

IMPORTANCE OF FORMING INDEPENDENT OPINIONS

Greetings, my dear friends. God bless all of you.

You all seek the kingdom of God, the kingdom of love. Yet, you encounter innumerable difficulties with other human beings despite being full of good will and aware of the basic spiritual truths and the importance of love. These obstacles arise from the blindness in which you are encased and from your lack of understanding of the blindness of others. The blindness of others hurts you, and in your own blindness you are unaware of how much and how often you hurt the other person. If you can keep this mutual blindness in mind, my dear ones, it will constitute the basic steppingstone for proceeding further.

With that in mind, you will be aware of how your own blindness, and not the other one's, keeps you in your misery about a real or imagined injustice. True, something may seem or even be unjust. But you will regard it differently when you realize what I am saying here. Whenever you suffer because of other people, the others are no more blind than you are -- and often even less! Understanding this, you may begin to look into your own blindness. You always make the mistake of battling against the other's blindness and lack of understanding instead of trying to eliminate your own. You do not realize your error because you see your own case so "clearly" and continue to strengthen it by thinking in reverse. Bearing this tendency in mind, you will automatically cultivate an objectivity, which is one of the fundamental requirements for unselfishness and the capacity to love.

The more you concentrate on how you have been hurt, the more difficult will it be for you to leave out your own little ego and see the other person's point of view and to accept that which you cannot alter. The more you battle against all that you cannot change -- which is everything and everybody except yourself -- the unhappier will you become. Unhappiness must follow whether or not you are "right" and whether or not you find someone to blame for a real or supposed wrong done to you.

The unhappier you become because of other people's wrongdoing, the less you accept that which you cannot change. That does not mean you should accept wrong in a sick and masochistic way, wanting to be tortured or wronged just to satisfy your guilt feelings. Accept another's wrong in a healthy attitude of realizing that the wrong can never do you any harm in reality, but only so long as you prevail in the wrong attitude.

Every crisis, every breakdown, is caused by a basic wrong attitude. You need never suffer a breakdown if you change the attitude in time. If you truly want to realize this all-important truth, you can protect yourself from crises and breakdowns. It is never the outer circumstances that lead to them, but your wrong attitude in such circumstances. In reality a breakdown is a childish temper

tantrum -- the degree is stronger, but the basic attitude is the same. I discussed temper tantrums last time in connection with one of the fundamental vicious circles in the human being.

When a breakdown occurs, the subconscious says, "You cannot do this to me; it is too much. I will be well again if the circumstances I abhor change to my liking." This, my friends, is really and truly what it amounts to. But this is the wrong attitude. Self-will prevails to a strong degree when this emotional climate exists. The right attitude would be to turn about inwardly and seek what can be learned from the painful situation. You all know well enough by now that no painful situation can come into existence from which an important lesson cannot be learned.

An entity going from one incarnation into another with an attitude in which self-will and self-pity prevail, tries to force the world to his or her own liking. When this cannot be done by power, other means are sought, such as sickness or a breakdown. Thus the entity violates his or her soul currents to such an extent that finally, in the incarnation in which this attitude culminates, the person will be predisposed to insanity. This is one of the basic reasons for insanity. I do not say it is the only one, but I might add that all other conditions creating insanity are, to some degree at least, connected with it. We wish that this truth about the background of insanity would be more fully recognized in your world.

The less you adjust to the world around you, to conditions that you cannot change, the more your life force goes into the wrong channel, becoming destructive instead of creative and regenerating -- and therefore the unhappier and more disharmonious you are bound to become. It begins with very disharmonious and rebellious moods, encasing you more and more in a wall of separateness, egocentricity and blindness. These qualities make you commit deeds and think thoughts that are bound to bring you unfavorable results, which create a vicious circle as you rebel even more strongly against the world around you -- blind to how you caused the negative results. The next step might be continuous tantrums in one form or another, and finally a breakdown in the hidden hope that this will change people and circumstances. And when you come back to the earth plane life after life to learn just that but do not, insanity will finally result.

The principle of insanity is the same as that of the mild tantrum. The basic attitude is the same both from a spiritual and psychological viewpoint; only the degree varies. The direction of the soul currents and the thoughts and emotions are the same in essence.

