

Oneness in the World

Craig Ian Ruff

Booklet IV

**The Awareness:
Spiritual Understanding Not Intellectual Information**

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Dear Reader, these series of booklets have become quite an adventure for myself and for my editor Mr. Steve Klein. We spend quite a bit of time emailing each other and, when possible, talking on the phone when I am in the USA about the ideas I want to communicate. Our exchanges make me reflect more deeply than before about my spiritual life so that I am challenged to present as clear as I can the spiritual problems we all face and share my experience in confronting these problems. By the time the booklet is done both of us have gotten so much out of the process that we feel well rewarded. After we are done, I hand the manuscript over to Ms. Laurel Magrini who finds ways to make the text even more readable and clear. I genuinely am so thankful to both of them who are life-long friends. I am glad they can share in this experience with me. Also my sincere thanks go to Ms. Karina Page who made it possible for me to hand this booklet to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

Mistaken Assumptions

THE BEGINNING OF THE END—UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

ENTERING INTO THE REALITIES OF INNER LIFE

Critical Thoughtfulness—A Clear Beginning

Putting Critical Thoughtfulness Into Action

First Fruits of Critical Thoughtfulness

LIVING FAITH – A STEP BEYOND THE INTELLECT

What is living faith?

The Relationship of Living Faith and Critical Reason

The Growth of Living Faith through Pure Intuition

Intuition – Meher Baba’s guidance in our lives

THREE AVENUES TO SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

THE HEART’S KNOWLEDGE OF TRUE VALUES

OVERCOMING THE INTELLECT THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF
TRUE AND FALSE VALUES

RELATIVE VALUES – THE WAY TO THE HEART

PURIFYING THE INTELLECT

WHAT IS NECESSARY IS NOT WHAT IS IMPORTANT

CONTROLLING THE SUBCONSCIOUS THROUGH TRUE VALUES

HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE IN UPHOLDING TRUE VALUES

DOWN TO BRASS TACKS

THE REAL RESPONSIBILITY

PREFACE

One of my duties at the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Office was to read out the daily correspondence to Eruch. Most of it was from Baba lovers around the world who would write questions to the Mandali about how to get closer to Beloved Meher Baba.

The Trust Office Mandali not only replied to these questions but also responded every day to the questions of the residents and the pilgrims who would come to the Trust Office. In witnessing the Mandali's various responses to these questions, I observed that sometimes their reply would be of a general nature and sometimes the response applied only to a particular person.

The questions never stopped and, I too had so many questions even after working with the Mandali for many years. Although the Mandali were the best examples of how to live Meher Baba's message of love and truth, my own search for how to get closer to Beloved Baba reached the point where I needed specific guidance that the Mandali seemed reluctant to give. I felt that I had no choice other than to read the "Discourses" again very slowly and carefully from beginning to end, searching through Beloved Baba's words—His explanations, His warnings and His guidance.

As I went through the "Discourses," sentence by sentence, I tried to honestly compare what Baba was saying with what I had been thinking and doing. I was surprised to discover that many of my assumptions about spiritual life, which I had taken to be based on Baba's words, were in fact mistaken. Painfully, I began to recognize that some of my most fundamental ideas of how I should live a spiritual life were not in line with what Meher Baba was saying in the "Discourses."

In fact, I was stunned by this realization. All those years, even living next to the Mandali, had not been enough to make me see the falsity of my beliefs. No wonder I had reached a dead end in my spiritual life and felt I needed more guidance.

As I re-read the “Discourses” in this way, I discovered that there was much more practical guidance in them than I had recognized earlier. Too often in my earlier readings, it seemed as if Meher Baba’s solution to the problems we face is to have qualities which only advanced souls nearing God-realization possess. On closer inspection, however, I discovered that when Meher Baba uses the word "realization," He often is referring to a *process* of realization. This process ultimately leads us to a deeper understanding, which is *realizing* something through experience and not just through the intellect. As a result I became free to begin my own process of realizing the truth of Baba’s words by putting them into practice and not just thinking about them.

When I started this process, I kept a journal of the new perceptions that came to me through this exercise. I would even read them out to Eruch. This was a period of true growth for me. I found that I was more genuinely focused on what was spiritual according to Meher Baba's words and not according to my misconceived assumptions. After several years, I thought that I would share these thoughts and perceptions in book form, calling the book, “The Moment Within.”

As the years passed, I continued to confront my ideas of spirituality by repeatedly comparing them to Meher Baba's words. This remains an ongoing process that is, at times, painful, as well as revelatory. As the Mandali aged and a future without them awaited us, I felt that I must dare myself and put down in writing what I felt was important about living Beloved Baba’s message of love and truth after living with the Mandali and undergoing my own process of change and growth.

My first booklet was called “In His Trust” and it dealt more specifically with Trust life and activities but certainly could be applied by anyone, anywhere. It had three sections: The Individual, The Trust, and The Community.

After completing that booklet in 1996, I felt compelled to write more. I wrote a manuscript entitled, “Mastery In Servitude” and read it out to Eruch and Bhau. That work stayed as a manuscript, however, because one Sunday morning before going to Meherazad, I had a flash of a thought where I suddenly saw how all of that material could be enlarged upon and presented in the form of seven booklets. I quickly jotted down the titles that had come to me and decided to call the whole series, “Oneness in the World.”

Thus, I started the process of writing, “Oneness in the World.” The booklets that have been completed and printed are: Booklet I, The

Relationship – Mastery In Servitude; Booklet II, The Transformation – The New Humanity; and Booklet III, The Service – Work for the Spiritual Freedom of Humanity.

This brings us to the current booklet IV, entitled, “The Awareness – Spiritual Understanding Not Intellectual Information.” But as it turns out, in the last booklet I ended up talking quite a bit about Spiritual Understanding. That's one thing that makes this whole process so engaging. Although I always think I have a good idea of what I'm going to say when I start writing a booklet, I soon discover that a deep examination of Baba's words reveals aspects of the subject which I had never considered.

I start off looking at Meher Baba's words in a new way and end up looking at my self in a new way. There is no better example than the previous booklet on service. When I started booklet III, I had been reading the “Discourses” for decades and yet somehow I had never really grasped how deeply Meher Baba connects spiritual understanding with service. I thought I knew what selfless service was all about but my assumptions did not even remotely include something called spiritual understanding. As it turns out, Meher Baba makes it very clear that for selfless service to have any effectiveness, either for those being served, or for the one doing the service, it must be based on "spiritual understanding."

So now, as I started this booklet, I thought, "What is there to say about Spiritual Understanding that wasn't covered in the last booklet?" As it turns out, there is quite a lot. I was surprised to discover that, in addition to pointing out the necessity for spiritual understanding, Meher Baba also lays out a very clear and practical guideline for how we can actually achieve it. What an exhilarating breakthrough this was! And that is what this booklet will be about.

Mistaken Assumptions

Let's start with the intellect. It is common belief, and one I used to subscribe to, that we have to go beyond the intellect to live a spiritual life. When I first came to Meher Baba, and for some years after that, I thought this meant that we had to enter the planes before our lives could truly be said to be spiritual. But in reading the “Discourses” carefully, I found that Meher Baba gives us numerous practical hints and considerable direction that sets us on a course of going beyond the intellect while using it in our daily life.

In fact, Meher Baba tells us that the way to begin to seek spiritual understanding is through a “purely intellectual search for God—the hidden spiritual Reality.” He validates using our intellects to find Him by confirming that it does have “its reverberations in the practical life of a person.” In other words it works.

Yet, at the same time, Meher Baba says in “The New Humanity” that, “Spiritual experience involves more than can be grasped by mere intellect ...It is a form of perception which is absolutely unclouded, and so practical that it can be lived every moment of life and expressed in every-day duties.”

