One of them passed through the hall in a wheelchair pushed by a nurse and I deeply felt the divine Presence in both.

If Mère had been here She might have helped them with the power of Her immense love, but I could only center in the Vastness and wish them well. Then I felt such a profound sense of sacredness that a mantra that I often use echoed in my mind in a crescendo:

**“Om Namo Bhagavate, Om Namo Bhagavate,
Om Namo Bhagavate, Om Namo Bhagavate...”**

Then although outwardly nothing had changed in the hall to me became like a temple and I saw everyone there immersed in an aura of sacredness. Someone helped me to a chair because was very giddy and almost fell. In a way that I cannot explain I felt that the fortitude with which many of them endured their life-threatening heart illness was like a prayer to alleviate some of the dreamworld's suffering.

I had always felt much more the wonder and mystery of all things than their sacredness because of my innate aversion to religious terms, but after this experience, I felt the sacredness much more often.

To be fully aware in the dreamworld, observe everything without judgment and embrace each moment as if were the last.

See every moment as if for the first time, cultivate a profound appreciation for it free from the interference of the mind, deeply savor the sights and sounds around you, and live each day as a most precious gift. Consider also this warning from Wu Hsin:

“Man is the one who is insane: he trades the experience of life, here and now, for time and attention spent regretting the past, hoping for a brighter future that will make right what is now deemed not right. The fragrance of the apple blossom, the laughter of a child,

**the blueness of the sky, all sacrificed on the altar
of mental preoccupations. What a waste!”**

7. The Sacredness

In a state of full awareness, even the most ordinary things are revealed as sacred for they also are an integral part of the divine's Manifestation. Because of the increasing acceleration of human evolution, the sacredness will soon be sensed by always more of those who are not in a deep inner slumber.

In the Bible, Exodus, "God" told Moses to take off his sandals because the place in which he was standing is holy ground, but so is the one on which we stand as well.

Religions consider sacred their temples, churches, mosques, and their rituals, but such things are but the kindergarten of true spirituality. As ST. John of the Cross affirmed,

"All has been consecrated: the forest's creatures know it, and so does the earth, the seas, and the clouds as every heart full of love.

**How strange that priests of this knowledge rob us, and then
the power claim to make holy what already always was."**

Indeed the sacred doesn't need a belief, a ritual, or a ceremony to house it because it is everywhere, and now is the time for everyone to know that everything is sacred.

By feeling it in everything, we become aware that we are connected with the web of creation like threads woven into it. As Sri Aurobindo said:

"The sacredness of life lies in the consecration of every moment, every act, every thought, and feeling to the Divine presence within and without us. Then life becomes a pilgrimage, and every step taken is a step towards the sacred goal of self-realization and union with the Divine."

In Hinduism, even the most common things are considered sacred and during Diwali, the festival of Lights, a main festivity, candles or oil lamps are set in every room until no darkness is left anywhere, and one is put also in the toilet: as everything is the Divine, how could it not be sacred as well? Considering this the question might arise: “But what about such things as prisons and concentration camps? How could they be sacred as well?”

Sri Aurobindo was one year in prison because he was part of the Free India movement against English colonialism, and He found the Divine there. At the end of WW2 Satprem, a disciple of Mère very close to Her, was in a German concentration camp and had his first experience of the Divine in it.

Once in Benares a Brahmin got mad at me because I jumped in the Ganges with my feet first. He spoke perfect Oxford English while angrily haranguing me: “Do not defile the Ganges’ holiness with your gross ignorance....”

After calming down he told me that the custom is to pour a handful cupful of the Ganges’ holy water on one’s head before bathing in it as a sign of respect for such a revered river.

Nowadays I would just have nodded, smiled, and said nothing, but at that time had no patience with religious attitudes and replied:

“As Ramakrishna said, only when the waters of the holy Ganges and those of a putrid sewer will seem to you equally pure, only then you will be able to say that you have realized God.”

Then I told him that all rivers are sacred and so is all of mother nature, but you arrogant and dogmatic Brahmins only recognize the Ganges’ sacredness and not the one of everything else. Then he completely lost it and shouted:

“NO! NO! You are so ignorant of such things, like all Westerners! The Ganges, the Yamuna, and the Saraswathi are the only sacred rivers; all the others are merely H₂O, just water!”

This is light years from sacredness, and those who love the sacred and despise the ordinary are deluding themselves.

Feeling the sacredness not only in those you love or special people but in everyone will make all your encounters holy.

Follow the advice of Thich Nhat Hanh:

"Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet. Look at the sky as if you are looking at your lover. Listen to the birds as if they are singing just for you."

As he also said,

"In each moment, there is an opportunity to touch the sacred. Whether you are sipping tea, walking in mindfulness, or simply breathing,

experience the profound beauty of the present moment. The sacred is not something separate from life; it is life itself."

8. The Dreamworld as a Mirror

The dreamworld is like an immense mosaic made of countless mirrors reflecting both the best and the worst in us. The reflections from the outer I often mirror separateness, disharmony, conflicts, suffering, etc, while the ones from our inward I reveal the divine Presence in everything. As the Persian poet and mystic Jami said,

“From the world’s atoms a multitude of mirrors He created, and into them the image of His face cast. A mirror He holds to His face beholding His beauty.

**The knower and the known He is, the seer and the seen;
no eye but His own upon the universe ever looked.”**

If we smile at the dreamworld will smile back; if we frown will frown in return; if we radiate love, caring, joy, and peace will respond in kind, but when we have any negative thoughts or emotions will also reflect them to us. Many ignore this mirror or deny what they see in it, but by doing so lose contact with reality. These words attributed to Vivekananda point out a very important aspect of this cosmic mirror:

“You cannot see your face except in a mirror, and so the Self cannot see its own nature until it is reflected, and this whole universe is the Self trying to realize Itself.”

As the Self is already realized trying to realize itself means that is in the process of manifesting itself in the dreamworld.

About how the dreamworld works as a mirror, suppose that on a nice Sunday afternoon, you are considering whether to go for a walk in a park, visit a friend, stay home and see a movie, listen to some music, read a book, etc. If you are not sure what you prefer to do, the dreamworld will show it to you: *it is what you end up doing*.

Likewise, if you want to ascertain the extent of our commitment to the Path you may overestimate it out of wishful thinking, but through the mirror of the dreamworld you can evaluate how much time, consciousness, and energy you put into it and how much into everything else.

**Never forget that the mirror of the dreamworld does not reflect
only what you do but also everything you think and feel.**

Never allow greed, resentment, hatred, fear, jealousy, etc in you because besides hurting you to some extent they increase the dreamworld's sorry condition, and instead of pursuing only what benefits you, contribute something that betters it. As Nisargadatta Maharaj warned,

“Everybody sees the world through the idea that he has of himself. As you think yourself to be, so you think the world to be. If you imagine yourself separate from the world,

**the world will appear as separate from you
and you will experience desire and fear.”**

9. The Lattice

One day I read a passage from the quantum physics scientist David Bohm affirming that what we perceive as reality is an illusion and everything so-called “material” is the projection of a deeper or higher order of existence.

I resonated deeply with this because since I was a child felt that the world was not real, and the same evening while meditating had my first experience of the Lattice.

It is a vast multidimensional, layered network of vertical and horizontal filaments of vibrant energy intersecting through an alien geometry which reminded me of Escher’s surreal lithographs.

Where they intersect there are clusters of focal points, from just a few to many close to each other, and now and in some of them, others appear as if out of nothing. Many glow from just a little to very brightly. The color of most is within the spectrum of human sight but some have nameless hues never seen on Earth.

I saw that many clusters in the first layer of the Lattice record all that I ever did, even very banal things and trivial thoughts, and the memory of every emotion and feeling that I ever felt. They are not recorded in the brain as most assume but in the Lattice, and it is through it that some of us may remember events from a past life. Then I was delighted to discover some clusters in a deeper level of the Lattice which recorded my visions and spiritual experiences, especially the blissful ones when I felt the divine Presence.

When I became more familiar with the Lattice I also discovered a part of it that projects everything in the dreamworld as a hologram, and as some avant-garde

quantum physics scientists affirmed everything that appears to be material might be akin to a hologram and called it the "holographic principle."

This is *science*, not just some esoteric mumbo-jumbo.

Although this has not been scientifically proven, everything so-called material that we perceive with our physical senses is an immense, splendidly detailed hologram originating from the Lattice. Those made by our technology just consist of three-dimensional images that can only be seen, but the ones from the Lattice can be interacted with.

Sometimes when I spoke about the Lattice I was asked where it is, but like the Internet, it does not have a physical location in a specific place. Sometimes I was also asked why if the Lattice really exists nobody ever discovered it before, but many did, only gave it other names. In some Western esoteric traditions and alchemy, it has been called Ether or Aether and is reputed to be the fifth element beside Earth, Water, Air, and Fire.

But the term most used for it is the Akasha which is used in Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, and Theosophy. It has been compared to a ledger recording everything that happened since the dawn of the universe. While doing some research for this chapter I came upon this passage about it by an unknown:

“The Akasha is an endless web of threads through the universe. The horizontal ones are in space, and the vertical ones are in time. Where they cross an individual emerges, and each is like a crystal bead. The Absolute Being’s great Light illuminates and penetrates them all, and they reflect not just the light from all other crystals in the web but also every reflection of every reflection through the universe.”

In his book *The Holographic Universe* by Michael Talbot, a recent American author of scientific books, he mentioned something similar to the ancient Indra's Net metaphor in Mahayana Buddhism:

"Imagine a vast, cosmic net stretching infinitely in all directions. At each junction of the net is a jewel, and each jewel reflects all other jewels in the web. Any change in a jewel reflects in all the others, epitomizing the interconnectedness of all things. Mère also called the Lattice Akasha and said that:

“Is like a very big library with many small compartments, so you find the one corresponding to the information you wish to have. You press a button and it opens. And inside it, you find a scroll as it were, a mental formation which unrolls before you like a parchment, and you read it.”

But I have not yet been able to do that.

**Dear reader, both the house where you live and even your body
are projected from the Lattice in the dreamworld as a hologram.**

Realizing this can be quite a shock, but if you read this book this far you already know that you are not your body but the dweller in it, so which difference could make if instead of a hologram was made of matter as almost everyone believes? As the English Theosophist writer of esoteric books, Alice Bailey said:

“In the Akasha, the past, present, and future are one. It is the cosmic memory bank of the universe, where every thought, every event, and every soul's journey is inscribed. When we learn to access the Akasha,

**we tap into the wellspring of universal knowledge,
and our spiritual evolution is guided by it.”**

10. The Guidance

If we are receptive to it the Guidance helps us to progress on the Path through signs, intimations, visions, and life-changing encounters. Potentially it is always available to all, but in most is covered up by the thoughts crowding the mind and all sorts of mundane concerns and distractions.

The events and circumstances of our lives may seem to be brought about by chance because are caused by countless extremely complex factors of which usually we are not aware, but cause and effect are part of an inseparable phenomenon.

**When the Divine wills something instantly
happens together with its apparent cause.**

Imagine that you are writing a novel and want the protagonist, let's call him Andrea, to find a beautiful spiritual girlfriend. So you create one, Jessie, with her appearance, character, personality, etc, and then make up how Andrea met her. Easy: Andrea arrives late at a bus stand and misses his bus, so sits in a café waiting for the next. By "chance" Jessie sits near to him, they strike up a conversation and the plot goes merrily on. Now, almost everyone would say that Andrea met Jessie because he missed the bus, right? Not at all: *Andrea missed the bus because he met Jessie*. She was there in your book long before you made him miss the bus.

Similarly, it is the Divine who is the author of the narrative of our life and arranges all its events.

As another example of Guidance, suppose someone asks Andrea what brought him to the Path and says that it was through Zen. How? He was impressed by a video about it. How did he get this video? Mark forwarded it to him in WhatsApp. How did he meet Mark? They exercised in the same gym. Why did Mark go to it? To become

much stronger. Why did he wish that? To overcome his lack of self-confidence. Why did he lack it? Because in his childhood was bullied by stronger boys. Why was he bullied? because...If we could follow the chain of apparent causality that brought Andrea to watch that Zen video we would find that it stretches back to the beginning of the universe. Sri Aurobindo spoke of the Guidance thus:

“He comes unseen into our darker parts and, curtained by the darkness, does his work, a subtle and all-knowing guest and guide, till they too feel the need and will to change.”

Dear reader, what brought you to read this book?

Acknowledging that all the events in your life that led you to the Path were set up by divine Guidance will bolster your confidence and give you the trust that you will accomplish your Great Awakening. Then you will look back at your life and realize how had not been your own efforts that brought you to it but the divine Guidance.

In this passage Sri Aurobindo does not use the term Guidance but is about how to follow it:

“Remember never to fear, never hesitate. Remember that it is I who am doing this, not you or any other. Therefore whatever clouds may come, whatever dangers and sufferings, whatever difficulties, whatever impossibilities,

**there is nothing impossible, nothing
difficult. *It is I who am doing this.*”**

11. The Guidance – Examples

The first link of the Guidance that brought me to Mère was that as I did not know where I would be in India before hitchhiking to it I asked my friends to send me their letters to the address of a friend of Dhamarama in Karachi. The shortest way to India from Afghanistan is down from the Kyber pass and then through Peshawar, Islamabad, and Lahore at the border of India, but if I had taken I would have ended up in North India, far from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. After getting my letters I could have hitchhiked to Lahore but the Guidance gave me the impulse to take a very cheap ship to Mumbai.