Sanity and emotional health depend largely on the ability and willingness to adjust to any undesired condition by finding out what can be learned from it -- by giving up the battle against it, relaxing inwardly, and concentrating on the cause in you that brought it about. This requires a certain humility and flexibility. It dissolves rigid self-love that cannot take life as it is and ignores the fact that you have molded your life. You often do seek the answer in yourself but still do not adjust in the right way. You seek within yourself in the wrong way; subtly you seek self-justification, and you go too far in looking for an answer. The real answer is much closer than you think or are willing to see. So the only solution is to turn about and realize that first you must change before you can expect life to change for you. If you are truly willing, the answer will come to you. And perhaps the best answer will be given to you by the very people who have hurt you.

If you, my dear friends, who are all so sincere, will try this approach, you will reach the inner freedom you are striving for. You must reach it in that way. If you can give up the slight

satisfaction in being hurt and wronged -- yes, there is a satisfaction in it, added to the pain -- and exchange it for the attitude described above, a much greater, fuller, and more durable satisfaction will be yours without the pain and disharmony. You will free yourself from the chains of blindness and automatically increase your understanding for others -- which must eliminate your pain!

Such words have been spoken many times but they need repetition for many of you, my dear friends. I say this with all the love I have for each one of you. I can promise you relief, clarification, liberation if you try.

We shall now discuss the subject of opinions. It becomes increasingly important on this path to find out just what your true opinions are. Many of you are completely unaware you have opinions that you have accepted ready-made, without asking yourself whether they were really yours, and why.

Human beings are often so involved in their emotional problems that they remain unaware of holding opinions not their own, and why they do so. It is beside the point that the opinion you hold may be objectively valid. If it is not your own, arrived at through mature deliberation, it is more harmful to the soul than a wrong opinion honestly reached. This may surprise you, but I will try to show why it is better to have a wrong opinion if it is really your own than a right one if it is not.

In the first case you may be mistaken. Why not? You are human beings and therefore fallible in judgment. An honest mistake, as I always say, is much better than a lack of courage and all the other sick and weak reasons that make you cling to an opinion not honestly arrived at.

Why do you voice opinions that are not your own? One possibility is, simply, laziness and inertia. Anything that does not touch you personally is not important enough to make an effort for - - in this case the effort to think independently for the sake of truth. Hence you quickly adopt the opinions of others. It is one thing not to have an opinion at all about a subject that is neither important nor interesting to you, but another if you hold other people's opinions.

Inferiority feelings are another reason for not having your own opinions. You are so certain that other people know better than you that you rely on their opinions rather than on your own. By going on in this way you create a vicious circle: the more you hold opinions not your own, the more you unconsciously despise yourself for it. And the more you despise yourself, the greater the apparent need to adopt other people's opinions. Thus you see can how every wrong inner condition creates a vicious circle, apart from the great vicious circle I discussed last time. The only way to break the circle is to have the courage to examine the subject, to review it freely and independently. If then you arrive at a different view and have the courage to live up to it, at the price of differing from your environment, you will automatically respect yourself a lot more -- and thus begin to break this particular vicious circle. On the other hand, if you arrive at the same opinion again, but this time it has really become your own, your courage and labor to free yourself from the yoke of your own weakness will have the same positive effect.

Another motive for holding opinions not your own is a desire to conform. The desire for conformity has a few subdivisions. For instance, the child or the immature person feels different from her or his surroundings, has a feeling of not belonging, of being isolated and unique in a negative sense. This is why all children want to be like other children and feel deeply ashamed about

their imagined difference. The maturing of the soul will change this tendency, but until then a person will be inclined to hold on to others' opinions.

Another motive for conforming and therefore not daring to seek one's own opinions is in the area where you still rebel against authority. Since you still crave to belong, and your rebellion is not only hidden but is limited to certain realms of your life, you want to make up for the rebellion by conforming to your environment in other ways.