This is exactly the sort of paragraph that made me believe that the intellect had to be transcended for spiritual progress to occur. But the key is that Meher Baba says we can begin to seek understanding through the intellect.

Meher Baba makes it very clear in “Removal of Sanskaras” that, “Thought has to be made use of in order to overcome the limitations set up by its own movement; but when this is done, it has itself to be given up.” Fascinating isn’t it, that we have to use thought in order to go beyond thought, that we have to use our intellect to go beyond it? In the following sections, we will look more closely on exactly how this can be done.

Something else we will be examining in depth is "true values." As I read everything Meher Baba said in the “Discourses” about perception, spiritual understanding and intuition, I found that He frequently associated them with true values. This was something I completely neglected, somehow mistakenly assuming that it wasn't important. But I was astonished to discover just how often Baba mentions it.

I began to recognize that True Values is a fundamental theme of Meher Baba’s throughout His discourses. He replaces the concept of good and bad with the notion of true values and false values. Not only that, but He says that right valuation (i.e., following right values) is so powerful that it undoes the construction of the ego.

Not being familiar with true values, I never would have guessed that it could play such a significant role in one's spiritual life. But as I paid attention to Meher Baba's repeated use of true values, and thought about what He was saying, I began to see how choosing true values, over false values, was a first step to attaining spiritual understanding and an awareness of the spirit and therefore a major path to the Truth itself. For this reason, true values also becomes a major theme of this booklet.

In addition to looking at the help that the intellect can give us, and that true values is a pathway to spiritual understanding, we will also see the importance Meher Baba gives to having a living faith, balancing the expressions of mind and the heart, and the way in which conflict can be resolved by intelligently choosing true values over false ones.

In short, there will be quite a lot for us to reflect upon as we look at these and other themes in the following sections. In a sense, we will be building up a good appetite by uncovering spiritual truths through self-reflection.

And after we have done this, we can sit down and devour the meal we ourselves have prepared! That meal is putting into action these spiritual truths. For Meher Baba tells us that when we put our spiritual beliefs into action, they will give real sustenance—that is, spiritual understanding and a growing awareness of the spirit. And this will bring us that much closer to the point where our perception becomes "absolutely unclouded, and so practical that it can be lived every moment of life and expressed in every-day duties."

Let me add here that although it is certainly true that Meher Baba often emphasized to His lovers the importance of remembering Him, He seldom speaks of this in the "Discourses." What He does there is give spiritual truths on general themes. These booklets are based on Meher Baba's words in the "Discourses" and so they may seem to slight the importance of remembrance. But everything discussed in this (and for that matter in past and future booklets) must be considered by the reader in the light of His remembrance. For His remembrance, like nothing else is self-illuminating. His remembrance takes the spiritual themes of the "Discourses" and illuminates them so we can dare to proceed to the truth of our own soul.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END—UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

Do you remember what your first conflicts were as a child? I can't recall my first clashes, but my mother tells me at the age of five I got into a fight with one of the kids on my block as we were playing and, instead of hitting him, I chose to take the bubble gum out of my mouth and put it in his hair! That immediately ended the fight with us both running home to our respective parents.

I wonder what the young human mind makes of its first encounters with conflict. I suppose like everything else, we gradually accept it as the way things are without thinking much about it. My point is that early on we accept conflict as part of life. And with this acceptance, each of us begins to devise a strategy of how to handle it. The way we do so may be our first philosophical statement. As we grow up, we develop new strategies of how to deal with conflict. Each of these encounters provokes us to choose a path of action. And the choice we make is usually based on what we either desire for the moment or what we value in life. Throughout our lives we are forced by events to make such choices, but how much sincere thought do we give to the choices we make? Without realizing it, we are often busy constructing our own Great Wall that protects our individual civilization and shapes it by the way we construct it. In this way, we actively imprison ourselves and do not at all recognize what we are doing to ourselves.

Because conflict governs so much of our lives, it is essential that we understand where it truly originates from, and how and why it is maintained. In later sections we will see what we can do to dissolve it by the choices we make through spiritual understanding.

The best way to begin to answer this query regarding conflict is to return to its beginning. In “Deeper Aspects of Sadhana”, Meher Baba sums up the basic dilemma of our lives. He says, “The individual soul is entangled in the world of forms and does not know itself as one with the being of God. This ignorance constitutes the bondage of the soul.” We usually don’t think we are in spiritual bondage, but we are every moment of the day.

Meher Baba explains how this bondage continues in “God and the Individual.” He says, we continue to be bound because, “The thinking of the soul cannot break through the hedge created by sanskaras [“after-effects of experience”], and consciousness becomes a helpless captive of illusions projected by its own false thinking.”

Because of this, the soul is unknown. It becomes a religious story to give comfort in time of need. But the truth of the matter is that “the perception of the soul is limited by these after-effects” and so we do not get a true picture of its nature.

Although the soul itself is without limit, because of sanskaras it experiences nothing but endless limitations. Although the soul includes everything and everyone, because of sanskaras, when we look upon the physical world we unquestionably accept the basic division of life— “the self and not-self, or the ‘I’ and its environment,” as pointed out by Meher

Baba in “The Beginning and the End of Creation.” Instead of unity, we experience separateness.

Not only are we imprisoned by our own sanskaras but because of this basic duality, our consciousness is further “trapped in ceaseless restlessness, forcing it to attempt identification with the not-self.” Unable to unite the ‘I’ and its environment, Meher Baba says “the vast remaining part of the environment that we have not successfully identified as “mine” then becomes “an opposition to the self” causing us to be in a perpetual state of trying to resolve this conflict. And the irony is that our very attempts at resolution only perpetuate and exacerbate the conflict because such attempts operate from the false premise that we are intrinsically separate from each other.

Everything we see is obscured by this “illusory veil of separation.” But this veil is no gossamer thing. It is wrapped tightly around our mind, restricting its ability to discern the unity of all life. It is immeasurably strong, overpowering us, forcing us to continue to create, preserve and destroy a universe of our own impressions. We are caught in an illusion of our own making, a victim of our own “imaginative construction” with no way to gauge the extent to which we are captured. Nor can we easily remove the veil because we ourselves are the cause of it. There seems to be no way out. Sounds almost like a horror movie!

This is the daily scenario that we all face whether we know it or not. If we do not recognize this, if we don’t remember that this is the basis for all conflict, then we will lose ourselves in numberless illusions that “others” out there in the world are affecting our lives. But the truth is that there is no one else but the soul. The truth of the soul is that we are all one. There is no other. To cast blame on others for our conflicts is to thicken the veil of illusion. Ultimately, conflicts come from separative thinking.

Thus any attempt on our part to bring wholeness to our lives, means that the Veil of Illusion of our own sanskaras has to be gradually effaced to reveal the soul, uniting the “I” and its environment. So how can we do this when we ourselves are the cause of it?

Meher Baba tells us that it is possible and in “Arriving at Self-Knowledge,” He reassures us:

When the time is ripe, the advancement of a person toward Self-knowledge comes about as naturally as the physical body of a child grows into full-fledged form. The growth of the physical body is worked out by the operation of natural laws, and the progress of the aspirant toward Self-knowledge is worked out by the operation

of spiritual laws pertaining to the transformation and emancipation of consciousness.

How is this “worked out?” It seems very often it is through conflict. Think back to what brought you to Meher Baba. Most likely there was a momentous conflict in your life that brought about an attempt to find something “more.” Usually only a crisis of such proportion makes us desperate enough to really want to change in a fundamental way.

Whatever our dramatic individual story may be, we were all just following spiritual laws, as naturally mapped out as physical laws. I think it is important to recognize this because if there were no such laws, how could the soul ever come to know itself? It would be forever bound in the illusion of its own making.