There I asked those I met where I could find a guru, was told about several, and went to the nearest one of Dilip Kumar Roy in the city of Pune. He was a Bhakti Yoga guru and a singer of devotional songs famous all over India. His ashram was painted with delicate pink and blue tinges and its being very close to a huge, hideous slum made it look very surreal. Dilip Kumar Roy did not correspond at all to the image that I had of a guru from the books about them that I had read: he looked very ordinary, was a bit fat, and received me in an office with a big bottle of Coca-Cola on the desk. But in the evening when he did his Satsang (spiritual gatherings often with music and singing), was transformed, cried, and cried imploring Krishna to come to him and never leave him. He sang in Hindi, but one of his disciples translated one of his songs: it was about Krishna as a child begging in the street for love, asking everyone to give him the tender offering of their love, a love that nourishes both the giver and the receiver. After a few days just when I was going to tell him that I had decided to leave he told me:

“You are an intellectual being who has no love for Krishna so you do not belong here. Go to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry (since 2006 renamed Puducherry), that is the place for you.

The second most important Guidance in my life was that when I was fifty years old and felt the need for a very spiritual companion. The problem was that the one meant for me, Prema Devi was in Turin in Italy and had no wish to come to India, and I was sure that I would never but never go back to Europe. The Guidance brought us together through a long sequence of many events of which I mention only the main ones.

The first link in it was Hu Tsu, a Chinese aristocrat who had escaped China when the communists took it over. He went to Benares and there someone told him about the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and his ashram in Puducherry which he eventually joined. When I met him he introduced me to the oriental board game of Go which is much more complex than chess. After I joined Auroville I taught it to Gerhart, a wealthy fellow Aurovilian, and some years later he paid my fees for a Go championship in which he was also competing that took place on a ship going from Moscow to St Petersburg on the Moskva river.

His wife bought the tickets but by mistake – *like Andrea missing the bus* - made also mine from Moscow to Munich like the one for her husband, so he asked me to stay a week or two with him in his house and play some more Go games with him. Munich is a few hours by train to Turin, and the Guidance made me wish to go there to visit my cousin Gianni, Dharmarama, and a few friends, and I did.

I did not have Dharmarama’s address, only of his Hatha Yoga center which was closed because of the August holidays. A few days later the Guidance gave me the impulse to go there again and I met him while collecting his mail and he invited me for lunch. I had brought some silver jewelry from our handicraft unit that supported

the reforestation in Auroville and I asked him where I could sell it. He didn't know, but his daughter Savitri who "by chance" had come to visit him from another town like she did once a year began mentioning a nearby jewelry shop, but then remembered that would soon close so the owner would not buy anything. It could only have been the Guidance that gave me the irrational impulse to visit it anyway. Indeed her owner, Marie Claude, did not buy any of my jewelry but helped me to sell some of it to other shops. She was very interested in Yoga, so I told her about Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and gave some talks about it and the Path to a group of her spiritual friends, mostly women who saw me as a bit of a guru although I told them that I was not playing this role.

When I was back in Auroville Marie Claude and I kept in contact, and a year later I returned to Turin for about a month to give more talks and sell jewelry.

The day after arriving I had just finished my breakfast in Marie Claude's kitchen when Prema Devi, a very beautiful Italian woman, came in and gave me a big bouquet of splendid yellow roses. I put them in a flower pot, looked at her, opened my arms and she came into them.

It was the most magical, awesome life-changing moment in my life apart from when I met Mère, and even now that more than thirty years have passed by since then when I remember it am overwhelmed with wonder. Marie Claude had told her about me and she felt that I was the one that she had always sought, just like I feel about her.

Eventually, she joined me in Auroville where we started a healing center in our community and could help some of those who came to it. This would never have happened if I had not met Hu Tzu or missed even one of the many links of the chain through which we were brought together. Without her, my life would have been very different and

**this book that you have been reading
would never have been written.**

12. The Presence

Unlike the “Gods” of religions, the Divine does not dwell in some imaginary heaven but in everything, from a grain of sand to the whole cosmos. Nothing can compare to the bliss of feeling the divine Presence in our hearts and all around us, and then whatever difficulties or hardships we may have lost their importance or most of it.

The Presence is always intimately close to us, but not many are aware of it because usually our consciousness is focused on so many other things. The Qur’an says: “To Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-encompassing and knowing.”

In one of the versions of the Gospel of Thomas, Christ said: "Where there are two they are not without God, and when there is one alone I am with him. Split a piece of wood, and I am there;

**raise a stone, and there you will find me;
cleave the wood, and there I am."**

The Presence is an often ignored companion of our life, “this one beside me walking whom I do not see”, and by being receptive to it we can feel our oneness with it and the Divine. In Hinduism, is symbolized by Krishna, the god of love, and has been depicted as always near us playing his flute, waiting for us to turn away from our entrancement with the dreamworld and embrace him. Mère speaking from the Divine’s viewpoint offers this reassurance:

“I am in every thought, every aspiration that you turn towards Me because if you were not always in my consciousness you could not think of Me. So you can be certain of my Presence.

In Sufism, there is the practice of Mushahadah, which consists of contemplating the Presence of Allah and how it manifests in our life. Once there was a debate in the Kabuli's Zawiya about which is the best way to find Allah. Some said that it was deeply loving Him, studying the holy Qur'an and obeying its commandments, the sacred twirling dance, practicing selflessness through acts of charity, etc. The Kabuli was the last to speak and said that indeed all these ways help, but

**the best way to find Allah is to feel His Presence
in everything we ever think, feel, and do.**

I first learned about the Presence from a French pranic healer who told me about a spiritual experience that utterly changed his whole life. He was an illiterate shepherd born in the south of France in a very poor family, knew nothing about spirituality but intuitively felt that a God must be there, but not like the one depicted by the Catholic religion of his family.

He told me that one day in the café of his village he overheard the schoolteacher telling the priest that God dwells in everything, *even in a stone*. These words kept echoing in his mind, and a few days later while grazing his family's sheep he stared at a big rock half-covered with moss and wondered: "God in a mere stone? How could this possibly be?"

He was silent for a while, overwhelmed by an intense emotion with which I deeply resonated, and then told me:

"As I asked myself this question something like a mighty wind lifted me up and threw me right against this rock. Ah, Vijay, how intensely I felt His presence in it! Not even the softest mattress in the world could be so comfortable! If only I could have remained in it forever! But God had other plans for me..."

Another day he read to me this passage from Mère which expressed how he felt about God being in everything:

"It is as though the Divine were all the time with you; you walk and He walks with

you, you sleep and He sleeps with you, you eat and He eats with you, you think and He thinks with you, you love and He is the love you have.”

A turning point in my inner journey came when I read these words of Sri Aurobindo:

“It is impossible to solicit the Presence in vain.”

At first, my skeptical mind reminded me that many times I had asked inwardly to feel the Presence but apparently nothing seemed to happen. Eventually, I realized that it had come to me after all, but I hadn’t been aware of it because I expected that would come through a vision or an intense spiritual experience, but instead made me feel more centered and at peace with myself, which at the time was just what I needed. Whenever I lost contact with the Presence even the most beautiful things lost their vibrant hues and a bleak discouragement took me over. To re-establish this contact I reminded myself of these words of Mère speaking from the Divine’s standpoint:

“You are not so far from me as you think. You have only to calm the agitation in your mind and vital a little, remain a bit quiet and concentrated, and at once will find my presence within you and around you.” She also said that:

“When I say: “I am with you always”

I mean it literally.”

My first very deep, life-changing experience of the Presence was while I was digging a hole to plant a tree sapling in it. A wonderful peacock came very close, curiously looking at what I was doing. I felt the Presence in it, went into a bit of a trance and we just looked at each other for a while. To me, it was no longer just a peacock but an amazing disguise worn by the Divine, and I was taken over by such an intense emotion that almost cried. Then an old chicken passed by; its feathers were dirty and ragged, its long neck scrawny, and near the peacock looked even uglier, but I felt the Presence in it as well.

My second memorable experience of it was when I stopped at a red traffic light in front of a big billboard on which a beautiful young woman in a colorful sari delightedly smiled while holding a mobile in her hand. Suddenly I no longer saw her as a woman advertising a product but as the Divine looking at me from the billboard right into the innermost depths of my being.

Once while remembering someone to whom I had been very close I saw the Presence as a light in her heart and then also in the one of many others. It was more radiant in the Teachers I met, small children, and some very spiritual persons, but was there in everyone else. Then I saw this light in my heart as well and realized that had always been and forever will be in me. Now I feel about the Presence as Rumi did:

“Watching my hand; He is moving it, hearing my voice He is speaking; walking from room to room none else is here but Him.”

**Feel the divine Presence not only in the wonders of nature
and some special people but also in all and everything.**

The easiest way to feel it is through mental silence, unconditional love, and being grateful to the Divine. If you like, you can use this prayer of Mère (representing the Divine) that sustained me in my most difficult times:

“Mother, be with me, now and always. Envelope me with your Presence. Raise and purify me with your touch. Inhabit me with your living image. Transform all dullness and darkness into bright and perfect faith,

**all restlessness and agitation into an inviolable peace,
liberate and change me, perfect your child.”**

13. Contacting the Divine

As many spiritual Teachers along the ages affirmed, potentially contacting the Divine is always possible because nothing is closer to us than That. The Qur'an asserts that Allah is nearer to us than our jugular vein, and the advice of the Spanish mystic nun St. Teresa of Avila is:

"We need no wings to go in search of Him, we have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him in us."

A main obstacle to having this contact is the materialistic belief that all that truly matters is how much money we have, our health, a nice house, an ideal woman or man to live with us, good food, etc. Another major obstacle is the widespread belief that "God" is very far from us,

**but often is this belief that prevents us from
having deep contact with the Divine.**

Many cannot have this contact because consciously or unconsciously fear that will prevent them from satisfying their desires and enjoying their pleasures. For instance, once when I told someone that the Divine is looking at us all the time he replied: "*But then we can't live anymore!*"

In the New Testament, the Corinthians, there is this famous sentence:

"Once I saw everything dimly, as in a dark mirror, but now I see God face to face".

But to see the Divine face to face we must first have a true face, and our outer I, personality, and self-image are but masks. The Exodus in the Bible asserted that God told Moses:

"You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live"

But this doesn't mean that we can only see the Divine after we die because by this "man," the Exodus did not mean our inner being but the outer I, which if could see

the Divine would be dissolved.

Every contact with the Divine is always unique and exclusive, not like the one It has with anyone else, but can only become permanent after we have surrendered to That and then we can be certain that we will reach the Great Awakening in this lifetime or another. But as the Indian mystic poet Dadu Dayal warned:

“If the meeting isn’t accomplished while alive if the Lord is not found when we are still living, then one simply drowns.”

Where we drown is in the dream of our life.

A way of contacting the Divine is by endeavoring to see everything through Its eyes. As Rumi said, when we look for God He is in the look of our eyes, in the thought of looking, nearer to us than our self, and Ibn Arabi speaking from the divine’s viewpoint affirmed: “You cannot perceive Me through yourself, through your eyes you cannot see Me. It is through my own that you can see Me.” Meister Eckhart said the same thing that:

**“These eyes with which I was vainly trying to see God
are the same eyes through which God sees me.”**

But how can we see through the Divine’s eyes? This question kept haunting my mind, but I could not ask Mère about it because when I saw Her my mind became utterly silent. So I asked Beehar instead and he told me that what I should do is no longer look at anything from my eyes, which means from all my mind’s biases, judgments, assumptions, and expectations, then only Its seeing through me would be left.

After trying to follow his advice unsuccessfully for some time I met him near the main ashram building and asked him what else I could do. He did not immediately reply and resumed walking, so I followed him waiting for an answer. He stopped at the entrance of a nearby Ganesh temple in front of a leper sitting there with a begging

bowl at his feet. After we dropped a few coins in it Beehar put his hand on the back of my head, which sent a powerful wave of energy through my whole body, pointed to the leper, and told me:

“What prevents you from seeing him through the Supreme’s eyes is the assumption in your mind that a leper is merely a wretch to be pitied.”

Just then the leper raised his head, attempted to smile with what was left of his lips, and stared right into my eyes. There was something like a flicker of amusement in his look and I felt that through it the Divine was telling me something like: “What, did you see Me as just a leper?”

And then I saw him from the Divine’s eyes.

He was transfigured into a surreal, androgynous figure of an unearthly, almost unbearable beauty. This lasted only a short but unforgettable moment, and then I saw him again as just a leper with loathsome oozing sores.

Even now that many years have passed since that magical moment I can still see him vividly in my mind and makes me wonder what the dreamworld will look like when in the course of our evolution everyone will be able to see it through the Divine’s eyes.

Many times while contemplating a flowered branch of a bougainvillea in our garden only that one moved although there was no wind. It was as if through it the Divine was telling me something like:

“Hello, Vijay! I am here! Can you see me?”