Still another motive for holding others' opinions is to cover up the exact wish that you deny yourself by adopting the opposite opinion. Because your desire does not conform to public opinion, you are convinced of its wickedness. Added to this is your general guilt feeling that arises from the main vicious circle. Hence, you are compelled to have an opinion that is not in harmony with your emotions and unconscious desires. Whether you consider these emotions and unconscious wishes desirable or undesirable is not the issue here. But under no circumstances do you eliminate possibly wrong desires by conforming outwardly, by adopting the opposite opinion out of fear and weakness. Such opinions are often particularly rigid -- and even violent.

In all these instances, you violate your personality; you lack the courage to be yourself and to arrive at your own conclusions. You sell out your truth for an imagined personal advantage, which increases your self-contempt, though this is usually quite unconscious.

I might add that often you hold an opinion only because it represents the exact opposite of a hated and rejected authority's, be it a parent or someone else. In this case your motive is not conformity but the exact opposite. It is defiance, rebellion, and hate that make you hold the opinion. You are thus just as much in bondage as by conforming. You are just as dependent.

Now you can surely see how harmful it is to hold opinions that you did not arrive at independently, that are not free from your emotional involvement. Find out which of these motives apply to you and bind you. Perhaps a combination of them applies to you. In some instances one may be predominant, but the others may still be present.

The danger is that your rationalizations -- the way you may succeed in justifying your opinions -- may hide the weak and dependent motives. Do not forget that the validity of the opinion is the not the point here. What you expound may be right -- but why do you really have the opinion? How did you get it? What are your inner motives for holding the opinion? This is the difficulty in the work. The validity of the opinion may be so strong that you cannot find the emotional and subjective reasons behind it. Finding your motives requires the utmost self-honesty, and a little more. It also requires an understanding of all subtleties described here and a deep-rooted goodwill to apply them to yourself -- to detect the slight emotional flavor in your reactions to some of your opinions. By listening to or feeling your reactions you will be able to get to their roots. Beware of your good reasoning capacity! The more successful you are, the graver is the danger that you are hiding your true motives.

I suggest that you take certain general subjects on which you have strongly formed opinions and examine them in the work you are doing by yourself and with your coworker. Take politics, religion, your idea about love and sex, or whatever it is that concerns everyone to some extent. What do you really think about it? Why? Think whether you would have the same opinion if you

had grown up in a different environment, if different influences around you had prevailed, or if your life circumstances were different? This self-questioning is healthy because it will give you a more objective outlook.

One can find justification for almost any viewpoint. There is also always a point in the opposite view. Try to see it. And then try to detect how subjective you may have been so far. It will already be great progress if you can admit that you have a personal stake in holding on to your opinion -- that it is not based solely on objective deliberations. This self-honesty is of great benefit to the soul.

Are there any questions about this subject?

QUESTION: There is something I don't fully understand. It seems to me that time is so extremely limited that one could not collect enough information and analyze it sufficiently to arrive at an adequate opinion on many subjects. And therefore one is compelled, consciously, to adopt an opinion on an emotional basis.

ANSWER: In the first place, my dear, let me ask you this question. Are you really aware of instances when you have adopted an opinion on an emotional basis? I doubt this very much.

QUESTION: Well, I am sure that there are many occasions when one isn't aware of that. But there are others when one is fully aware. For instance, when the subject is not of sufficient interest to devote what little time there is.

ANSWER: The moment you are emotionally influenced, the subject is of importance. It is unimportant only when you cannot be emotionally touched. There are many questions that cannot touch you emotionally. If it is not important for you, you can say, "I do not know." Therefore you will have no opinion. For instance, in the case of a scientific subject it would not be difficult for you to say that you do not know. It does not touch you personally. However, a scientist working in a particular field may be emotionally involved. Or, if not, the subject is still important to him. Therefore, he must study it. But you may say that you hold no particular opinion on the subject, except when you are too proud to admit that there is a subject that you know nothing about. In that case you do become emotionally involved. And this will lead you to adopt an opinion you know nothing or too little about. For it is perfectly true that you cannot possibly study all subjects in existence. I did not say that it is necessary to have opinions on all subjects. I merely said that where you have opinions, they should be your own.