Meher Baba tells us in “Types of Meditation: VII” that we ordinarily submit to our “sanskritic interests” without giving it any thought whatsoever, thus maintaining the bondage of our soul. Only when we are “profoundly disturbed by setback, defeat, suffering” are we propelled to deeply ponder where our accepted beliefs and values have failed us. And therefore it is likely that one such profound disturbance in our lives became the catalyst that directed us toward Him.

After this great event that brought us to Meher Baba, there can be a so-called honeymoon period in our relationship with Him. This is because we look at life and love fundamentally differently than before. But after a while we find ourselves confronted by the mind’s relentless habit of separative thinking from which it seems impossible to get relief. Yet despite conflict returning to our life once more, a very deep transformation has taken place within the core of our being, altering the way we look at conflict.

What has happened is this: before we came to Meher Baba, the basis for conflict was caused by our mistaken belief that we are separate souls. Through conflict itself, we were ultimately propelled to profoundly question the purpose of life. From that time onwards, conflict was transformed from a means for perpetuating separateness into a catalyst for change that begins to efface the veil of illusion. And so the journey to the truth of the soul begins.

Having come to Meher Baba, we now have an understanding of the ego’s falseness. We no longer can simply assert our ego when we are confronted with a conflict as we did before. And even when we automatically react from a viewpoint of separation, our conscience begins to stir after a while, forcing us to consider the possibility that we are caught in separative thinking. Thus we come to understand that as

conflicts arise in our lives with Meher Baba, they really are catalysts for us to change and grow, initiating a new process of self discovery.

Meher Baba explains that there are basically two kinds of catalysts for change. One such instrument of change continues to be through defeat and suffering. Although a monumental disturbance brought us to Meher Baba, defeat and suffering in our life continue to play their role in bringing us closer to Him. There is no getting around them and they are necessary. They humble our ego and through such events we learn to accept that we must submit to an honest, personal analysis in order to understand what needs to be changed within us.

Fortunately, we don't have to always experience "setback, defeat and suffering" to move forward. Meher Baba tells us that there is another catalyst for change. He says that we can also be "shaken by a spark of spiritual understanding." This occurs as a transformative process in our lives that gives us an immediate awareness of the inherent falseness of a particular perception and points us toward the Truth without having to go through a phase of self-examination.

The problem, of course, is how to precipitate a "spark of spiritual understanding" that brings spontaneous awareness compared to the process of personal analysis. It would seem to be beyond our capabilities. But it turns out, from what Meher Baba tells us in the "Discourses," that it is possible. The rest of this pamphlet will be devoted to the methods Baba delineates to help us ignite that spark.

ENTERING INTO THE REALITIES OF INNER LIFE

Critical Thoughtfulness—A Clear Beginning

At that joyous time of first discovering Meher Baba, we are usually so enthusiastic that we happily leap off the cliff we were hanging on to and start flying in any direction. Each of us makes our own way to Him in that vast pathless sky where there are so many directions to fly toward. This "spiritual" sky is full of promise, with multiple suns lighting up the sky with simultaneous magnificent sunrises and glorious sunsets. It almost seems as if we are bound to experience something great no matter where we head.

Eventually, as our wings start to tire, we come to realize that we are still on that cliff—that all we have done is flap our wings and we have not flown away at all. Even though we now acknowledge Meher Baba as

the Avatar, we find that the revelation, by itself, has not freed us from the cage of our own ego.

Before we began our search for God, or were touched by His love, we were in a state of “implicit ignorance” where it was impossible to imagine what we were ignorant of—the spirit. We were completely accustomed to accepting things at face value, seldom deeply examining what we based our actions on or, if we did, basing them on worldly, even if idealistic, values.

Now that we are being awakened to the truth of the spirit, naturally we enthusiastically want to put into action our new found beliefs. And yet, because our minds are shaped by patterns of thought that have nothing to do with our search for Beloved God, we often find that our behavior is at odds with our ideals.

This is because we are still caught in the imaginative constructions of our own ego mind. Even though we are now living a “new life” in Baba’s love, we find that we tend to slip into old routines and habit patterns until the next huge setback, defeat, or suffering knocks us out of our ordinary mindless submission to our sanskaric interests.

What should we do when we feel so helpless? At such times, we may mistakenly assume the answer is to change our lives drastically. I know when I first came to Baba, I thought I was supposed to go to the Himalayas, or somewhere like that, in order to remove myself from my daily preoccupations. But Meher Baba has made it clear that He wants us to live a spiritual life right in the midst of our normal worldly activities. He doesn’t want us to abandon the world, but He does want us to find Him within it and to directly experience the infinite hidden Reality behind it.

But how do we do this? Meher Baba says the first step is to develop a mental attitude of “critical thoughtfulness” which will, over time, result in changing our behavior in a very natural way. In “Search for God,” He explains critical thoughtfulness by saying, “This involves looking at everything from a new angle and entails a reinterpretation of each experience” to try to gather “its spiritual significance...in the march toward this hidden goal of existence.”

What is this new angle and in what way do we interpret each experience? In “Qualifications of the Aspirant: I – Entering into the Realities of Inner Life,” Meher Baba explains that it is a “change from a life of thoughtless acceptance of established traditions to a mode of being that is based upon thoughtful appreciation between the important and unimportant.”

In this one sentence, Meher Baba sets out for us our course of action—our flight pattern so to speak—plainly telling us what we need to do. The first part of the sentence states what we need to change in ourselves “from a life of thoughtless acceptance of established traditions.”

We may think that “established traditions” refers to organized religions. And it certainly does include that. And for those who have set religious beliefs they have to confront, this can be very difficult. But it also refers not only to general patterns of so-called acceptable behavior, but also our personal philosophies that prompt us into action. Moreover, as I discovered when I started looking at Meher Baba’s words with the utmost seriousness and thoughtfulness, it also means our own preconceptions of what it means to follow Meher Baba.

What it comes down to is that we can no longer simply accept the way we used to approach life. Meher Baba says that what is necessary is that we enter into a stage of “critical thoughtfulness” towards our personal habits of thought, belief and action. In this way, we gradually free ourselves of thoughtless acceptance of things that we rigidly upheld in the past, or erroneously construct in the present. Moreover, through confronting our thoughtless acceptance of our past behaviors, we also begin to see whether our thoughts and actions help or hinder us in our search for God.

In so doing, we “enter the high life of inner realities.” It may not be the inner realities of the planes that years ago we innocently assumed were our destiny, but surely we are facing the inner realities of our very own being. Instead we are to base our actions “upon thoughtful appreciation between the important and unimportant.” Meher Baba is not talking about what is important and what is not according to our own definitions, or based on our momentary desires. I feel He is talking about what is important for the search for God and what is not.

Putting Critical Thoughtfulness Into Action

What does it mean to enter a state of “critical thoughtfulness”? It means we evaluate everything in our lives by intellectually discriminating “between the lasting and the transitory, the true and the false, the real and the unreal, the important and the unimportant.” However, if everything were black and white, it might be fairly easy to choose between what we should do and what we shouldn’t do. But, as we all know by now, this isn’t the case.

When we start to evaluate everything, intellectually trying to discriminate between what is helpful in our search for God and what is not, we have to realize that the answer will not always be obvious. Sometimes what at first had seemed very simple, we now see is a much more complex, nuanced situation, and conversely what had seemed almost impossibly complicated now seems amazingly straightforward. We go forward by experimenting and by being honest with ourselves as we do so. This does not, however, preclude our taking action on what we have tentatively concluded is right. Sometimes we just have to go ahead and experiment and see where it takes us. Sometimes it will lead us forward and sometimes we will come to recognize that we have been fooled by some hidden desire that made us make the wrong choice. But either way, we learn.