My first major contact with the Divine was when I met Mère. The next happened in Mosambe, Tajikistan, and I recorded it in a notebook which I still have:

“This afternoon while going down a street I saw a five or six-year-old girl holding hands with her parents who were walking in front of me. Suddenly I felt the Divine in her with such intensity that I trembled, and in the same instant

she let go of her parent's hands, turned, and waved to me with her little hand, *but she had begun to wave it before seeing me.*

I did not record the next main contact but remember it vividly and was similar to the previous one: I was walking on a deserted country road and turning a corner saw a young woman carrying a big clay pot on her head walking with her back to me. Just as I felt the Divine in her she turned, smiled, and made the Namaste greeting with joint hands to her forehead.

Now, this might not look like much to you, but it happened near Khambhat in Gujarat, a very traditional region of India where a young woman would never greet a male stranger, let alone smile at him even amid her family, and certainly not when alone on a deserted country road.

As a last example, one day I had been talking with Beehar in his small, very austere, spotlessly clean room, and from the open window came the intense scent of frangipani flowers from a tree in the courtyard. I was sitting on the only chair and he was on his bed which had a color photo of Mère above it. Suddenly I saw this photo as a window through which the Divine was looking right into my eyes through Hers, and since then this sometimes happens when I contemplate a large framed photo of Her in front of my meditation armchair.

Ideally, we should never lose our contact with the Divine and cherish, treasure it as a most precious jewel.

If you cannot feel this contact all the time, endeavor to discover and overcome what prevents you from having it. Once this contact is firmly established you will

know exactly, without the slightest doubt what you should do, how to respond to every challenge, and always find the best possible solution to whatever difficulties you may have. Aspire to feel this contact like Mère did:

“And how many times, how many times the feeling that...There is no form - there is a form and there is none, it just can't be expressed. You feel a look, too, and there are no eyes - there is no look but there is a look; a look and a smile, and... there's no mouth, no face! And yet there is a smile and a look and...there is a form...and yet there is no form;

**and the impression of a look, and there are no eyes,
but He laughs, you laugh, you are happy.”**

14. Talking with the Divine

Many assume that the Divine only speaks to us through visions, spiritual experiences, and through the words of Teachers or gurus, but can also talk to us in many other ways: through a subtle voice in our depths, dreams, synchronicities, something that we are told or overheard at the right psychological moment, etc.

Every dialogue that we have with the Divine brings us a step closer to our inner being, and whatever we wish to share with That will always lovingly listen to us. If we have tried to talk with the Divine but couldn't, probably is because of a conscious or unconscious belief that we cannot do so. Many think that only very spiritual people can have this contact, but potentially everyone who can silence one's mind and remain without thoughts long enough should be able to, and as Nisargadatta Maharaj said,

**When we talk to the Divine, we are talking to ourselves,
for there is no separation between the two.”**

Feel the wonder of feeling this.

One day I met Eileen Caddy, a co-founder of Findhorn, an eco/spiritual community in Scotland who said that she talked with God and wrote a book entitled “God Spoke To Me.” At the time I thought this unlikely because I did not feel in her the Presence that I felt in the Teachers that I met, and she wore very garish, big plastic jewelry.

But now I know that is possible that she talked to the Divine because simply being very receptive allows us to connect with its Presence within ourselves. She gave me this advice:

“Talking to God is just like speaking with a friend, so you should not be too concerned about which words to use to express yourself because He will understand even your unspoken ones. If every day you spend some quiet time alone talking with God peace and love will fill your heart.”

She also read to me this passage from the Christian mystic monk Brother Lawrence:

“There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than a continual conversation with God and we should establish in ourselves God’s presence by continually conversing with Him. It is a shameful thing to quit His conversation to think of trifles and fooleries.”

My reaction to reading this was typical of how skeptical my mind was at the time:

“Yeah, right, God must get bored in its too peaceful heaven and has nothing better to do than chat with me!” But eventually felt the power of his words and now sometimes ask the Divine in which way I could best help someone or how to express something in this book in a more clear.

In a period when I lived too much like a hermit, spending most of my time in meditation and seldom going out, a friendly neighbor knocked at my door and called me, but I could not immediately emerge from my meditation to answer her. As she left I heard her sarcastically mumbling to herself:

“Ah, of course, he is in Nirvana as usual and doesn’t even remember that there is a whole world out here!” Then I felt that the Divine had spoken to me through her and endeavored to be less of a hermit.

Once when I was going through a very difficult time the Divine used Citra, a village woman who cooked my meals and cleaned the house to tell me something.

She was extremely poor and had walked a long distance to my house until I bought her a bicycle. I could only afford to give her work for half a day, and her husband was an unemployed alcoholic who spent most of her wages on alcohol and if she protested beat her.

One day while sweeping the ground floor veranda she disturbed my meditation by loudly chanting a song in the Tamil language, but as I was going down to tell her to sing it less loudly I remembered that when Sri Aurobindo was troubled by something He told the Divine:

“So, my old Playfellow, thou hast taken again to bullying me, and I sit down to possess the pleasure of the pain, the joy of the grief, the good fortune of the mischance; then He sees He is found out, and takes His ghosts and bugbears away from me.”

So I imitated Him and inwardly told the Divine:

“So, my dear Playfellow, on top of all the other ways with which recently You have been testing me now you won’t even let me meditate in peace?”

And then suddenly found her song very beautiful.

She was sweeping with her back to me and I hoped that she would not turn around and see me because then she would stop singing. Then I felt that it was the Divine that through my subtle voice told me:

“Vijay, if this woman in such extremely difficult circumstances can still smile and gaily sing, how can you be so concerned about your hardships which are so much less serious than hers?”

**In your intimate conversations with the Divine feel free
to share your innermost feelings, doubts, or fears.**

The Divine knows also what you are unable to express and by talking to That will become your confidant, the ever-present companion in the journey of your life, “this one beside me walking whom I do not see” and then feel that you are never alone. According to this passage attributed to Rumi,

“Every moment, in every event of your life, the Beloved is whispering to you exactly what you need to hear and know. Who can ever explain this miracle? It simply is. Listen and you will discover it every passing moment.

**Listen, and your life will become a conversation in thought
and act between you and Him, directly, now and always.”**

15. The Divine's Play – Lila

Lila also spelled Leela, is a minor but still important aspect of the Manifestation of the Divine in the dreamworld. It is a manifold, extremely complex, at times very dramatic Play in which joy and sadness, laughter and tears, serenity and turbulence, comedies and tragedies alternate in our lives. In it, the Divine is at the same time its scriptwriter, the dreamworld as its stage,

**and all its actors, each one of us, who willingly
or unwillingly play our roles in it.**

Many Teachers compared the Lila to a dance: the Buddha said watching the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of a dance; Kabir that God dances in rapture and waves of form arise from His dance; Rumi that we rarely hear the inward music but are all dancing to it all the same, and Einstein that humans, vegetables, or cosmic dust, all dance to a mysterious tune intoned from far away by an invisible player.

In this Lila, the Divine performs all kinds of characters through us: the believer and the atheist, the guru and his disciples, Cain and Abel, Christ and Judas, the revolutionary and the tyrant, the victim and his killer, the Puritan, and the libertine, etc. Through them, the Divine creates something like an immense, multi-layered, intricate mosaic of a marvelous variety. Even the craziest things some of us may do are a part of it because having never been done before, or not quite in the same way, they contribute to completing this mosaic and in philosophy, every theory, even the most absurd has been affirmed. It is as if (everything that we say about the Divine should always have an “as if” before it) in its Lila the Divine is exploring all the

different ways to experience the dreamworld. Mère gave us this hint about an important aspect of the Lila:

“In the game of hide and seek, one hides and the other seeks.”

But who is hiding and who seeking?

According to Lalla, a great Kashmiri mystic poetess, it is the Divine who hides from us:

“Playfully from me absconded You: all day I looked and then discovered that I was You, and the celebration of Him began.”

Indeed it may seem that it is the Divine who conceals Itself behind the veil of Maya, but why would That hide from us who are like its children? No, it is us who abscond behind the masks of our self-image and outer I.

In this quote attributed to the anonymous Christian text The Cloud of Unknowing, its author speaking as if from the Divine offers this invitation:

“In the palm of my hand all stars I hold, galaxies, nebulae, universes, all dimensions physical and astral I hold;

**My playground are they and my playmates are you:
come let us play, become joy with Me.”**

When I first heard about the Lila I was outraged and found it monstrous: how could fascism and nazism, wars, murders, billions living in extreme poverty etc, be a play for the amusement of a so-called “God”? What made me change my outlook about it was these words of the recent Indian Guru Anandamayi Ma:

“Who is it that loves and who that suffers? He alone stages a play with Himself; who exists save Him? What a comedy God's Lila is! What a lunatic asylum! *He is sporting with Himself!*”

Now even writing this book is for me a way to play the divine Lila.

**See the divine Lila as a wondrous mystery play, a fantastic
adventure that the Divine orchestrates also through you.**

You are an integral part of it whether you like it or not, are aware of it or not, but by playing it consciously and willingly you might become a co-creator of your life with the Divine. Experience the Lila like the Ashtavarka Ghita says:

“How wonderful it is that in the infinite ocean of myself, the waves of living beings arise, collide, play, and disappear according to their nature.”

Regard the Lila as an opportunity to progress in the Path in the awareness that the Divine has given you a special role in it: enact it the best you can, and regard its divine

Play as Mère did:

“How well He plays! With everything, with the smallest thing. You have things to put on your table, do not believe you have to think and arrange, no, you are going to play! You put this thing here and this there and then this thing like that...what a pretty game, and so amusing. So,

**it is understood that we will try to know
how to play with the Lord.”**

16. The Manifestation

The Manifestation is the process through which the Divine guided the course of our evolution from the mineral, vegetal, and animal levels up to the present human one. There are much higher levels of it in which the dreamworld will be divinized, matter transmuted into spirit, suffering into ecstasy, ignorance into awareness, hate into unconditional love, and all conflicts into peace.

Indeed considering the present condition of the dreamworld this seems unlikely, but through the Manifestation the Divine is in the gradual process of transmuting it into a marvelous new world which is already there in its vision. Through the ages, many seers had some glimpses of it and called it the Kingdom of Heaven, the Promised Land, the Pure Land, the Land of Kak, Khadar, Shangri-La, Shambala, Ultima Thule, etc. But even this perfect and wondrous world will not be the end of our inner journey because

**our consciousness will keep expanding forever
into yet unimaginably vast inner horizons.**

To explain in the limited extent that can be done why the Divine didn't just create this new world instead of slowly bringing it about through the Manifestation I made this metaphor, but should not be taken too literally:

One of the Divine's infinite possibilities was a speck of darkness and That yearned to fill it with all its light, but doing so would instantly obliterate it. So the Divine temporarily disconnected a part of itself and in it left only a small spark of all its light and consciousness. Then further fragmented that part into countless selves, every one of us, and through this spark of light in our hearts the Divine could penetrate this darkness without obliterating it. Quite a lot of it is still in the dreamworld, and we all

have been allotted a measure of it according to our capacity to transmute into light. About how to transmute it, as Mère said:

“In the spiritual order of things the higher we project our view and our aspirations, the greater is the truth that will descend on us

**because it is already there in us and calls for
its release from the covering concealing it.”**

The covering concealing it is the ego and the part of the outer I entranced by the illusions of the dreamworld. Many theologians and philosophers struggled with the paradox of a supposedly benevolent “God” creating a world full of so much suffering instead of one perfect from the start. One reason is that our hardships and suffering can be like a catalyst for our inner growth and foster qualities like resilience, compassion, and wisdom, while a world without suffering might lack the depth and potential for spiritual or moral development.

But probably the main reason is that a world perfect from the start world would have lacked the joy of progressing on the Path, the delight of awakening from the dream of our life, discovering the way back to our Source, and reaching always higher levels of awareness. About this, there is this passage from Sri Aurobindo in which by the “surface being” He did not mean the outer I but our inward one:

“One might almost say that our surface being is only the deeper eternal Self in us throwing itself out as the adventurer in Time, a gambler and speculator in infinite possibilities, limiting itself to the succession of moments so that it may have all the surprise and delight of the adventure, keeping back its self-knowledge.

so that it may win again what seems to have

been lost, reconquering all of itself.”

But even after all this has been said is still hard to accept that the Divine allowed so much suffering, wars, extreme poverty, etc in the dreamworld. Oh well, one of the rules that the Divine made in it is that we can try to do whatever we want even if it is harmful to ourselves and others. It is us, not the Divine, who turned much of the dreamworld into a nightmare with our selfishness, greed, hatred, fears, etc, and we should take full responsibility for this.

Do you perchance object that you aren't responsible for such things as wars and millions of people living in extreme poverty? Of course, you aren't, but whenever we do anything contributing to climate change or a selfish action that has harmful consequences we increase a little the dreamworld's sorry condition. As the Buddha said,

“All that we are is the result of what we have thought and is founded upon it. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, while if a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him.”

The old traditional spirituality often advocated for solitude and retreat as an escape from the illusion of the world, but now we should instead stay engaged with it to help the Divine's Manifestation in it. When a visitor criticized the teachings of Ramana Maharshi by saying that it is very selfish to seek only our Self-realization instead of doing something to relieve some of the world's ills he replied:

“Your Self Realization is the greatest help you can render to the world.”