Furthermore, the moment one realizes that one's opinion is based on emotion and therefore subjective -- even if it should happen to be objectively true as well -- this realization already is a great deal. Many people are utterly unaware of this. In fact, this is the reason I spoke on the subject tonight -- to help you find out just that. Perhaps the best you will be able to do for quite a long time is to make such realizations. You cannot become completely objective all at once. To reach such detachment, you must go through the stage where you realize that you cannot be objective in certain areas of life. It is healthy to say, "Here I am not objective, for I am emotionally involved. For the moment, my opinion is such and such, but I realize it is subjective, and therefore I take it with a grain of salt. I do not take it too seriously." The danger is when you are convinced that your

opinion is completely objective and you expound it with very good arguments, while being utterly unaware that notwithstanding all the good arguments you are deeply and subjectively involved.

QUESTION: Did I misunderstand then in interpreting what you said to mean that one should have opinions when one is not qualified to have any?

ANSWER: You certainly did misunderstand. There is nothing wrong with saying about as many subjects as you wish that you do not know. On the contrary, that is fine. However, when you feel disharmonious whenever an opinion contrary to yours is being offered, when you feel angry inwardly or when you feel the great need to convince others that your opinion is right, then you should examine where and how you are emotionally involved. It would be very foolish if I were to advise you to have an opinion about every conceivable subject.

QUESTION: What about the problem of being unable to form an opinion on a subject on which the majority seems to have an opinion?

ANSWER: That does not matter. The fact that many people have opinions -- often not their own -- is no reason that you must have opinions on subjects that you did not study. There is nothing wrong in that. Only if it becomes a pattern: when a subject is of importance to you and you cannot form an opinion, then you should look into yourself. If you examine the pattern, it will reveal something to you. You will find out why you are unable to form an opinion. What are the psychological reasons behind your inability? It could be a fear of committing yourself. It could be that a person constantly refrains from having opinions in order to avoid friction, to be liked and "respected," to never differ from other people, or avoid a certain responsibility. From the moment you have a conviction, it entails a certain responsibility. That may be behind the inability to form an opinion. From a little and seemingly unimportant symptom you may find out something infinitely more important. By reviewing your life from this new viewpoint, you will find certain clues about the hidden reasons why you hold opinions not your own or why you are incapable -- I should rather say, unwilling -- to form an opinion for psychological and emotional reasons that are still hidden.

QUESTION: After death, the physical body disintegrates. And after that one of the subtle bodies does. Is that the etheric or the astral body?

ANSWER: Well, my dear, it is unnecessary to go into this here. There is enough written about it in occult and esoteric literature. Besides, it is really not important.

QUESTION: That was just part of the question I had in mind. If the spiritual body is just one body, does that have any feeling and emotional personality?

ANSWER: Yes, but in a very different way. Certainly, every spiritual entity, as created by God, is a personality and therefore has feelings, reactions, and opinions. But they differ greatly from the unpurified ones of the human personality. Your own higher self, the divine being living within yourself, registers, feels, and sees, but as differently as your feeling is different from a child's. Your reaction would be quite different from the reaction of a child in certain circumstances. If the child's favorite doll is broken, it will think the world has come to an end. The child cannot see that this is no tragedy. As an adult, you will sympathize with the child, you will understand its sorrow, but you will not be affected by the loss in the same way. A similar relationship exists between your

unpurified personality and your divine personality. The latter is watching and observing your outer personality. It often differs in the opinion of what is good for you. It tries to lead you on the right way. Sometimes you let yourself be guided, but sometimes you do not. Your self-will and blindness stand in the way.

The fact that your divine personality does not feel and react in the same way as your outer personality does not mean, however, that it does not feel and react, too. But the feelings are refined and much wiser. The aim is much higher. It has an infinitely wider, longer-range outlook.

QUESTION: We are told that love is something that grows. However, if we don't possess too much of it and sometimes wonder what is the right thing to do, we still feel we must do the right thing, even if we are not quite ready to do it. We feel we should do it because of love. Is it then right for us to do it as a "must"?