Even then, there are times where it is unclear whether our course of action was correct or not, and I have found another criterion to be helpful. If any thought, word or deed brings me a sense of Oneness, or if it brings wholehearted remembrance of Meher Baba, then I assume it has a connection to what is true, real, important and lasting. For me, this sense of Oneness or remembrance is the light that eternally shines and is the illumination behind all the passing scenes of our lives. It would be nice to live in this light permanently but Meher Baba reassures us that using critical thoughtfulness is a way of getting there.

Meher Baba has dictated several discourses that discuss the various choices we can make. We will be looking at these choices throughout this booklet, refining our discussion on key considerations that Baba brings to our attention. But for now, let us look at a few examples of how to apply intellectual discrimination in our lives.

Now where do we begin? How do we do this? Think of your life as a slide show with each slide representing a particular moment in your life. We have the tendency to focus on the slide in front of us and think that it is of paramount importance. But no sooner is it replaced with another, then we tend to focus completely on the new slide. Each picture gets our full attention and yet we give very little thought to how we discarded the previous picture for the present one. We unthinkingly assume that the present slide is the most important.

Now comes the difficult part for us all to grasp. It's not just that the current picture is not the most important. It's that all the pictures are unimportant. Why? Because they are all transitory. And because they are passing, they are also, by definition, false, unreal, and unimportant. Only something that is lasting is real, important and true. The only thing that is lasting in the slide show is the light that projects

the pictures. It is this light that gave each picture its individual moment of life before it disappeared. And what is this light that illuminates each of our moments, that, in fact, gives everything life? It is spirit, or love, or God.

This is, of course, easy to say. We can nod our heads and repeat, "It's all a passing show," but it is very difficult to truly grasp this essential truth. I struggle with this all the time. I get glimpses of it through my belief in and feeling of a sense of Oneness. But because I don't actually experience what is lasting (and therefore, true, real and important) the best I can do is to try to deeply recall the truth of the soul as compared to all the passing moments that run through my mind.

There are two things which I have found helpful in this regard. One, of course, is to remember Meher Baba in whatever way I can, as often as I can, with as much longing as I can. Very naturally, I find that this helps free my psyche from its absorption in temporary desires and helps it expand towards a sense of the timelessness of the spirit.

The other is to make myself aware of thoughts as they flow through my mind. Witnessing thoughts is like sitting by a stream, watching it flow by. No sooner does something arise in the mind, then another situation comes along demanding our full attention. Usually, without thinking about it, we accept whatever crops up in our mind as important. We become engrossed in doing this or that as our mind prompts us, but it is like drawing designs upon the stream. No sooner do we do this then it disappears. Reflecting upon this phenomenon of the mind even for a moment helps to remember the truth that everything is passing.

So going back to the example of life as a slide show, if I look at my individual desires as the slides in the slide show, I get a better sense of how temporary they really are! As they arise in me, I can see how they immediately reshape my life by pursuing them. And then as they are replaced with other desires, I can see how the shape of my life again immediately disappears and a new one is created. As I observe this, I begin to get a sense that my life, instead of being one uninterrupted stream is really a series of desire-driven pursuits that continually alter who and what I am. I can see how each desire changes me, because each separate desire draws on different parts of my personality and brings out a different collection of thoughts and feelings. And when that desire is replaced with another, it is almost as if I am a new person, with each new persona only being alive as long as the desire lasts.

This is a way that we can observe that desire brings out in us a series of personas that continually are born and die. Look at the common

expression, “That’s not me anymore.” We can say it so casually without really grasping what we are really saying. We feel we have made a change in ourselves that is so fundamental that we no longer identify ourselves with our previous self. In a sense, our previous self has died and a new self is born.

But if everything is short-lived and transitory and none of it is important, then what is left? What is left is God. The problem is that we don’t experience this directly from moment to moment. But in coming to Meher Baba, something has taken place within us, in our hearts and in our minds that has convinced us of this unseen truth. And Meher Baba says, if we believe in God, then it us up to us to search for God. And where do we search? Since everything is in God and God is in everything, Meher Baba wants us to make the genuine effort to find what is lasting, true, real and important right in the midst of our daily lives.

This brings us right back to the beginning, that we have to look at everything in our life from the discriminating vantage point of critical thoughtfulness so we begin to perceive what constitutes the “lasting and the transitory, the true and the false, the real and the unreal, the important and the unimportant.”

It is interesting to note that Meher Baba emphasized the importance of intellectual discrimination by stating that it “is undoubtedly the basis for all further preparation.” We may find this statement surprising, but on reflection, it makes sense. After all, if we don’t begin to use our intellect to discriminate in this way, what will we base our actions on—continued falsehoods. We have to begin to make our way to the truth through the means that are in our hands. And what is most readily in our hands is our intellect.

As we learn to discriminate, at the same time we naturally try to detach ourselves from experience that is transitory and therefore false, unreal and unimportant. Detachment then is another expression of critical thoughtfulness where we carry out “a watchful detachment in relation to the alluring opposites of limited experience.” Moreover, as we try to employ a sense of detachment in our activities, we become aware that everything is passing. And therefore, to hold on to any of it, good or bad, only brings us pain. An attitude of detachment gradually produces greater mental equipoise. As the mind quiets down through detachment, we are in turn more able to discriminate between the true and false, etc.

Through evaluating our actions, like sitting on the edge of our mental stream panning for gold, we learn to discriminate between real gold and fool’s gold. We learn to discern what will lead us to God and

what will take us away from Him. In this way we do detach ourselves from what is unnecessary in our search for God.

Moreover as our mind calms down, we begin to hear the voice of intuition that leads us still further to Beloved God. Intuition is a powerful means that we have to give up thoughtless acceptance of the past and directly accept God's guidance.

The process of discrimination, detachment and intuition are not for a day or year, they are life-long. These are the tools we have to experiment with and to explore our spiritual life.

First Fruits of Critical Thoughtfulness

As we continue to re-evaluate our daily experiences through critical thoughtfulness, Meher Baba assures us we do arrive at deeper understandings than previously held. Yet there is another step Baba tells us we need to make. "If the results of critical thought are to be spiritually fruitful, these results must again invade and recapture the heart so as to enlist its cooperative functioning."

A beautiful and intriguing thought: "these results must again invade and recapture the heart." So many well-intentioned thoughts, even inspiring thoughts come to us. But if they don't touch the heart and ignite it into action, then they remain in the domain of mind as a pleasant fragrance.

Meher Baba says the same thing in another way: "The ideas that have been accepted after critical examination must again be released into active life." If we don't do so, we remain on the surface of life. Our ideas, no matter how profound or well-meaning, serve no purpose. "From the spiritual viewpoint, what matters is not theory but practice." We all know this but sometimes we neglect to put into action the observations and conclusions we have come to. And therefore Meher Baba explains that critical thought "yields its fruit only when newly perceived values are brought into relation with practical life."

Meher Baba looks at our daily life and calls it "the process of practical living." In fact, in explaining the overall value of reevaluating our daily experience in terms of a spiritual life, Baba states, "Reevaluation of an experience amounts to a new bit of wisdom, and each addition to spiritual wisdom necessarily brings about a modification of one's general attitude toward life."

These modifications lead us to change our mode of being from thoughtless acceptance of what is not important to thoughtful appreciation of what is important in the search for God. And through this process, He further explains, as we put these new perceptions into action, “they often undergo a healthy transformation and become more soundly interwoven with the very fabric of life.”

Meher Baba ends the discourse, “Entering into the Realities of Inner Life” by summarizing the process He has been describing into two straightforward guidelines for us to follow:

“(1) Freeing the mind from the inertia of uncritical acceptance based upon blind imitation and stirring it to critical thinking; and (2) Bringing the results of critical and discriminative thinking into practical life.”

Wouldn't it be interesting to hear how Baba describes the life of one who follows these two guidelines. Well He describes it this way.