Is the greatest help because as our consciousness is interconnected with the one of everyone else, raising ours through Self-realization also increases its collective level, thereby contributing to the global shift toward greater awareness and elevating the overall vibration of humanity.

**You also were born here to help the divine Manifestation,
and for this do not need to be someone very special.**

Just like building houses does not require only architects but also masons, plumbers, manual workers, etc, so for the Manifestation, all kinds of people are needed.

It is as if the Divine had given you a handful of the original darkness and told you to heal it and deemed you capable of doing so otherwise would not have given it to you. This advice attributed to Nisargadatta Maharaj might not be an exact quote from him, but is according to his teachings:

“When you discover that you are the whole of the Manifestation and all this splendor and countless human beings, you forget about your little individual. You must identify yourself with the totality of the Manifestation, then you spread out everywhere, while by clinging to your individualism, you cannot make any progress.”

Mère’s advice is:

“In Peace and Silence the Eternal manifests; allow nothing to disturb you and the Eternal will manifest;

**have a perfect equanimity in the face of all
and the Eternal will be there”**

17. The Task

According to this passage doubtfully attributed to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, we come here with a specific, personal destiny and have a role to perform, a calling to fulfill, and a Self that we must become. Our function in life is not to follow some imaginary ideal but to find out who we really are and ask ourselves this essential question: “For which Task was I created?”

Mère suggested that we ask ourselves a similar question:

“Since I am here, it means that I have a mission to fulfil. Since I have been endowed with consciousness, I have something to do with it - what is it?”

The quote attributed to Marcus Aurelius answers this question thus: “What man must accomplish must be done quickly, at the place assigned to him and within the time allotted to him.

**This task is no less than the manifestation
of the Divinity latent in man.”**

If we do not find and fulfill our main Task even our greatest achievements in the dreamworld will leave us with a lingering sense of incompleteness, a void that no worldly accomplishment can fill, a feeling that something essential is missing from our lives, and the meaning of our existence will keep eluding us.

According to an ancient metaphor, not accomplishing our Task is as if a great King sent us abroad to do a special task for him, and if upon our return we must confess that we did many other things instead it won't be pleased with us.

Besides our main Task, we may also be given some others, like for instance bringing someone to the Path or progress on it, opposing fascism, and dictatorships, doing

something to counteract climate change, spreading peace and happiness around us, etc. The life of those without a higher aim is always a miserable one even when they are contented with it.

Over the years I met many who were unhappy because had not accomplished their Task: a philosopher who ought to have been a mystic, a prostitute whose Task was to be a healer as she had quite a talent for it; a mercenary who when old regretted not having been a freedom fighter instead, and quite a few whose Task was meant to be the Path and accomplish it, but because they didn't were stuck in unfulfilling lives. To those who find accomplishing their Task too difficult, the advice of Mère is:

“You cannot say: “That is beyond me, it is too big for me.” Go within your little person and you will find the key which opens all the doors.”

When I joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I thought that my Task was to reach what at the time called Self-realization, but when I told this to Beehar he replied that:

“Indeed this is your main Task, but not quite as you conceive of it. We should aspire for our Self-realization for the sake of the Supreme, to help its Manifestation on Earth, but you seek Self-realization mainly because you want to be free from your outer I and its attachments, illusions, and the heavy burden of ego-driven desires.”

Since then I strove to achieve my main Task mainly for the sake of the Divine's Manifestation, and now regard it according to these words of Wu Hsin:

“You came to this life with your unique nature. It was combined with the experiences you had to forge who you are. You had no say in the matter. You are a one-of-a-kind instrument performing the work that only you can in the service of That which sent you here.”

**Only by accomplishing our main Task, we can live
in a permanent state of peace, joy, and love.**

Whatever your main Task may be, probably to fulfill it you must no longer consider everything according to whether benefits you or not but if helps the Divine's Manifestation, and follow this advice of Mère:

“The Divine has set for you a special place and function in the Manifestation. Aim to discover and fulfill it, because in it be everything worthwhile you ever aspired for, and wonders still inconceivable for you. Nothing can take away your special place and function from you,

**but how long will take to find
and fulfill it is up to you.”**

18. The Path As Being Born

The dreamworld is like a womb in which we gradually become ready to be inwardly reborn and according to many Teachers and gurus this rebirth requires the death of our apparent “I”. For example, in the Gospel of John Christ said: “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” Shams Tabrizi said that every breath is a chance to be born anew, but to do so we must die before dying. The Persian philosopher, theologian, and mystic Al-Ghazali said that if we die to our external self before we leave our body we will find that there is no death, and Wu Hsin asserted that we must die so that we will never die again.

Of course, it is not our inward I but only the outer one that must die, but now as we are approaching the next level of our evolution

**the time has come that the outer I no longer needs to die
but be refined and merged with our inward one.**

Until this is possible, to be inwardly reborn requires shedding the layers of illusions of the outer I. In most cases, it is not a one-time sudden event but a gradual transformative shift that brings about a heightened awareness and makes us feel that our life before it had been like a black-and-white movie but now bursts into wonderful colors. It is like returning home from a long and exhausting journey, or as if we had been living in a dense fog but now emerge from it into the sunshine and see everything with a newfound clarity. According to Mère,

“The way to our inner birth is like being seated before a closed door and gathering all one’s concentration and aspiration in a single beam, pushing harder and harder

against it until suddenly gives way. Then entering it one is as if thrust into the light and is truly born.”

Since I read these words they were often in the background of my mind, but I became discouraged because although I had been on the Path for many years had not yet achieved my inner rebirth. I was already fifty years old and instead of dedicating all my energy and time to being inwardly reborn I still spent a lot of time on too many other things.

The breakthrough occurred one night when I was participating in a Go tournament (an ancient oriental board game much more complex than chess) which took place on a ship going from Moscow to St. Petersburg on the river Moskva. It was the time of the “white nights” in Russia, and although was past midnight the deck of the ship was bathed in an eerie light. I suddenly remembered this insight that I had many years before in Paris: we seem to be living beings going toward death, but actually we are not yet alive in the true sense but preparing to be inwardly born by awakening from the dream of our lives.

Then I realized that I did not indulge in whatever distracted me from the Path only because I enjoyed them but to escape the heartbreaking awareness that unless I managed to be inwardly reborn at least in this life

**I would miss out on the awesome chance of
living forever and ever with the Divine.**

Then I was flooded with many images of what our inner rebirth might be like and wrote down some of them in my journal: feeling like a bird who spent all his life in a cage escaping from it at last, like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, being suddenly released from a claustrophobically small prison cell, a mountaineer reaching

the top of a high peak after a challenging climb, a miner digging through a hard rock finding a splendid, priceless ruby crystal under it.

**Dear reader, like when you emerged from your mother's
womb your umbilical cord had to be cut,**

so its equivalent, which is your identification with the outer I, must also be cut, and then you might feel like this inner rebirth attributed to Rumi:

“For so long out of the void as a ghost, I lived and then in a single instant was born; free from all that I had ever been I found myself and all my old cravings like ashes tasted now.”

After your inner rebirth, the familiar energies of the outer I to which you were accustomed will be no more, and for a while, you might feel as if the ground had vanished from under your feet; this can be bewildering, but then you will be able to live as who you truly are. Mère's advice is:

“Await every moment, in the concentrated expectation of imminent motherhood, the birth of the Divine in you.

Await it calmly, await it in breathless exaltation.”

19. Immortality

Many assume that immortality means to live forever in the same body and the perpetuation of their personality, but instead consists of transcending them and realizing that covertly we are our immortal Self. As Sri Aurobindo said,

“There is a means to attain physical immortality, but who would care to wear the same coat forever or be confined in one narrow & changeless lodging for all eternity?”

Moreover, what use could physical immortality be to those who get easily bored and don't know what to do in their spare time and stupefy themselves with all sorts of entertainment because they do not know what to do with their spare time, with their lives?

Unless there is also a fundamental change of consciousness, by living in an immortal body after some decades they would just keep repeating the same routines, feeling trapped in a monotonous existence, increasingly restless and dissatisfied, constantly searching for new ways to pass the time.

It would be a never-ending nightmare in which all we could do would be like playing with our old children's toys even as adults.

I had always considered immortality to be just a fantasy, but when I joined thSri Aurobindo Ashramam I found out that potentially it is possible for the inward I to attain it by merging with our Self who is unborn, undying, and survives the dissolution of the body because it existed even before its birth.

When I read that according to Mère to achieve immortality everything else must be abandoned, every desire and vital craving, all the parts of us unworthy to become immortal I asked myself what I n me might deserve it. At first, I thought that I it was

this part was my visions and spiritual experiences, but they are merely some steps of a very long journey. Eventually, I felt that this elusive essence in me appeared to be but a seeking, a yearning, for what is true and real, for the Divine forever untainted by the ego or the vital.

; this is what is worth preserving from oblivion, becoming immortal forever; everything else in us must be abandoned to lighten my inner journey to the Great Awakening.

When I said this to Beehar he told me that my experience of it corresponds to the Psychic, the divine spark within us that is the core of our existence and has often been described as a bridge between the mortal and the immortal, the finite and the infinite, has the power to bridge the gap between the physical and spiritual realms.

**Immortality does not mean making the dream
of our life last forever but Awakening from it.**

Immortality is not a birthright but a conscious achievement, something to which you must give yourself, not take; it isn't the continuation of your "I" as you know it, but its merging with the Divine. But in a way immortality is already there in all your expressions of unconditioned love, every act of selflessness, compassion, and kindness. By manifesting them in your life you will feel that you are forever part of something eternal as if you were already immortal. As Krishnamurti said,
"To understand immortality, you must let go of the desire for continuity in the personal sense. Immortality is not the extension of your ego or your personality beyond death. The ego is time-bound, and to crave its continuity is to live in illusion. Immortality is timeless, infinite, and can only be achieved when the apparent 'I' ceases.

**In the absence of the ego, there is something immeasurable,
something beyond time and death. That is immortality."**

20. Be Without Leaving Yourself

One day someone asked Ramana Maharshi for an upadesa (spiritual teaching) and he replied with just four words: “Be without leaving yourself. This means to live authentically, fully in the present moment, in the center of our being, and ideally never departing from it.

Most of us leave ourselves in so many ways, in the myriad of thoughts and divagations of the mind, movies, videos, reading Facebook posts, chatting on WhatsApp, computer games, and Wu Hsin pointed out that:

“Man is the one who is insane: he leaves the experience of life, here and now, for time and attention spent regretting the past and hoping for a brighter future, a future that will right what is now deemed not right. The fragrance of the apple blossom, the laughter of a child, the blueness of the sky,

**all sacrificed on the altar of mental
preoccupations. What a waste!”**

So long ago, at a time we do not remember, we were attracted to the experiences that can be had in the dreamworld and ventured away from our Source, became lost in a labyrinth of illusions, felt separated from our Self and the Divine, wandered in the fog of forgetfulness seeking outside ourselves for what is within us.

However, as everything that ever happens is always part of the divine’s cosmic Design although we cannot mentally understand why, even our losing ourselves in the dreamworld’s mirages must be according to it.

Ramana Maharshi’s injunction “Be without leaving yourself” profoundly touched me and made me more aware of how often left myself in many ways. The main one was a wish to have high visions and spiritual experiences because although they help us on

the Path my vital desires for them for its enjoyment led me away from myself. Another sentence that touched me deeply was this ancient Zen question attributed to the Japanese Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku:

“What could the tiger ever find in the dark recesses of its own lair?”

Of course, merely rotting old bones.

These bones represented the remaining fragments of the detours and dead ends in which I left myself in the past and although they had also been stepping stones in my inner growth and contributed to making who I am today the time has come to let them all go.

Almost everything that you look at or think about has one thing in common: you are looking away from yourself.

You have done this for so long that it has become a deeply ingrained habit, and now should shift your consciousness away from looking outward and firmly focus it on your Self. Then you will no longer feel the need to wander away from yourself because the dreamworld's attractions will lose their appeal to you.

Whenever you have an impulse or inclination to do something, stop for a moment to ensure that does not make you leave yourself, and if it does reject it. The advice of Kabir is:

“Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus, (our center) and there gaze on the infinite Beauty. Don't go off anywhere else!

**Just discard all thoughts about imaginary things
and stand firm in that which you are.”**

21. An Examination

In a period when I was gathering many quotes from various sources for this book, I became captivated by them. This brought about an experience in the twilight between sleep and wakefulness which I am not sure whether was a dream or a vision, or perhaps a mixture of both. I was passing an examination, and after it wrote down the questions that I was asked and my answers. This experience was so vivid and intense that I mostly remembered them correctly or at least got the gist of them.

I was in a classroom at Turin University where my cousin Gianni had taught philosophy and expected him to show up, but instead, Beehar came. Strangely, he wasn't wearing his usual white cotton pants and kurta but an elegant Western suit which looked very surreal on him.

Without any preliminaries, he put an antiqued alarm clock on the desk and a dossier with my name on it sat down, gestured for me to do the same, and then told me that I had only five minutes to answer each question, and began interrogating me:

“The Buddha said that the Path is not in the sky but in the heart. *Why are you not on the Path with your heart?*”

I had no idea and before I could find the answer the alarm clock announced that my five minutes expired so he put a minus mark on my dossier.