ANSWER: One cannot generalize. It depends on what the case is and how the "must" is executed. A compulsive "must" is, of course, not advisable. But let us say that in the course of your progress in self-recognition on this path you realize that a certain behavior on your part, being good and right in itself, was done without your feelings sustaining it. You have actually done the right thing out of weak and sick motives -- bargaining for a reward, pacifying a guilt feeling, or nurturing a desire for self-destruction. All this adds up to compulsion. Now, depending on the issue, in one instance it may be right to discontinue doing the right thing until you are ready to do it wholeheartedly. But in other instances your desire may still be so crude that to express it openly might bring harm to others and, of course to yourself. This you recognize. A part of your personality wishes to avoid doing harm; another part does not. So far, you have done the right thing out of mixed motives -- partly out of the good ones, but partly to cover up the sick and weak motives with the right action. By recognizing these facts you will, of course, continue to do the right thing, but now you will be aware of your inner motives and not deceive yourself into believing that your motives are all good and pure. Then the compulsion will be gone. The act will remain the same, but the motive will have changed through the recognition, even though you are still incapable of having a pure motive of love.

When you discover that your former motives were compulsive and not entirely genuine, there is the danger that you will fall into the opposite extreme and give vent to the crude feelings. Having performed a right act out of wrong motives, you will think the proper change is to do the wrong thing out of the "right" motive, because then you are at least honest. You do not have to commit a harmful and selfish act to be honest. It is sufficient that you recognize that your motives are not yet pure, that you are as yet incapable of having a pure motive of love. Besides, it is never your whole personality that wishes to commit the selfish act. It can only be a part of you. In the interim stage, after you cease to act in self-deception and compulsion and before you are capable of being one with your divine self, you may continue to do the right act while realizing how you feel and that your bargaining for certain results should stop. This will bridge the gap until you reach the perfection of letting your divine self manifest. That is the way to learn love: first, be honest with yourself about your past and present motives. Second, continue the right act for itself even though you cannot love yet. To do the wrong act is being no more true to yourself than was the right act so far. Because as long as you are not pure in this respect, your personality is always divided. When you are one with yourself you will be completely loving. Until such time, you should recognize where you fall short of this aim, but that does not mean to give up the right act. In this way, gradually, something will

grow and bloom in you. By doing the right act without self-deception, in the hope that one day you will be capable of feeling entirely at one with yourself in doing the act, you will develop the force of light and love in your soul. Do you understand?

QUESTION: Yes, that is very clear insofar as it goes from one to the other. We are told in one of the past lectures that no human being can love completely or be perfect. Then how much love can a person expect to receive from another person? Can we expect to be loved with all our faults?

ANSWER: The expectancy of love may be a hindrance to having it. For what does that mean? It means that there is still a bargaining going on in the person. It means that you actually say deep down, "Yes, I would be willing to love if it were safe. And it would be safe only if I were sure to be loved as much as I love." It takes a great deal of searching until one comes to understand that people are capable of many different kinds of love. By such understanding, you will come to the point when you can love without expecting it back from the same source. You will recognize that a little gesture may have a greater meaning from one person than a great gesture from another. It is so relative, and your sense of it can be cultivated.

You asked, "Can we expect to be loved with our faults?" Perhaps the best attitude would be that you expect to be loved with your faults as much as you love others with their faults. That is the way it will be, my friends, exactly. This may sound disciplinarian, but it is not. It is the way the magnetism of the soul currents work. In the measure that you are intolerant of the other person's faults, in that measure will you yourself be judged, and you will reap love to exactly that degree. There is no other way.

QUESTION: On the subject of right action, how can a person who is so bound that he or she is compulsive know a right action from a wrong one?

ANSWER: In many instances it is not possible. In many it is. There are many occasions when it is quite clear that one alternative is right and the other is selfish.

COMMENT: We have learned by now that very often what we think of as love, in our terminology on earth, actually amounts to hatred.

ANSWER: In cases that are not so clear, you cannot and should not make any major decisions anyway until you become much clearer about yourself. I was speaking of the little everyday acts where a person is confronted with the choice of an obviously selfish or unselfish act. The other problem you bring up is a different subject altogether. I suggest that we take it up next time more extensively. They are two different questions.

And now, my dear friends, be you all blessed in the Name of God. Go on your path. Continue, and God's strength and light must always come to you, even though at times things may look hopeless and bleak. But do not ever forget that as long as you are willing, God's light comes to you again. The sun will shine again. So I bless all of you here. Be in peace, my friends, be in God!

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