His life now becomes a real experiment with perceived spiritual values. The more he carries on this intelligent and purposive experimentation with his own life, the deeper becomes his comprehension of the true meaning of life.

“Inner realities” does not mean a vision of the planes, rather it means we see the inner reality of what is truly motivating our outer actions. And this, Baba tells us, will inevitably result if we follow His guidance. So it is up to us. It is up to us to free the mind from the past and stir it to critical thinking. It is up to us to experiment with the spiritual ideas and results that come from this process, that touch our hearts. Wholeheartedly putting spiritual ideals into action gradually brings us a deeper perspective on life. This is a very natural transformative process in the midst our daily life. In fact it becomes so natural that after a while, we don't even notice we are continually modifying our “attitude toward life.”

And because this does not bring about a dramatic change, we might not even realize that we are gaining “a true perception of the real significance of life as it is.” But this, Meher Baba shows us, is what a true spiritual life is actually all about. To have such a picture before us and understand that picture is important. It will help us forget about spiritual advancement in the sense of planes or “experiences” and will help us to focus on the importance of everyday life and understand the great opportunity it provides us to develop true spirituality. It will give us a sense of where we are going and so encourage us to move forward.

This is a safe direction to fly toward because Meher Baba has taken the truth of sublime spirituality and united it with normal human life. He is guiding humanity to transform commonplace worldly ways to spiritual understandings right in the midst of daily life. In this way, we gradually change our selves in a way that transforms our entire lives. Sounds pretty good to me! I think only the Avatar can create such a path for humanity that leads to realizing the truth of the soul.

LIVING FAITH – A STEP BEYOND THE INTELLECT

What is living faith?

Even though Meher Baba’s description of spiritual life sounds as normal as a walk in the park, and the result almost inevitable, we know otherwise. These first steps of a mental and emotional attentiveness that make us go beyond the surface activities of our minds and hearts are not easy to take.

As we exercise critical reasoning, let alone putting our understanding into practice, we will certainly discover that various parts of our psyche will not cooperate and will cleverly subvert our efforts. We will hear our minds continually provide any number of “good reasons” why we should not change our habits, viewpoints, preferences, etc., all in the name of really caring for our welfare. Yet this is the very mental activity that maintains the false separative self.

In fact, the ego-mind will stubbornly resist and as such be in conflict with any effort made that lessens its separative perspective. Therefore, because conflict arises through separativeness, its solution has to come from beyond any notion of separativeness.

In order to dare to say “no” to the ego’s separative impulses, even occasionally, we have to say “yes” to something else—something which transcends our separative sense of self, a comprehensive ideal like God, or brotherhood, or service to humanity, or, for most of us, Meher Baba.

Meher Baba explains the fundamental requirement for the resolution of conflict in “The Nature of the Ego, I.” He says that “the most important requirement for the satisfactory resolution of conflict is motive

power or inspiration, which can only come from a burning longing for some comprehensive ideal.”

This “burning longing” gives no room for any kind of separative perspective. Through its motivational force, it dissolves separative attitudes that otherwise would be impossible to drive away. In other words, only through deep yearning for an all-embracing spirit of unity, can we dissolve the discord of separative conflict.

In having Meher Baba as our comprehensive ideal, we are indeed blessed. For as the Beloved, He plants the seed of love in our hearts which gives us the "burning longing," the motive power or inspiration to say "yes" to Him as we struggle with the nature of the false separative self. However, we should carefully note that Meher Baba states that it is through a “burning longing” that conflict can be resolved. Thus our casual remembrance of Him will not give us sufficient motive power to overcome conflict.

In this struggle, there is a tendency in Meher Baba circles to disparage using one’s reason or intellect and an insistence that one should rely solely on the heart. It is understandable that we feel this because Meher Baba has emphasized love as the way to Him.

But we should recognize, as we have seen, that Meher Baba has emphasized that the first step towards creating a spiritual life is for us to use our reasoning to discriminate between what is important and what is not. Although we may not take it as such, to make this effort is indeed an act of love on our part.

The difficulty, though, is that too often the use of discrimination becomes a dry exercise. Initially our heart is inspired to make this effort because of our “burning longing for a comprehensive ideal.” But then after a while, when it seems our heart is not nourished by this action, our minds start to rebel against such efforts. When this happens, we need to remember, like the farmer, that much hard work takes place before the seed ripens into the fruit of maturity.

This brings us to the point where faith must—I stress must—accompany the use of discrimination as an act of love. Not just a vague sense of faith that everything will work out but a faith that will inspire us to put “the results of critical and discriminative thinking into practical life” regardless of our viewpoints, habits, and preferences which we usually call reason. As we are able to confront our reason in this way, we put faith into action. Meher Baba calls this kind of faith a “living faith.”

According to Meher Baba the reason living faith is so important for us is because the mind, even critical reason, operates in the domain of duality, where a living faith is rooted in the truth of the unity of the Soul. Because of this it “has the most vital and integral relation with all the deeper forces and purposes of the psyche. It is not held superficially; nor does it hang, like mere intellectual beliefs, in the periphery of consciousness.”

Therefore what living faith can do for us is move us toward a greater reliance on the heart and away from the intellect. Living faith can realign our consciousness, so that it is possible that any and every part of it can feel its effects—each and every thought, feeling and action can carry the glow of spiritual inspiration. It is this kind of faith which links us spiritually to our own soul. Meher Baba says, “It is a form of sight.” For although we have not seen the soul, we have in a sense “sighted” it through faith.

In “Qualifications of the Aspirant, IV,” Meher Baba states that a real living faith “must be carefully distinguished from mere intellectual belief or opinion.” This is a critical differentiation for spiritual life. And we must make it, so that we don’t casually rely on beliefs or opinions “about” Meher Baba but rather have a faith “in Him” so we are able to overcome the separative attitudes that we maintain.

So let’s look a little closer at this difference. I think we can admit that many of our beliefs and opinions are held in the superficial layer of our minds. We hastily put together our thoughts for expediency’s sake in order to complete our daily activities. So we are aware that these kinds of beliefs or opinions have little to do with genuine faith.

But there are other opinions which we have formulated after much thought; so much so that we tend to call them our “beliefs” and so have faith in them. However, if these beliefs are merely based on intellectual information about Meher Baba or spirituality, these beliefs, no matter how honorable they are, originate from the surface of the mind. They cannot have the power to realign our consciousness toward the truth.

An example that comes to mind regarding the difference between living faith and intellectual beliefs can be represented by the human body and the clothes we put on it. All over the world, the human body is clothed in various styles. These styles, let us say, are the numberless beliefs and opinions that are carried in our surface consciousness. But when it comes to what is essential, that is the human form itself, there is no substitute for it. Without it we don’t exist. Likewise, such is the potency of living faith—it is fundamental to the transformation of our psyche in order to live a real spiritual life. Only when we have living faith

can we make the deep fundamental changes necessary to truly live a life based on the spirit. Without it, we won't be able to.

Perhaps the difference between faith and living faith can be seen more clearly with an example from my own life. I loved spiritual literature. When my search for Truth started, I would read anything that I could find. I read holy books from all the religious traditions as well as accounts of the saints from those traditions. I gloried in it all, with my imagination taking flights of fancy as often as possible. When I came to Meher Baba, I likewise read everything that I could find. This was followed by listening to the Mandali as often as I could when I visited India and then finally, when I moved to India in 1978, spending my weekends at Meherazad listening to them.

I carried all those stories fervently in my heart. Loving it all, living to hear the next story so as to imagine and remember Meher Baba and feel His Presence through the stories. The stories became my various beliefs: how Meher Baba was the perfect human being, and how it was to be with Him, etc.

I swallowed as much as I could. But eventually I started to get spiritual indigestion. By this I mean that as wonderful as the stories were, they just stayed in the superficial part of my mind.