“The Buddha also said that you cannot travel the Path until you have become the Path itself. *What does this mean?*”

I replied that our concentration on the Path must be so absolute that we are no longer distracted by the dreamworld's illusions, and he nodded his approval as he gave me my first plus mark.

“You know that who you truly are is your Atman, but just believing this means nothing until you have realized, and experienced this. *Why haven’t you ?*”

I mentioned my main difficulties in practicing the Integral Yoga but he shook his head and I got another minus mark.

“The ancient wisdom affirms that on the Path there is no distance between us and our ultimate destination. *How can this be?*”

I said that as our destination is our Source and we are our higher Self who never left it no distance between it and us can be there, and he agreed.

“According to the book *The Voice of the Silence* by Helena Blavatsky, the cofounder of Theosophy, the Path begins and ends outside our self. *Is this a fact?*”

The answer came to me just after my five minutes expired and I got a minus mark: by “our self” Blavatsky meant the outer I, and of course, the Path begins and ends beyond it in our inward one.

“An ancient Sufi text affirms that going on a pilgrimage to the holy Mecca is equivalent to drinking a glass of the very best wine but in the wrong tavern. *What does this mean?*”

I thought and thought about it but no answer came. After my five minutes expired Beehar laughingly told me:

“Ha ha ha, I just made up this nonsense to see if you would fall for it and give me a contrived, mental answer of sorts; therefore not answering this question earned you a plus mark!”

“According to Wu Hsin, the best way to achieve our Self-realization is to return to the Source from which we came. *How can we return to it?*”

This was an easy one: to return to it we must dissolve the illusion that we are separated from it. Another plus mark.

“Wu Hsin also said that we are already looking for the one that we are seeking. *What does this imply?*”

I replied that who we are looking for is the Divine, and it is That who is seeking itself in us. He agreed.

“According to Ramana Maharshi when we can bear our emptiness we are free. *How can emptiness make us free?*

Just as I was going to say that what Ramana had called emptiness is the Vastness and it is by abiding in it that we become utterly free, my five minutes expired and I got a minus mark.

“As you know, Mère said that we do not really exist because there is only one thing that exists, and it is the Divine. *But how can you be on the Path if you do not exist?*”

My answer was that although I don't yet really exist I am on the Path because the Divine is writing the story of my life as my being on it. He nodded his approval.

The last question was:

“But still, if you do not really exist *who is now sitting in front of me passing this examination?*”

The answer came to me immediately: who is passing this examination is the Divine playing Its cosmic Lila through our esoteric chattering, blah blah blah.

I had never seen Beehar with such a delighted smile.

22. Transcending the Outer I

According to the old spirituality, we should just get rid of the outer I instead of purifying it of its flaws like it is much easier to replace a heavily stained garment with a new one rather than cleaning off its dirty spots one by one. But as Ramakrishna said,

“The outward I can be useful and is better to let it mature than destroy it because to remain in the world a bit of it is indispensable to protect oneself. However, it must not be taken too seriously, and we must be aware that it is just a mask.”

Indeed we should not regard it only as a hindrance on the Path because by freeing it from all its limitations and selfish concerns

**the outer I can undergo a profound transformation and become
a useful instrument at the service of the Divine.**

To achieve this radical transformation we must overcome the resistance of the outer I which is afraid of losing its apparent identity, while instead it is only through this transformation that we can find it. According to Gurdjieff,

“Transcending the outer I requires disrupting the unconscious patterns of our conditioned habits and discovering the transformative fire in us that can burn away the layers of our sleepwalking existence.”

About this, there is a well-known metaphor about the caterpillar that must die to become a butterfly (our inward I). Once when I mentioned this while doing a

conference about Integral Yoga I mentioned it and a man in the audience stood up and almost shouted:

“That may be great for the butterfly, but let’s be honest, we are caterpillars and bound to fucking die! Why should I give a damn if after I crap out a stupid butterfly is merrily flying around?”

There is no way to convey the wonder of being our inner being to those determined to remain caterpillars.

Transcending the outer I is a bit like peeling the layers of an onion, every layer representing a belief, a fear, a societal conditioning, a past trauma, a suppressed desire, a lingering resentment, etc, that we may have accumulated over time.

I had always deemed the outer I only as an enemy, the usurper of my life, and how I felt about it is best expressed by this passage of the ancient Gilgamesh epic in the poetical version of Herbert Mason:

“But my hands were too small to do the gathering. I have only experienced such a tearing when the sea of death I contemplate,

**this striving against such a petty smallness -
myself - waiting for an uplifting gesture.”**

How I regarded the outer I changed when in a meditation my life flashed very fast in my memory like in a speeded-up film and I vividly recollected all the struggles, anguish, and suffering that it had to endure. I then felt a deep understanding and compassion for it, no longer saw it merely as an obstacle on the Path, and

acknowledged that it had provided me with tests and challenges that I needed to progress in it.

**To transcend the outer I let go of its ego-driven desires,
have an unwavering aspiration and faith in the Divine.**

Always remember your basic oneness with That, follow its guidance, and trust that every step of your inner journey is divinely orchestrated for your inner growth. As Mère said, after transcending the outer I:

“Then we shall understand the vanity and childishness of our meager satisfactions, our foolish quarrels, our petty passions, our blind indignations. We shall see the dissolution of our little faults, the crumbling of the last entrenchments of our limited personality, and our obtuse egoism. We shall feel ourselves

**being swept along by this sublime current of true spirituality
which will deliver us from our narrow limits and bounds.”**

23. Being in the Flow

A note: The term Flow was popularized by the recent Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and has been used in self-improvement books and courses. He defined it as a state of optimal experience in which we are fully immersed in our activities, have greater energy and higher motivations, but the Flow is much more than this. In Zen Buddhism is called "mushin" (no-mind), a state in which we are present and very focused, without thoughts and judgments. Taoism has named "Wu Wei" (effortless action) a state of harmony in which our actions arise spontaneously and easily without striving by aligning with the natural flow of life.

The Flow is a divine force like an inner river going back to our Source. In it, we are in syntony with the divine's guidance, serene and joyous, our actions are always according to the truth of our being, and we do them more efficiently.

Either we are in the Flow and our life unfolds as an enchanted, delightful adventure, a dance with the Divine in which challenges are seen as opportunities for inner growth, or outside it where we are exposed to all sorts of adversities and suffering. The advice of Ramana Maharshi is:

“Go along with the current. Don't try to swim against the flow of the river.

Everything is perfectly all right as it is. Realize it!

Go along with its natural completion.”

When I read this I strongly disagreed because so many things do not look all right as they are, and the current that carries most of us around is the unexamined forces of our lives keeping us in an inner slumber. But when I mentioned this to Annamalai Swami, one of Ramana Maharshi's main disciples he told me that must have said this

to those who had the potential to be in the divine Flow but had not yet overcome the resistance of their ego and outer I to be carried by it.

In my early teens, I had a first hint of the Flow without knowing what it was through a strange sensation that sometimes had while walking: I felt as if I was sitting inside my head looking out from the windows of my eyes, just observing where my body was going and what was doing in an unconcerned way. When I was with the Flower Children I had another hint of it through this song:

“The river is flowing; the river is glowing; the river is flowing...back to the sea. Mother Nature carry me; a child I will always be; Mother Nature carry me...back to the sea.”

While listening to it I felt as if I was carried by this river to the new, more harmonious, serene, and compassionate world that the Flower Children aspired to bring about, and felt more at peace with myself than ever before.

A prophecy from the Hopi American Indians of which there are several versions also spoke of the Flow as a river:

“There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that some will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are torn apart and will suffer greatly. Know that the river has its destination.”

One night I had this dream about it: I was in a very overcrowded, chaotic Indian bus stand trying to find a bus to the Great Awakening, but none had the usual panel in front naming their destination, and those whom I asked did not know where it was. I thought of inquiring about it at the information booth and instantly found myself in front of it, but was closed and a mess of spider webs covered its window.

Then I felt a gentle tug on my leg, looked down and was overjoyed to see that it was Anna, the enlightened child from the book “Mister God This is Anna”, and asked her

where it was. As she burst into an amused laughter the noisy bus stand fell into an eerie silence; everyone it moved like in a slow-motion film and then stood still as if frozen in time.

I blinked, closed my eyes a moment and when I opened them again the bus stand was deserted and all the buses were rusty and decrepit, their tyres flat, going nowhere since long. Then Anna lovingly took my hand and familiarly spoke to me as if we had always known each other:

“Vijay, in the past you already took most of these buses but they only went somewhere in the dream of the dream of the world!”

Then she mimicked wiping off something written on a blackboard which made the bus stand vanish and asked me:

“Now can you see the Flow?”

At first I only saw a hazy mist, but Anna gestured to me to bend over and put her hands on the top of my head. This sent such a powerful wave of energy through my whole body that I almost fainted, *and then I saw the Flow*.

I saw it as a splendid river of such unearthly light and bliss that I immediately dived into it. The outer I could not follow me and was stranded on its shore, desperately calling me to come back. But why would I do that? Without it, I dwelt in a sense of eternity with no yesterday nor tomorrow, no longer needed anything, and time dissolved into the Here and Now. But, alas, like the other times when I experienced such a blissful state the unregenerated forces of my life did not yet allow me to remain in it permanently.

Remember Gurdjieff’s metaphor about the outer I as several people in a bus that each can drive for a while.

One of them is you. If you are not yet on the driving seat wait till it is your turn at it and drive the bus to the Flow. If another I takes the driving wheel away from you before you can it don't be discouraged but hold onto it as long as possible until gradually none of your outer I's I will be able to take it away from you.

By remaining always more in the Flow the outer I and the ego will lose their power over you, and then your life will unfold as if it is meant to be in the Divine's cosmic Design. Wu Hsin spoke of the Flow thus:

“There is a force, awake, aware and vital, that is the primary element in all that is. It is in each thing to the extent that it is required. Wu Hsin calls it the Flow.

**Remove the attention from what is personal,
and what will be left is the Flow, the Source.**

24. Oneness

No object, no being can be isolated from the others because there is a fundamental oneness permeating everything, and notwithstanding all our differences deep within we are one with everyone and all that exists. Some avant-garde Quantum physicists affirmed what many ancient Hindu scriptures, particularly the Advaita Vedanta, had already discovered thousands of years ago. For example, the famous recent Quantum physics scientist David Bohm affirmed that the underlying reality of the universe is interrelated and that what we perceive as separate entities is part of a much vaster whole.

The physicist Fritjof Capra who wrote the famous book *The Tao of Physics* said that both modern physics and ancient spiritual traditions recognize a fundamental interconnectedness in the universe.

Schrödinger, one of the main quantum scientists found many similarities between the wave function in quantum mechanics and the Hindu concept of Brahman in which everything is connected and nothing can exist in complete isolation.

Everything that exists is woven from countless threads, each inextricably linked to all others.

According to the ancient Shvetashvatara Upanishad,

“Thou art man and woman, boy and girl; old and worn thou walkest bent over a staff; thou art the bluebird and the green and the scarlet-eyed...it is thou alone who, when born, assumest diverse forms. Thou art beginningless and all-pervading”

By being aware of the basic oneness of all we become aware that if we hurt others we harm ourselves as well, while by bringing about happiness and joy in them we share it. From the atom's subatomic particles to the whole cosmos nothing can be an

independent entity. A grain of sand and the Himalayas, butterflies and scorpions, Benares and Las Vegas, prisons and temples, forests and deserts, saints and Hitler are all part of our basic oneness with all.

Without being aware of this we cannot discover who we truly are because as the book “A Course In Miracles” affirmed:

**“If you look only at yourself you cannot find yourself
because that is not what you are.**

You have no meaning apart from your rightful place in the whole. This is your life, your eternity, and your true Self.”

There can be no more intense, wonderful, and ecstatic feeling than when the sense of separation is no more and we experience our oneness with the Divine but is not easy to feel it because we have always regarded ourselves as isolated from all else. As Mère said, there are two ways of feeling our oneness with the Divine:

“One is to concentrate in the heart and go deep enough to find there His Presence; the other is to fling oneself in His arms, to nestle there like a child nestles in his mother’s arms, with a complete surrender, and of the two the latter seems to me easier.”

One day when Jean Klein told me that we are not only one with the Divine but also with everyone at first found this outrageous: One one with Hitler? With fascists and child molesters? I recoiled at the thought. But of course, it is not with their outer I that we are one but with their Self. Jung describes how he felt his oneness with all thus:

“At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and I am living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons.”

I deeply resonated with his words but at the time had some anxiety that by spreading in all I might lose myself and be no more, while on the contrary we do not cease to be but we realize that who we truly are is “this one beside me walking whom I do not see.”

The first time that I experienced my oneness with someone else was as a teenager when from the window of a bus I saw a very tired looking old man slowly pedaling on a bicycle and wondered about his life, which wishes, worries, and hopes he may have. Then a kaleidoscopic array of vivid images of his life since he was a child unfolded in my vision. My skeptical mind told me that it must be just my imagination, but at the time I did not yet know that we are one with all. I also felt a sharp ache in my calves like the one that he probably had while cycling and it lasted until I went out of the bus.