I naively thought that by listening to them and feeling Meher Baba's Presence through them, that I was creating a spiritual life. True, the stories affected me. They connected me to Him and I remembered Him through them. But it finally came crashing down on me that something was missing. It took me many years to realize that what was lacking in me was the faith to live what the stories talked about.

Here is an example of what I mean. Many of you have heard the story that Eruch would tell often in Mandali Hall called, "Is That So?" It is not a story about Meher Baba but it is a story that Eruch came across about how to live life—spiritual life. I am not going to recount it here. I am sure it is one of the books that recall stories he would tell us.

The crux of the story is about someone who was wrongly blamed. When the person was accused of a serious wrong-doing, he simply replied, "Is that so?" And then he continued with his daily tasks without losing his mental equilibrium and having no ill-will to those who accused him. Eruch would tell the story at great length, setting the scene and describing the characters, and he kept us all enthralled. We would listen to the story captivated, marveling at it. In the story when the main character was finally exonerated, and his accusers sought his forgiveness, he continued to reply, "Is that so?" He continued with the

same mental equilibrium, having no ill-will for them who wrongly accused him. In fact, the people started to praise him for the way he conducted himself. But our main character would just respond with, "Is that so?" He treated both blame and praise the same. He remained unaffected. He had nothing to do with either. It is a great story, depicting an essential truth in order to live a spiritual life.

As Eruch concluded the story, I would nod my head as if I really understood. But I never really tried to put the story or the truths the story depicts into action. For that matter all the stories had their truths and I just never thought of trying to uphold what they were saying, although I accepted their essential truths. Only when my spiritual life continued to narrow, creating a stranglehold on me, did I finally start to seriously look at myself and wonder what was wrong.

And what was wrong was that my surface mind was bulging from the enthusiasm of intellectual beliefs of which I truly put into action very little. I had faith in them but they were not a living faith. They were in my mind but they did not have the "most vital and integral relation with all the deeper forces and purposes of the psyche," because I had not let them penetrate my heart to the extent that I tried to live out their truth in my daily life. Once I truly understood this, there was no going back. It was abundantly clear that I had to begin to put into action some of the truths that I had heard for years. When I tried to do so, I found that an inner world started to develop within me. It was a world not created out of imagined beliefs but formed out of the steadfastness of what may be called "living faith." From that time until now, regardless of still being a novice, this is what has made all the difference in my spiritual life.

The Relationship of Living Faith and Critical Reason

Although there was a great burst of enthusiasm in my life because of the discovery of this new inner world, it has not been easy to put spiritual ideals into practice. I very seldom receive the feedback that what I put into action improves circumstances. What I do experience, however, is the inner satisfaction that I have lived up to the truth that I deeply believe in.

You may ask how I know that what I have upheld as truth is valid. I could very well be deceiving myself. Over the years, I have found a test that tells me whether my action is truth-oriented or not. That test is whether I am happy within. I have found that if my actions are based on the truth within they will bring their own kind of internal happiness that sustains me.

Perhaps this is why Meher Baba talks about the importance of having a burning longing for a comprehensive ideal. It doesn't matter in what way we remember Meher Baba. As long as we have that desire to move towards an ideal, in whatever way we conceive it, we will have the motive power to keep at it, regardless of the lack of positive reinforcement or even opposition we experience, which can be considerable at times.

Given that Meher Baba talks about the importance of living faith, and knowing, from my own experience, how hard it is to continue to try to put spiritual ideals into practice without it, the question obviously comes up, "How can I develop a living faith?" It seems to me that making the attempt to put spiritual truths into practice facilitates the growth of living faith. From my experience this approach to developing living faith seems to be the most readily available way because our life is action-oriented.

So again, starting with where we are now, it is important to re-examine Meher Baba's two guidelines for transforming our reason into critical reason. He said that by doing so, we will enter into the realities of inner life. In other words, by upholding those guidelines which affect our reason, we can open the door from the external to the internal, from reason to faith, from having intellectual ideals about spirituality to beginning to live them as spiritual expressions of our life.

Once again those guidelines are:

"1) Freeing the mind from the inertia of uncritical acceptance based upon blind imitation and stirring it to critical thinking; and
2) Bringing the results of critical and discriminative thinking into practical life."

By putting the first guideline into action, it prevents our ideas of faith from becoming a comfortable belief system. This is very important for us, because if we did not examine our notions of spirituality, we would carry on false ideas indefinitely, thinking we were getting closer to Meher Baba.

As we carry on with this honest assessment, if our ideas are not found valid for our search for God, they are weeded out. In this way, critical reason clears the mind by cutting down these weeds of thoughtlessness.

Let me share what I mean by making an honest assessment of our notions of spirituality. From time to time, I am drawn to reflect upon a spiritual notion I have. Something provokes me to start wondering how I

presumed that my action was a spiritual expression. And so I start to examine this notion of spirituality. In making this examination, I try not to justify or defend my thoughts and actions. This is not as easy as it is to write that sentence. It requires an honesty that cannot be prejudiced by my own self-interests. This process may take only a few minutes, but it also may take days, weeks or months, as I honestly try to free myself from self-interest and determine how I came to the conclusion that a specific conception I had of spirituality was “true.” I will often find that the real basis for my actions was fear or pride, two major motivators of behavior.

Perhaps a simple example will make this clear. Suppose, over the years, I had decided to choose to efface my ego by “turning the other cheek.” Due to my “spiritual” efforts, this has become almost second nature to me. But now something within prompts me to seriously look at a recent expression of this truth. As I reflect upon it, I realize that I wasn’t always taking a stand on the unity of the spirit as I thought I had been. Instead sometimes what I was doing was maintaining my separative self. I could perceive that on occasion I would take pride in my behavior, or operate from a fear of confrontation or rejection by another.

What may have started out as an honest expression of a spiritual truth becomes a shelter for the ego. In fact, it is bound to happen sometimes no matter what spiritual truth we are trying to uphold. Invariably the ego-mind will subvert our efforts to overcome it. This only becomes apparent if we are willing to undergo an honest, and often painful, examination using disinterested critical reason.

This process of “freeing the mind from the inertia of uncritical acceptance” of our ideas spirituality, may help us understand why, at first, we need to use our reason and not simply follow our heart. Ultimately our hearts will lead, but the problem here is that at the beginning of our journey our minds are usually so overgrown with the thoughtless acceptance of our preferences, habits and desires that they do not allow the heart to be heard. And our hearts are so full of desires that they cannot provide true guidance yet either.

So the first step is the rigorous examination of our motives and behavior using our critical reason. This can begin in a natural way by just observing our mind with greater and greater impartiality. And then as we are stirred to reexamine ourselves through critical thinking we can free ourselves from the past.

Then we can put into action the second guideline, “Bringing the results of critical and discriminative thinking into practical life.” However, although critical reason may inform us that our “spiritual

behavior” was really motivated by some selfish impulse, and while this may be enough to stop us from thoughtlessly repeating the same behavior over and over again, it does not automatically tell us what we should do instead. Nor does critical reason make it easy in accepting its judgments. It is hard to face ourselves. And even if we do accept it, we may feel helpless to overcome the revealed weakness.

This brings us back once again to the importance of “burning longing” for the truth. With it we are able to build up enough motive power within ourselves to accept our critical reason. And in addition we then are able to actually attempt to replace the fear or pride which prompted our behavior with “something” that has true spiritual value and reflects the unity of the spirit.

Turning to the spiritual ideal, looking at it squarely with a new perspective, and daring to put it into action in the face of our weakness seems to me to be an act of faith. And I feel that if we persist in doing so, we may find that our faith in what we are putting into action starts to realign our consciousness so that we are inspired to uphold the spirit—which is living faith.