**Begin by feeling one with those closer to you, then with all you know,
then with everyone, and finally with the Divine as well.**

To feel the oneness see everyone you encounter as the Divine coming to you under the disguise of their appearance. There is something else that I wish to tell you but let me say it with these words attributed to Rumi which express it so much better than I could:

“We are all the same, all the same, longing to find our way back, back to the One, back to the only One. My soul and yours are the same: you appear in me; I appear in you. We hide in each other. In truth, your soul and mine are one.

**Your spirit is mingled with mine, what touches you touches me,
you and I will be together till the universe dissolves.”**

25. The Surrender

A note: For many the surrender has a negative connotation, as a defeated general capitulates to an enemy, but surrendering to the Divine is not a defeat, not an escape from the adversities of life nor a resignation to fate but an act of profound wisdom, inner strength and the best way to the fulfillment of the Path.

Surrender means giving all of ourselves to the Divine, putting all we have and all we are at Its service. This is the solution to all our problems, conflicts, uncertainties, and suffering. But our surrender should never be a reluctant renunciation of something that we would have preferred to keep but a joyful letting go of it in the awareness that it will be replaced by everything we truly need. If there is any sense of sacrifice while giving something to the Divine our surrender is still not complete. In a perfect one, we do everything according to Its will, and apart from taking care of the basic needs of our body, we should not do anything for the sake of our ego or outer I, not even for those we love unless the Divine wants us to do so.

**It is by surrendering the ego's desire desires and fears that
we can fully access the limitless power of the Divine.**

Once ur surrender is complete, we can rejoice in letting Tat do everything for us much better than we ever could, set up the best events of our lives, make us find the books and those who can help us on the Path. Mère pointed out the contrast between an ordinary life and one in which we surrendered to the Divine thus:

“It is the difference between walking slowly, laboriously, during centuries up a mountain, going round and round it, and opening invisible wings to fly straight to its

summit.”

It is too easy to say to the Divine: “I surrender and offer all of myself to You,” but as we cannot surrender what is not under our control we must integrate all the disparate aspects of the outer I with our inward one. This requires an often long process of regeneration and transformation in which we must re-examine everything that we do, think or feel to ensure that they are according to the Divine’s will. As Sri Aurobindo said,

“The Divine gives itself to those who give themselves without reserve and in all their parts to the Divine.

**For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss,
the freedom, the wideness, the seas of Ananda.”**

I still vividly remember the first time that I managed to surrender to the Divine not just some minor things but a very important, life-changing decision that I had to take. I was living in Fertile, a small Auroville community, and working with its reforestation program, but wished to start a new one on a nearby very arid, barren wasteland and plant trees in it. My friends said that I would be crazy to do this because at least at first I would be alone there, have no money to hire workers to help me, and the nearest water source was in Fertile, about one km away. I knew that I should surrender this decision to the Divine but didn’t because, I must confess, I did not want to be told to remain in Fertile.

But one night had this dream: I was lost on the outskirts of the Dasht-e Lut desert in Iran. It was about noon and the heat was fierce; I was terribly thirsty but my water bag was dry. I carrying a heavy backpack that I did not want to let go of because in it

there was all that I had, and could not even sit down a moment to rest because the sand was scorching hot.

But then I heard a noise behind me and saw that it was the air-conditioned Land Rover of Ahmed, a friendly farmandeh (governor) who a few years before had given me a generous hospitality in his small township near this desert. His driver picked me up and at last I got out of the sun, drank my fill of water, and relaxed while being brought out of the desert.

After waking up I realized that choosing whether to start this new community or not instead of letting the Divine make this decision would have been as stupid as refusing a passage on that Land Rover out of the desert and dying there.

After I surrendered this decision to the Divine I was inwardly told that yes, I should start this community. I had just enough money to build a tiny hut made of bamboo and palmyra leaves; water to drink I would get from Fertile and have my meals there. I applied to a German environmental foundation for a grant to dig a well and a windmill to pump water and was soon allotted it. About some workers to help me dig the holes to plant the trees in, tools, seedlings, compost, and a bullock cart to transport it I trusted that the Divine would somehow provide them, and indeed was so.

Now I know that everything I had to go through in my life, including the worst, had contributed to bring me to my surrender and feel like Rumi did when he said: “He is the Writer...the pen am I in His fingers”

**Ask yourself if you could manage your life better
than the Divine would if you surrendered to That.**

Whenever you are confronted by a hardship surrender how to deal with it to the Divine, otherwise would be like telling That: "Don't bother to help me, I already know what I should do!"

When your ego or the outer I try to make you do or say something not in harmony with the Divine's will find the strength and integrity to resist it. Even if you are doing something great in the field of healing, social work, art, ecology, etc, be always ready to leave it if it is the Divine's will. Then your perception of everything radically changes, and always more signs and intimations will guide you on the Path. Mère advised to surrender to the Divine by saying:

"Here I am, a creature of various qualities, good and bad, dark and enlightened. I offer myself as I am to you, take me up with all my ups and downs, conflicting impulses and tendencies – do whatever you like with me."

And in another passage She said:

"He does it, He arranges the circumstances, arranges the people, He puts the words in your mouth or under your pen - He does it all, all, all, all,

**and you have nothing more to do, nothing
but let yourself live in bliss."**

26. Certitude

The essential revelation of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Ghita, and of true Teachers or gurus is basically the same: notwithstanding the appearances, we are not the very limited, mortal beings that we seem to be but are our Self which is one with the Divine.

By intensely feeling, experiencing this, not just believing it, we can have an absolute certitude that whatever may happen in our lives is ultimately for the best. For example, the English mystic Julian of Norwich for a long time kept asking herself why God who loves us created hell until she was inwardly told that eventually "All will be well, but all will be well and all manner of things will be well"

Once we are on the Path, we can be certain that whether in this life or another, our destiny is to reach the Great Awakening.

Certitude does not only mean never having any doubts but a profound realization beyond a mere mental understanding that we are guided and as Sri Aurobindo affirmed we may doubt anything but not that he who desires only the Divine shall reach the Divine is a certitude more sure than two and two make four.

If at times any doubts about this arises we must be aware that they are not ours but belong to the outer I. Beyond the mind's skepticism, in our depths the certitude is always there that our destiny is to realize who we truly are. By never forgetting this our life becomes like a symphony in which each note is part of ever-unfoldings synchronicities, insights and revelations.

Once Ramesh Balsekar, a main disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj, told me that one

day a Western woman visiting his guru for the first time asked him a question but disliked his answer so just stood up and left. Ramesh had remarked to Nisargadatta that it was such a pity that she went away in such a manner without benefiting from his teaching, but he replied (I might not remember the exact words) that having been in the spiritual energy of his room even for a short time had cast a seed in her which in another life will germinate and certainly bring about her Self-realization.

Another day I asked Ramesh what was the essence of Nisargadatta's teaching, and told me that it might be this affirmation:

**“What changes is not real, what is real does not change;
the real does not die, and the unreal never lived.”**

Then I did some research and found that many Teachers and ancient texts had affirmed the same thing and often with similar words. To mention just a few: the Bhagavad Ghita says that “The unreal has no existence and the real never ceases to be.”; the Greek philosopher Parmenides said: “That which is, never ceases to be. That which is not never comes into being”; the recent book “A Course in Miracles” expressed this very powerfully:

**“Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists.
Herein lies the peace of God.”**

The real is our higher Self and the unreal the outer I, therefore if the former cannot be threatened or hurt in any way and the latter is not real we can be certain that “All will be well, but all will be well and all manner of things will be well”

Certitude...about my Teachers, Sri Aurobindo and Mère, I never had any doubts, but had one about whether Integral Yoga was meant for me because my progress on it

seemed to me slow. What helped me to deal with this doubt were these reassuring words of Mère:

“Whoever is seriously doing Yoga has been chosen by the Supreme, and as He has made you a seeker and have already received Its awakening Call which brought you out of the ordinary level of consciousness you can be sure that He will guide you to your Self-realization.”

**Certitude cannot be acquired through any effort but by entering
a state in which the illusion of separation can no longer be.**

When you recognize yourself as a part of the consciousness permeating all existence, certitude arises. You need not search for it because its essence is already within you. The journey to the Great Awakening is as if you had already bought the train ticket, found your seat, and the train already left the station, therefore do not waste time considering whether the train is fast or slow or if perhaps you ought to have taken a different one. Mère’s speaking from the viewpoint of the Divine offers this advice:

“Remember that I am present in you and do not lose hope; every effort, every suffering, every gladness and every anguish, each call of your heart, each aspiration of your soul, each renewal of your seasons, all, all without exception, that which seems to you sad as that which seems to you joyous, that which seems to you ugly as that which seems to you beautiful, all infallibly brings you to Me, and

**I am the Light without shadows, endless Peace, perfect Harmony,
Certitude, Rest, and the Supreme Benediction.”**

27. Inner Peace

What most call peace is merely the momentary absence of conflict or disturbances, but real peace is a harmonious state of mental and emotional serenity that does not depend on any external circumstances and is not affected by them even when they are difficult. In this state, what we do is always in syntony with our inner being, and then we are always happy, creative, and deeply loving, which helps us to progress faster on the Path.

Imagine being on a small boat in the sea on a moonless night when there is a fierce thunderstorm. All you see is heavy rain, lightning, huge waves crashing down in a cloud of foam, and darkness all around. But all this turbulence is only within a few meters of the sea's surface,

**and below it are miles of undisturbed,
infinitely peaceful water.**

To achieve permanent inner peace we do not need to retreat in a Himalayan cave or an ashram to escape from our sometimes stormy waves but learn how to surf them. According to Sufism, the way to an unshakable inner peace is by practicing the Dhikir, the constant remembrance of the Beloved through which we become like a clear mirror reflecting its boundless peace in our hearts. The advice of Wu Hsin is: "If you want space, remove all the rubbish obstructing the space. If you want peace, remove all the mental rubbish obstructing it."

This rubbish is most aspects of the outer I: beliefs, wrong identifications, desires, mundane concerns, etc depriving us of peace, therefore to become free of them we must thoroughly examine the psychological formations that perpetuate them. We

should also keep the mind as silent as possible because as Sri Aurobindo said it is from the Silence that peace comes, and when the Silence deepens peace becomes always more one with it.

Once in Paris during a demonstration against the war in Vietnam, I was arrested for fighting with the policemen blocking our way to the American embassy. When I was in the Sante prison I remembered that in a Talk of Krishnamurti which I attended, he said that war is the result of our state of mind, the selfish way in which we live. We have built a society based on conflict, and until individually and collectively we keep pursuing only, or almost only, our interests, we will have wars, therefore

**To bring about peace on Earth, we must begin by establishing
it firmly in our daily lives and in our relationships.**

Remembering what he said I became more aware that seldom I had any inner peace, and unless I was absorbed in my creative writing, listening to a symphony, making love, or smoking some weed soon became restless and tried to find something to do, no matter what.

When I got out of jail went to Turin and asked Dharmarama how I could find some inner peace. He told me that as it is our original nature all I had to do was quieten my overactive and restless mind so that it would no longer disturb it.

When I asked him how my mind disturbed my peace he told me that it was with my negative thoughts, harsh judgments about many things which I did not like, and being discontented with my slow progress on the Path.

Then gradually I began to find a measure of inner peace by being more patient with my progress on it, accepting that our inner growth takes time, and relishing each step forward in my inner journey.

**Even if you lived alone in a Himalayan cave a solid, firm
foundation of inner peace is a great help on the Path.**

More than anything else it is the mind with all its ceaseless vagaries that prevents you from feeling the inner peace and serenity of your inner being. Whenever any thoughts, emotions, or worries try to disturb it remind yourself that they do not belong to you but to the outer I. Mère's advice is:

“See how all the external circumstances have little importance. Why tense and strain yourself to attempt to realize your old conception of the truth? Be more flexible, and more trustful. Your only duty is not to let yourself be troubled by anything...In peace and inner silence, you will become more and more conscious of the constant Presence. In peace and silence the Eternal manifests. Let nothing trouble you and the Eternal will manifest.

**Let the vast peace of the Divine penetrate you entirely
and initiate all your movements.”**

28. Ecstasy - Ananda

The main difference between ecstasy and the divine Ananda is that ecstasy is a transient state of intense happiness or enjoyment that comes and goes according to external circumstances, while the Ananda originates from our Psychic or directly from the Divine and once firmly established is usually permanent. But neither can be there in a life based only, or almost only, on the outer I's mundane concerns.

In a deep Ananda, we have a profound contact with our Psychic, and through it we feel one with everything in the cosmic dance of the divine Lila, one with its blissful ocean of peace and love and this is just the beginning:

In the course of our evolution, the divine Ananda will keep increasing forever up to yet inconceivable levels.

Potentially it is possible to remain in a state of ecstasy or Ananda not only in our meditations and contemplations but all the time and whatever we may be doing, but we should not indulge in it for too long at a time until our nervous system is ready to bear their overwhelming energies. Nisargadatta Maharaj warned about this danger: “You would like something like ecstasy twenty-four hours a day, but a too prolonged one would burn your brain unless it is extremely pure and subtle.”

When the Kabuli was told that a dervish at night went out of the Zawiya to indulge in sex he asked him why he exchanged his great treasure for garbage. This dervish asked him which was this treasure and the Kabuli told him: “Our greatest treasure is Allah's ecstasy which you cannot feel because you prefer lustful garbage!”