As we do this, another critical development is taking place for spiritual life. That is, the objections that come from our mind concerning spiritual ideals lessen. And the contradictions that reason once raised regarding things taken on faith also lessen. Where once there was a mighty conflict between reason and faith, it is now being transformed by critical reason and living faith into a special relationship, as explained by Meher Baba:

Living faith “is not to be regarded as the antithesis of critical reason but as the unfailing guide of critical reason. When critical reason is implemented by a deep and living faith based on pure intuition, its functioning becomes creative, fruitful, and significant instead of barren, ineffective, and meaningless.”

So when living faith complements our critical reason, they can perform in a way that is meaningful for our spiritual life. We can say that critical reason is an act of the mind while living faith is an act from the heart. And through their partnership, they form our first set of wings that helps us fly towards Meher Baba and His Truth. Yet balancing them requires an exquisite degree of fine-tuning not called for in ordinary worldly life, for we are balancing the requirements of inner life.

In order to begin to create this balance, as we have been discussing, first we have to consciously transform our reason into critical reason and our faith into living faith. However, as Meher Baba explains

above, our new sense of living faith, even as limited as it may be, must guide the attempts we make at critical reason. Otherwise our critical reason will dictate actions that are likely to be “barren, ineffective and meaningless.” At this point, this is where our heart begins to lead the mind.

However, we have to be careful here as well because our actions are not totally based on living faith. So invariably our actions will miss the mark to some extent. And once again we have to reapply our critical reason to discover where we have missed and why. And so it goes a constant balancing of living faith and critical reason even as they grow. One of the things that helps establish balance is when our faith is grounded in pure intuition. How this happens is what we will look at next.

The Growth of Living Faith through Pure Intuition

One of the things that helps us increase living faith is being alert to our intuition. As we become more accustomed to receiving intuition and acting upon it, we deepen our living faith at the same time.

We may not experience spiritual intuition very often yet. But most of us at least have experienced it when it comes to art. Often through art, drama, music, dance, we feel we “understand” something even though we haven’t arrived at this understanding through an intellectual process. So we know that the intuitive faculty is already present in us and we do experience it from time to time whether through art or spirituality.

However the frequency of experiencing intuition is about to change. Meher Baba has made it clear in “Avatar” that humanity is in a new transitional stage of development. The previous transitional phase was from sensation to reason. The present transitional stage is from reason to intuition.

Being in this transitional stage, intuition is only starting to dawn in our consciousness just as reason did long ago. Reason was once an uncommon experience and not part of daily life. Nowadays it is hard to imagine that humanity in general would be without it. Since we are in a new transitional stage, intuition is just beginning to have an impact in consciousness, and in the future it too will become part of our daily life and not just be an occasional experience.

With the rise of intuition in our consciousness, a new dilemma also arises in our lives: should we act upon the intuition received? Just as the

development of reasoning brought new dilemmas to people's lives, so too does the intuitive faculty. The intuitive faculty provides no time for its expression of intuition to be analyzed as the use of reasoning would allow. The intuitive faculty offers a choice: either spontaneously act upon it or fail to do so. There is no middle ground. Once the intuitive moment is gone, it is gone. And so upholding the dictates of intuition requires a leap of faith.

Although we all may utter that we would not hesitate to follow Meher Baba's orders, when it comes to intuition, we may not be so ready. But following the intuitive faculty, just as following Meher Baba's direct orders, is not so easy a thing, as we have heard from the Mandali. They recounted many stories about how even they did not follow their intuition sometimes, when they were carrying out Baba's orders, much to their regret.

This may give us some degree of comfort. Nonetheless the question for us is why we are uncertain about taking that leap of faith since intuition is supposed to be the voice of the heart. Generally, I think this is because we are unaccustomed to receiving intuition at all, since we are in this transitional phase.

Yet I feel our uncertainty is further compounded when we question whether our intuition is Meher Baba's guidance or the voice of our own thoughts. We are so habituated to the continual chatter that goes on in our mind that we can't distinguish it from intuition. So we question whether the intuition is genuine guidance. Because the intuitive faculty is not able to express intuition clearly—which I believe Meher Baba calls "inarticulate intuition"—we hesitate to act upon it. If this is the case, what can we do to receive clear intuitive guidance?

Basically there are two voices in our consciousness: the noise of the mind and the voice of the heart. Picture a thunderous waterfall and then a quiet stream. The roar of the waterfall drowns out that of the stream. Normally, what is running through our minds is the cacophony of conflicting desires making it nearly impossible to clearly hear the quiet voice of His guidance that comes from the heart.

So there is only one thing to do and we have been hearing about it since we first heard about spirituality—we have to lessen our desires. This includes confronting the spiritual assumptions that our intellect created through thoughtless acceptance. Although we may feel conflicted in confronting our desires and our spiritual assumptions, Meher Baba says, "Such conflict is often a beginning of pure thinking, which immediately seriously challenges the usually accepted belief." That is why, as we have seen over and over again, Baba emphasizes the

importance of challenging ourselves by confronting the accumulated assumptions we call our beliefs. We need to do this in order to begin the process of pure thinking which leads to pure intuition, that is, intuition free of desire.

As we free ourselves from desires and preconceived notions of spirituality, the voice of intuition becomes purified and we hear it with increasing clarity. Moreover, being less distorted by desire, we have a greater likelihood that the intuition is genuine and we can respond to it through faith with less hesitancy.

Confronting and lessening our desires also answers the bigger question of how to create living faith through intuition. Meher Baba explains that there is a direct correlation between the lessening of desires and the growth of faith. He says, "True faith is therefore a matter of gradual growth. It grows in proportion to the success that the disciple attains in freeing his consciousness from diverse cravings."

Then the question of the growth of faith may be this simple: our faith is as solid or weak as our desires permit. So we should remind ourselves that we strengthen our faith when we dare to confront our desires. Meher Baba confirms this by stating, "An unwavering faith grounded in pure intuition can come only to a mind that is free from the pressure of diverse wants."

By making the conscious effort of challenging our own notions of spirituality and confronting our desires on a daily basis, critical reason and living faith gradually are established in our lives, giving a chance for intuition to guide us truly. Then, our hearts will become active. We will no longer plod along the dry trail of intellectual information about spirituality but genuinely move forward, step by step, into the sanctuary of an inner life where we perceive spirituality.

Intuition – Meher Baba’s guidance in our lives

Many times I don’t follow my own intuition. There are several reasons. As I stated previously, it is because the intuition is not clear and it makes me uncertain whether to follow it. I don’t know whether it is Baba’s guidance or the voice of my desires. But I also admit that sometimes I don’t follow my intuition even when it is clear, because of lack of faith. And sometimes I don’t follow my intuition just because of mere laziness on my part.

The amazing thing about acting upon intuition is that even when I act upon it and it is confirmed to be true, that does not mean that I won't fail to act upon it in the next moment. Sometimes I miss the beat and sometimes I am right on target. It is an uneven struggle. And the remarkable thing about intuition is that once the intuitive moment is missed, it is gone. It is like missing a fly-ball in baseball. If you miss the ball and it falls to the ground, you can't put the ball back into your mitt and say you caught it! Nonetheless even if we have failed to act upon our intuition this too has its own benefit, because through an honest assessment of ourselves we can examine what is holding us back from trusting it and acting upon it.

This is where critical reason is important. If my reason with its accumulated assumptions of spirituality and my desires are governing me, my intuition is thwarted. When and where reason is not transformed into critical reason, there is room for error. If critical reason is not present, I can easily assume that some of my mental chatter is Baba guiding me through intuition. Or I could be manipulated by my own desires, lessening my faith in the intuition received. Both reason and faith have to be transformed so we can receive pure intuition that will guide us.