This passage by the American writer and professor of comparative mythology Josef Campbell applies more to the Ananda than just to bliss:

“Follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be. By following your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has always been waiting for you, and then the life you are meant to be living is the one you live.”

This “kind of track” is the Flow.

The Tripura Rahasya, a main ancient text of the Advaita Vedanta, also called the Ananda bliss and asked: “If bliss be of the Self, why is it not always felt?”

Mère asked a similar question and when I read it felt as if She had asked it directly me:

**“How it is possible that you do
not feel this ravishment?”**

If we cannot feel it the reason is not just the veil of Maya with all its illusions but that we are not yet present to ourselves, disconnected from our Self instead of remaining centered in it.

Even after being on the Path for many years, I could not yet experience the rapturous divine Ananda that many Bhakti (devotional) Teachers and yogis enjoyed, but eventually had my first hints of it while reading Sri Aurobindo's and Rumi's poetry, contemplating the starry sky on a moonless night, a sunset, a flower, etc. In those enchanted moments, I felt that it was not just me as Vijay enjoying them but “this one beside me walking whom I do not see” through me, and felt like Rumi did when he wrote:

“I am like an ant that got into the granary, ludicrously happy and trying to bring out a grain that’s way too big.”

**Ecstasy and the Ananda are always in your depths
even when you cannot yet experience them.**

To feel them several yogic techniques are there, but apart from some Zen ones they belong to the slow Long Path, while in the Short one we can follow this advice of Kabir in which what he calls sweetness is the Ananda:

“Dive thou into that ocean of sweetness: thus let all errors of life and death flee away.”

This might sound like wishful thinking or futile advice like in pseudo-spiritual posts on Facebook, or perhaps you might have already visualized plunging into this ocean but found yourself still in the dream of your life. If this is the case, it is probably because you tried to dive into it as the outer I, but it is only your inward one who can plunge into it. Mère spoke of the divine Ananda thus:

“If you can imagine...it is just an image...a ray of honey with the capacity to taste itself, and at the same time each drop of honey...and each drop able to taste itself and all others, the whole honeycomb as if it was itself and

**as if each of these drops could at the same time taste itself, all
the others, and the whole honeycomb as if it were itself...”**

29. The Mystery

Besides the Divine, the ultimate Mystery is our Self, and although we are one with its boundless consciousness in us become so limited and fragmented. How did this come to pass? How did we come into being?

The mind breaks when confronted by these questions, and neither science nor philosophy nor religions found the answer because it is hidden in the very core of our being. The Self is elusive, and difficult to grasp because it is the very subject of perception, just as the eye cannot directly see itself. To have a glimpse of it instead of trying to understand it mentally we should shift the focus of our consciousness from the mind to the heart. According to one of the several versions of the Katha Upanishad:

"That which the mind cannot comprehend, nor the senses perceive, nor the words express,

**That which is beyond time, space, and causation,
that eternal Mystery is the Self within us."**

As the Tao Te King Taoist text affirms,

"Looked at but cannot be seen - it is beneath form; listened to but cannot be heard - it is beneath sound; can be held but not touched; it is beneath sensation; these depthless things blend into a single Mystery.

Elusive and ineffable, it is beyond the grasp of the intellect and dwells in the utter stillness of our mind. For every aspect of the Mystery that we unravel others rise up,

challenging our rational mind and reminding us of how little we truly know. Even in the realm of science, each discovery brings about more questions and enigmas like for example the strange, inexplicable behaviors of subatomic particles when observed at the quantum level.

As Einstein said, it was the experience of mystery - even if mixed with fear - that engendered religion. The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious; it is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and science, and whoever can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is a man half dead, and his eyes are closed.

When the Kabuli was asked by a visiting dervish about a cryptic passage of the holy Qur'an about Allah he admonished him thus:

“Trying to understand the mystery of Him with your mind is like trying to cross the desert on a boat, the sea on a camel, or attempting to start a fire with water as its fuel!”

I had my first vivid glimpse of the Mystery after reading these words of Wu Hsin:

“One cannot look at the mystery. One can only look from the mystery because one IS the mystery. The preoccupation with the foreground, the sights, the smells, and the sounds, takes away the attention from the background. Yet, *it is in this very background that the Mystery abides.*”

**This background is the Vastness which is our Source,
never seek the Mystery anywhere else.**

In this Vastness, the finite and the infinite, the tangible and the intangible converge, the veil of the dreamworld dissolves and you will realize that wonder of wonders,

you are the very Mystery that you strove to fathom.

Therefore do not seek the Mystery too directly, seek rather the obstacles that are between it and yourself. Your mind is the main one: become like a child again and the Mystery will come and play with you. As Sri Aurobindo said,

“The mystery of our own being is the most profound and fascinating quest of human existence...Our true nature is not confined to the limitations of the body but is a boundless, eternal consciousness transcending time and space. To unravel this mystery,

we must delve deep within ourselves, explore the recesses of our consciousness, and awaken to the truth of who we really are."

30. The Wonder

A deep sense of wonder inspires us to embark on a quest of self-discovery, venture beyond the familiar known, and enjoy the thrill of gradually discovering who we truly are. Wonder makes us more aware of the magic of each moment and everything. Through it, we feel with a greater intensity such things as the symphony of raindrops on the leaves of a tree, the dance of shadows at twilight, the rhythmic cadence of our breath, the delicate intricacies of a spider's web glistening with droplets of dew, the refreshing scent of vegetation after a very needed rain, etc. But besides the Divine, the utmost wonder is simply that we exist. As the contemporary theoretical physicist Paul Davies said,

the statistical odds of life spontaneously forming from non-living matter are so remote as to be almost inconceivable.

By asking the Unanswered Question, “Who am I?” a sense of wonder is bound to arise and through it we can be in a state of amazement and remain inwardly youthful whatever the age of our body may be. In this blissful state, we can feel the Divine not only in such things as flowers, every dawn and sunset, the laughter of a child, the song of birds, and the dance of light upon the ocean’s waves but also in the most apparently ordinary things.

If there is no wonder in us, we tend to be taken over by shallow thoughts, emotions, trivial pleasures, and transient concerns, and then our life passes away very fast until death without having really lived it.

According to Sri Aurobindo, wonder is the driving force of evolution, the bridge joining the finite and the infinite, the spark of divinity within us that yearns to reconnect with our Source, a beacon of light guiding us on a sacred quest of self-discovery and self-realization.

**To be in a constant state of wonder, step outside your
comfort zone and live with mindfulness and gratitude.**

Regard everything with an open heart; see it through different viewpoints, travel to new places, meet different people, never take anything for granted, and then your life will become a wondrous adventure beyond your wildest dreams. This is how Seyfullah Nizamoglu, a Sufi Turkish seer of the sixteenth century, expressed his sense of wonder:

“Who it is that I am I cannot tell. Amazed am I, so amazed!

'Myself' this self I cannot call. Amazed am I, so amazed!

Who in my eyes is seeing? Who in my heart endures?

Who inhales and exhales in me? Amazed am I, so amazed!...

Who with my tongue speaks out? Who with my ears is listening?

Who with my mind is understanding?

Oh Seyfullah Nizamoglu, hear this: Everything comes from the One.

Abandon yourself to this mighty beauty. I am amazed, I am amazed!

31. Divine Love

There should be two diverse words for human love and the one of the Divine because the difference between them is greater than a little puddle and the whole ocean. Divine love gives itself to the worst of us no less than to the best and has often been compared to the sun which casts its rays equally on a wonderful garden as upon a filthy sewer, and also correlated to how a mother loves her children regardless of which faults they may have.

If we love only a special person or some of those closer to us it is still the human variety. With the love of the Divine, no longer be burdened by the weight of expectations like the desire to be loved in return, and then our love becomes a source of profound inner peace and joy. These words attributed to the recent spiritual leader Sri Chinmoy express how the Divine loves us:

**“I love you beyond words, love you beyond bounds, love you
in ways that you cannot possibly understand.”**

To feel the Divine’s love we must transcend the ego because cannot coexist with it, they are like light and darkness, as the light comes darkness disappears. It is in our power to become free of the ego because as Mère said of all the forces in the universe, love is the most powerful, the most irresistible, and without it the world would fall back into the chaos of unconsciousness.

When someone told Yogananda that it is nice to say that God loves everyone equally but it doesn’t seem right that he gives his love equally to the sinner as to the saint he replied:

“Is a diamond less valuable because it is covered with mud? God sees our soul and knows that we are not our imperfections”

The Divine descended into all the limitations, ignorance, and suffering of the dreamworld to gradually transform and divinize it. The main reason that most cannot feel Its love is that it is not expressed in the vital, emotional, and passionate ways to which we are so accustomed. The boundless, eternal love of the Divine embraces everyone while loving only one person or just a few ties us up in the limitations and shallowness of human love. However, even the egocentric ways through which most love are unconscious yearnings to find the one of the Divine. When a dervish asked the Kabuli how he could best love Allah he replied:

“Love Him like the mother camel loves her newborn, like a sunflower loves the sun, a parched date palm loves the rain, bees love flowers, eagles love the wide open expanse of the sky, and fire loves wood.”

The capacity to love the Divine intensely depends on the degree of our receptivity to it and the extent to which we are no longer identified with the ego and outer I.

Apart from the one of Mère, the best example I have of Divine Love is my beloved soulmate Prema Devi. Her love is like an ocean of peace and serenity, embracing the whole world. Notwithstanding how badly she was treated by her family and others who mercilessly exploited and slandered her, she still loves them. Even when her brother and sister abandoned her when she was in extreme need, she forgave them without any resentment and kept supporting them the best she could.

As she often told our students, without the love of the Divine we would still be in the Stone Age, missing out on the infinite possibilities of our evolution.

These visionary verses of Rumi about divine Love from his poems touched me most:

I have no companion but Love. Love is the whole thing and we are only pieces. Love is the astrolabe of God's mysteries. Love rests on no foundation, means to fly towards a secret sky or diving into a boundless ocean; bridges the chasm between the finite and the infinite, the realm of time and eternity. Is a fire and an intoxication, a breath from heaven. His advice is:

“Don’t look for Love, look for the one in you looking for Love.

You can never lose it and will never leave you.”

I had my first experience of divine Love just after one of Krishnamurti's Talks in Saneen, Switzerland. About a dozen backpackers and I went very early to the large geodesic tent where he spoke and sat on the front bench to be near him, but then the organizers said that it was reserved for some important people and we must vacate it. We didn't and they left, but when the tent was almost full came back with those people and again told us to give our seats to them. Just then Krishnamurti came in, grasped the situation at a glance, and with a gesture and a smile invited us to join him on the platform on which he sat. As it was not big we were very close to him and while he spoke his leg touched my shoulder. He began this Talk by asking the audience :

“What it is that the world needs more than anything else?”

Before anyone in the audience had the time to reply we answered as if with a

single voice: Love! He also asked some other questions like what is the key to happiness and fulfillment, what is that we most need, what is the greatest gift we can give to someone. As he expected, again our answer was: Love!

I did not remember what else he said because I went into a bit of a trance and felt the Divine's love so overwhelmingly that for quite a while I was as if I was no longer there and only Its love was left.

But it was only after meeting Mère that I realized how immense the divine's Love is, and felt like this passage from an unknown Sufi that was forwarded to me:

“Once I had a thousand desires but in my one desire to know You, all else melted away. You are the flame of my heart, the sustenance of my soul. In Your love, I am no longer myself but You, forever You.”

Although you do not remember it, is with the immense power of the divine's Love that once, so long ago, you made the ultimate sacrifice to be born into the dreamworld, forgot who you really are, and became subject to its ills, suffering, conflicts, hardships, and even the death of the body so that you could play your role in the Manifestation. If you fully open your heart to this amazing divine Love and feel its depth, the ecstasy of it to you the world will be radically transformed.

Now please stop a moment reading this text, close your eyes, and feel how awesome is the Divine's love for you; then let these words of Mère deeply resonate in your heart:

“Which weight have our impulses and our desires, our anguishes and violences, our sufferings and conflicts, all these intimate events dramatized so much by our unruly imagination, what do they weigh against this great, this sublime Love over us from the deepest part of our being, indulgent of our weaknesses, correcting our errors, cicatrizing our wounds, bathing our whole being in its regenerating streams?”

32. Satori

A note: In Zen Buddhism, satori is a flash of heightened awareness of what enlightenment can be, a turning over of our consciousness that triggers a radical change of how we see ourselves and the dreamworld bringing about or intensifying a yearning to awaken from the dream of our life.

Satori is the sudden realization of what covertly we already are and with it, we see everything as truly beyond conceptual thinking, without judgment or prejudices like small children do. In it, we begin to discover layers of consciousness that we didn't know beyond our ordinary perception, and then the barriers separating us from our Self begin to dissolve.

Fritjof Capra, a contemporary Austrian-born American physicist and author of books about the comparability between modern physics and Eastern spirituality experienced its satori thus:

“Suddenly I became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance....I "saw" cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses;

**I "saw" the atoms of the elements and those of my body
participating in this cosmic dance of energy.”**

To make a few more examples, this is how the semi-legendary Chinese poet and Zen monk Han Shan experienced his satori: “I took a walk and suddenly stood still, filled with the realization that I had no body or mind. All I could see was one great illuminating whole – omnipresent, perfect, lucid, and serene.”

The great Japanese Zen master Hakuin described his own as a moment of profound clarity in which every element of the world appeared illuminated and unified. Ramana Maharshi's satori consisted of a profound inner stillness and recognition of the essence of consciousness and since then embodied a deep, abiding peace that radiated just through his presence and was felt by all those close to him. Eckhart Tolle described his as a feeling of being pulled into a void, where all his past fears, worries, and thoughts vanished into a state of everlasting peace and joy. Krishnamurti experienced it as a complete transformation in which he felt that was merging with the whole universe and his ego dissolved until only pure awareness was left.

My satori occurred in a broad open-air amphitheater in the center of Auroville. All around the circumference, there are large stone steps on which one can sit, and in its center an urn in the shape of a lotus in which a handful of earth from many countries was put as a symbol of human unity. Now and then collective meditations take place there, but sometimes it is also used to listen to some high music together. One day when I was listening to it about two hundred Aurovilians were there in small groups, couples, and singles.

One day for a while I listened to the music with closed eyes in a spontaneous meditation, and when I opened them saw everyone highlighted by vivid details. Just as a choreographer plans all the details of a dance, the Divine had arranged in a perfect orchestration exactly those who were meant to be there, where they sat and in which posture, their expression, the color, and design of their clothes. The formation of the clouds in the sky, the music being played, and even the noise of a motorbike in the distance all fit harmoniously with everything else.

I saw an older woman raising her arm to greet someone and knew with absolute certainty that her gesture could not have occurred a second before or after it did, and her green T-shirt couldn't have been of a different color or nuance.

A brown dog with a red collar who had been running all over the amphitheater stopped in front of me, stood still, laid down, and looked deeply into my eyes. I had the impression that the Divine was looking at me through its eyes as if saying "Hello Vijay! Now you can see Me!" and I still feel the sacredness of that magical, timeless moment.

**Then I saw the amphitheater as part of a great mystery Play,
the divine Lila, of which the Divine is the choreographer.**

Just then about a dozen very young Aurovilians, mostly girls, went in front of the lotus urn and began practicing Tai Chi fighting moves; but they were just hinted at, never completed, more like a dance of such amazing beauty and harmony that I felt like crying.

A bird of which I don't know the name but am familiar with its singing because there are many of them around my house in the forest where I live alighted on top of the lotus urn and began its usual refrain: "Ho...ho...ho...ho...ho...ho...ho..." Its singing was the last detail needed to complete the choreography, and then the satori took me over and the amphitheater was filled with the ecstasy of the Divine's Presence.

After this experience for a while, I regretted having lived for so long without feeling it, but these words of Rumi helped me to come to terms with it:

“Why should we grieve that we have been sleeping? We are groggy, but let the guilt go. Feel the movement of tenderness all around you, the buoyancy.”

**To become ready for a satori always remember how all
is always part of the Divine’s choreography.**

Then you can become an active participant in the orchestration of your life with the Divine. But unless you are a Zen monk do not put too much time and energy into trying to have a satori, just follow your version of the Path, and when is the right time it will spontaneously come to you. See it like Pema Chödrön did:

"Satori is the experience of awakening to our true nature as pure awareness, beyond the fluctuations of the mind and the changing forms of the world. It is the realization that

**we are not the roles we play, the thoughts we think, the emotions
that we feel, but are the silent witness behind them all”**

33. Enlightenment

A note: the terms enlightenment and Self-Realization are often used as if they were synonymous, but they aren't. Enlightenment mainly consists of a profound shift in consciousness through which we become fully aware, not just mentally know or believe, that our so-called "waking state" is like a dream or a hypnotic trance, while Self-realization or Great Awakening is the irreversible merging with our Self and the Divine.

Many associate enlightenment with marvelous experiences and mystical visions and indeed often brings them about, but what is more important is that it reconnects us with our original nature from which we have become estranged. Through it, we become free from the illusion of separateness and the other limitations of the outer I, but it cannot be reached merely by acquiring knowledge or practicing yogic techniques, although they may help us to become ready to experience it.

Many wish for enlightenment much in the same way in which pursue their mundane desires, but this is a main hindrance to achieving it. To do so we often have to pass through the arduous process of radical psychological changes, and ultimately

**giving up the identifications with all our beliefs, habits,
attachments, and the self-image limiting us.**

These limitations belong to a part of the outer I which is prevalent in most of us and rightly sees enlightenment as its end and resists it to the utmost.

About how to become enlightened, since ancient times the Vedas and the Upanishads found many ways to do so: merging our consciousness with the universal one, dissolving the sense of separation from the Divine; realizing that our Self is already

enlightened, practicing Atman Vichara, a steadfast inquiry about our essential nature.
But perhaps

**the best way is to no longer identify ourselves with our body,
mind and emotions but with who in us perceives them.**

More than with mental definitions, enlightenment is best described by allegories, metaphors, and poetry like for example these few verses of Wu Hsin:

“The lightning flashes.

The world vanishes.

I remain.

The world returns as I.”

It has been said that enlightenment is like cleaning a soiled shirt: nothing is added to it, only the dirt is removed. This dirt is the negative aspect of the outer I, but as we have no super detergent to wash it away we should deal with it as with a robe with too many dirt spots: instead of cleaning them up one by one just get a new one.

When the Buddha was asked what he had gained by his enlightenment replied that he had not gained anything from it but realized something that had always been within him. This “something” is our Self. Bodhidharma had a similar realization: after becoming enlightened he kept laughing and laughing because

**he saw how ridiculous his search had been:
what he sought had always been in him.**

Several Zen masters challenged the concept of enlightenment as an achievement by affirming that nobody can get enlightened because the "I" who wishes to gain it is illusory, a construct of the mind made up by Maya that is not real.

No Enlightenment?

But several Zen techniques like the koans, the Zazen and Shikantaza meditations, various techniques of Yoga, etc, aim to achieve it.

The reason for such a contradiction is that those affirming that there is no enlightenment refer to the outer I who can never reach it, while those who recognize its reality refer to our inward one.

Jung made a very important point when he said that one does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but *by making the darkness conscious*. Some of the original darkness from which the Divine created the dreamworld is still there and ultimately

**it is this darkness that must be enlightened in us,
literally filled with light, transmuted into it.**

I had my first hint of what enlightenment can be after one of Krishnamurti's Talks. As I was leaving the huge geodesic dome where he spoke many were chatting away, blah blah blah, instead of reflecting on what they had been told. Suddenly it was as if their voices had been boosted to a deafening level, but soon returned to normal and I was filled with such immense peace and serenity as I had never experienced before. The chatting all around was still going on but no longer bothered me, and although I didn't yet know about the divine's play of Lila I felt that the Divine was having fun playing it through their babbling and my initial reaction to it, teaching me to have patience and equanimity in all circumstances. I also became aware that even their chatting had its place in the Divine's Manifestation.

Did I get enlightened?

No, I wasn't ready yet, but every glimpse of enlightenment, however brief and partial, helps our Awakening ascent.

Once I took care of Donovan, a very special six-year-old child when his mother was not well. He went to sleep when it was dark – we had no electricity in our hut and had run out of candles - and at dawn excitedly woke me up and said:

“Vijay, look! Vijay, look! All the darkness has gone away, now there is light! The darkness is no more!”

Yet another missed enlightenment opportunity!

As a last example, once I saw two butterflies having a lot of fun flying around very fast in our garden: they turned round and round each other, flew very close for a while then went in different directions but soon rejoined, etc. There was such immense joy in them that I felt it as well and had a profound hint of what enlightenment can be. But, alas, the mind distracted me by saying that I should add this experience to the chapter of this book about the Divine Lila, and then this hint of it faded away.

**To become enlightened create a clear, uncluttered
space in your mind free from all its distractions.**

Take care of this space like a gardener tends his garden by removing the weeds around the flower plants. As you are on the Path, enlightenment is your destiny: do not allow anything to distract you from it, deeply quieten your mind, and let the divine guidance lead you to it. Wu Hsin made this very important point:

“The enlightenment you seek wants to happen. It is seeking you as much, if not more than you are seeking it. The only thing that needs to be done is to get out

of your way. The only impediment to enlightenment is that the ego wants it but can't have it because it would be its end, it is a want that cannot be fulfilled."

**It cannot be fulfilled for the ego and outer I
but it can be for our inward one.**

34. The Great Awakening

A note: To understand the difference between Self-realization and the Great Awakening, imagine being an actor on a stage playing the role of Hamlet: Self-realization is like at the end of the play remembering that you are not Hamlet but an actor playing This role, while the Great Awakening means becoming aware that you are not only the actor but also the audience, the whole play, and the Scriptwriter of your life on the stage of the dreamworld as well.

Before the Great Awakening, we are a bit like tree roots working in the darkness under the ground, unaware of the trunk above it growing in the light and of all its branches, leaves, flowers...

The Great Awakening often occurs when we feel as if we have been trying to break through an invisible wall enclosing us for so long that the strain of it has become unbearable.

**Then a radical reversal takes place and we emerge at last
from our apparent “I” into the Vastness beyond it.**

A metaphor that many made about this is the one of a droplet of water that by dissolving the bubble of its surface merges with the sea and becomes forever one with it. But it is not always so simple because this transition can be like an earthquake making our self-image collapse, feel stripped of everything, and left with nothing, disoriented and adrift in a state both terrifying and liberating.

We also become aware that not only our life had been a dream, but *as we perceived them* so were our parents, children, partners, friends, etc. This may be very hard to

acknowledge until we realize that it is only their outer I that is like a dream, not who they covertly are.

Like in the case of Enlightenment, many seekers expect that the Great Awakening will bring them some peace, happiness, and a better life. Of course, it will, but if this is the most important aspect of it for them shows that they are seeking it on behalf of their ego and outer I, which can no more Awaken than our shadow on the ground could. Wu Hsin called the Great Awakening Liberation and pointed out that:

“The individual desires Liberation. But Liberation from what? Liberation from the pain of being an individual. Can you see why Wu Hsin is laughing so hard?”

The Great Awakening is not for the individual
but from the individual.

Some assume that reaching the Great Awakening requires too many strenuous efforts, and on the Long Path, some cannot be avoided, but are a small price to be paid for it. Others have no hope of attaining it because they feel unworthy of such an accomplishment, but fortunately for us achieving the Great Awakening does not depend on whether we deserve it or not.

The main hindrance to reaching it is our identification with the outer I, and it cannot be overcome by our mind because it is too identified with it. On the contrary, it is by keeping the mind focused inwardly, devoid of all thoughts, that we can feel more intensely our yearning for it, for the truth, what is real, the Divine, and then the outer I begins to lose all its power over us.

After The Great Awakening, we will find it hard to believe that we lived for so long in a dream, not knowing who we are, enduring so many struggles to finally arrive... where unknowingly we had always inwardly been. The dreamworld will still be there, but we will feel like in the Bible Jacob did when he awakened from his sleep and said:

“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not...How awesome is this place! This is none other but the house of God and the gate of Heaven.”

Some may also feel like as a Sufi told me Rumi did when he attained his Great Awakening:

“For years out of emptiness my existence I drew. Then with one stroke, an arm’s swing done was the work.

**Free of all that I had been became I, of lethal
fear and of such terrible wanting free.”**

When I found the Path, over sixty years ago, in the West there were not many books about it as now, and several traditional ones depicted Self-realization as a kind of retirement, akin to saying: "I did so many meditations and austerities, renounced nice food, meat, fish, alcohol, comforts, and sex, but now my work is done and I will rest and enjoy the Divine’s Ananda for all eternity."

I felt that this could not possibly be all, and felt such a relief when I was told that as Mère said after our Self-realization.

**our inner journey will never end and we will forever
discover always vaster, boundless horizons.**

Sometimes I was asked: “But what if this Great Awakening is just a fantasy and we just shift from an ordinary dream to a much better one without waking up from it?”

Indeed quite a few seekers fall into the illusion of being already Awakened when are still far from it, but often this doubt originates from the hostile forces trying to discourage us from the Path.

**Notwithstanding whatever flaws you might still have
the Great Awakening is your inalienable birthright.**

The sign that you are becoming closer to it is that apart from progressing on the Path, helping the divine’s Manifestation and others you no longer desire anything, are joyful and loving, and have always more insights and intimations guiding you. If at times the outer I still takes you over do not be discouraged but remember these words from the book “A Course in Miracles”:

“Your sleep will not withstand the call to awake. There will be nothing left of your dream when you hear Him *because then you will be awake.*”

Then you will no longer feel that you are in the dreamworld but that it is within you. Mère also called the Great Awakening Self-realization and said that:

“The journey of self-realization is a journey of love. It is the discovery of the infinite love that resides within our hearts and the recognition of the divine Love that sustains all creation. As we awaken to the truth of our being, we become channels of love, radiating light and compassion to all beings.

**Self-realization is the realization of love as the essence
of our being, the ultimate reality of the universe."**

Dear reader, remember the koan of the two tigers mentioned in the first part of this book and its question: "What will you do?" Although not many find the answer it is surprisingly easy: the only thing left to do in your life...

IS TO WAKE UP!