So far, in a sense, I have discovered four kinds of intuition. I have to assume that there may be many more and you may discover them yourselves.

One kind of intuition which I think is common for many people is suddenly knowing something. An example of this happened to me a few days ago. I was looking for a picture of Meher Baba that I wanted to take back to the U.S.A. on a visit there. I spent a long time looking everywhere for it and finally gave up. The next day I again started to wonder where it was. Suddenly, without any thought whatsoever, I knew where the picture was. I went over to a drawer, opened it up and there it was! As I say, I think this type of intuition is experienced even by people who are not seeking the Truth.

The second kind of intuition, I believe, is the kind that gradually accompanies us in our relationship with Meher Baba. What I have found over the years is that the harshness of the intellect, with all of its judgments based on duality, is gradually softened. I feel this kind of intuition very gently begins to displace the mind's bumpy ride of intellectual activity for a smoother ride of intuitive mental movement based on Meher Baba's Presence in our lives.

The third kind of intuition is the kind that brings guidance in normal every-day events in our life. Following this intuitive guidance is

another matter. Sometimes we follow it and sometimes we neglect it for all the reasons I stated above.

The fourth kind of intuition is the kind that brings spiritual understanding. As we saw earlier, this is when we are “shaken by a spark of spiritual understanding” which brings an awareness that bestows an immediate spiritual understanding. It sounds good! But note the word “shaken” here. Meher Baba does not use this word casually. He is describing an event in our lives that shakes us.

Although we can be shaken out of sleep, it seems to me that this spark generates an occurrence more like an earthquake, for the ground of our consciousness shakes from the spiritual truths that have erupted from the deeper part of our selves. That is, when we are shaken by a spark of spiritual understanding, our consciousness is jolted by the spiritual understanding that has just been revealed.

We might have faith in the truth that we are not the body, or the truth that we are all one. But when we are shaken by the intuitive moment that ignites a spark of spiritual understanding, in a sense that spark burns a bit of the veil of illusion for a moment and a truth is perceived and experienced in some small way. And thus our consciousness is shaken because it has been challenged by what has been revealed. By creating critical reason and living faith, we have already begun the discussion of how we can prepare ourselves to receive such sparks. And we will continue this discussion throughout the booklet.

THREE AVENUES TO SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

We have discussed the importance of critical reason and living faith and how it can help us create a spiritual life if we put them into practice. However, you may find, like I do, that even when we understand their importance, life has a way of rushing upon us so quickly that often we respond somewhat automatically to events as they occur. And many times it seems to us that a fairly superficial response is more than enough to adequately meet the demands of the moment. So although we may understand the spiritual necessity of critical reason and living faith and we may even have the intention to respond to life from their spiritual perspective, too often they can remain only as a background to our actual actions.

This is when, time and again, we have to slow ourselves down and assess what is really important in our lives. In other words, we must

remember the vital difference between having ideas about spirituality and applying those same ideas through faith, so they sustain our spiritual lives. When Meher Baba states, “Understanding has no meaning,” He is referring to intellectual understanding of the spiritual life without any application to practical life. And our goal is to achieve spiritual awareness in order to live a spiritual life.

Yes, spiritual information is fascinating. It allows for enjoyable and lively conversation. However it can also beguile us into thinking we know something. But information and the superficial faith that it engenders, keeps us stranded on the surface of our search for God and we never achieve spiritual awareness.

Meher Baba states this in “Avenues to Understanding.” He says, “Knowledge of the intellect alone is on the same footing as mere information, and being superficial, it moves on the surface of life. It gives the shadow and not the substance of reality. The hidden depths of the ocean of life can be gauged only by sounding the heart.”

How do we draw upon our heart in order to experience the depths of life that cannot be reached with the intellect? It is what we have been saying all along. We must try to experiment with putting into practice our present understandings of spirituality. After which we should review the outcomes through critical reason, as Meher Baba has suggested. And we must do this regardless of how furious the rush of events is in our daily life.

In “Deeper Aspects of Sadhana,” Meher Baba validates our attempts at this daily experimentation by saying:

The deeper secrets of spiritual life are unraveled to those who take risks and who make bold experiments with it. They are not meant for the idler who seeks guarantees for every step. He who speculates from the shore about the ocean shall know only its surface, but he who would know the depths of the ocean must be willing to plunge into it.

The experiments we make with critical reason and living faith and other spiritual ideals increase our knowledge. We might not have thought that we are on the Path of Knowledge. We normally don't describe our remembrance of Meher Baba in this way. Yet when we use our intellectual understanding about Truth, we are applying a form of knowledge. And as Meher Baba explained earlier, the path to Him begins with an intellectual approach by our re-examining our life in the light of our search for God. Moreover, Meher Baba affirms in “Life of the Spirit”

that we are to use our mind “to face and tackle problems of life [but] from the point of view of spiritual understanding.”

In “The Deeper Aspects of Sadhana”, Meher Baba explains how we can attain this spiritual understanding. He says we can do so through the Sadhana (practice) of Knowledge which is accomplished through “the exercise of detachment which is born of true understanding...and the constant use of discrimination and intuition.”

We have already talked about the importance of detachment, discrimination and intuition in helping us to acquire critical thoughtfulness. But we are now going to see that they can also help us acquire something much deeper—spiritual understanding.

Meher Baba says the following about these three essentials spiritual practices:

1. Discrimination: “Realization of God comes to the aspirant who uses discrimination as well as his intuitions about true and lasting values... “Every day life must be guided by discrimination and inspired by the highest intuitions.” (from “Deeper Aspects of Sadhana”)

2. Detachment...“is not only compatible with true evaluation of things, but is its very condition. Craving creates delusion and prevents right perception. It nourishes obsessions and sustains the feeling of dependence upon external objects. Detachment promotes right understanding and facilitates perception of the true worth of things without making consciousness dependent upon external things.” (from “Life of the Spirit”)

3. Intuition: “Spiritual evolution consists in guiding life in the light of the highest values perceived through intuition.” (from “Reincarnation & Karma”)

When I first read over these quotes, I was struck by Meher Baba’s repeated references to “true values.” I could see that some of the byproducts of these three essential spiritual practices are: “true values,” “true evaluation,” and “highest values.” So I went back and looked at the Discourses again and was surprised to discover how often Meher Baba brings up the topic of true values. He emphasizes their importance again and again, as in the “New Humanity” where He states that, “The larger spiritual understanding includes a steady perception of true and lasting values.” And because spiritual understanding is necessary for spiritual life, we must gain knowledge of true values in order to attain spiritual understanding.

It's possible that true values have not been a major signpost on your way to Meher Baba. I know it has not been with me. But seeing the many references Meher Baba makes to true values and the importance He seems to give them, I felt it was important to pause and give them serious consideration.

In our discussion on critical thoughtfulness, we heard Meher Baba explain that through the practice of discrimination, detachment and intuition, our "life now becomes a real experiment with perceived spiritual values." Now He further clarifies, that as we experiment with discrimination, detachment and intuition, they help us gain an understanding of true values. "The more [we carry] on this intelligent and purposive experimentation with [our] own life, the deeper becomes [our] comprehension of the true meaning of life," where ultimately we arrive "at a true perception of the real significance of life as it is." Ah, making this effort sounds very worthwhile because this is an achievable goal in our life.

Therefore let us look at discrimination, detachment and intuition and see how they will help us gain this perception. Basically, we can say that discrimination helps us discern true values from false ones; detachment helps us learn to put true values into action; and intuition promotes the spiritual growth of those values in our life as we perceive them.

Discrimination is the first avenue to gaining a spiritual understanding of what true values are. Initially we need to observe the difference between true values and false ones. Through this, we become aware of what honestly motivates our actions. Then we can begin to choose the true value from the false. For me, the simple basis for choosing a true value rather than maintaining a false one is my belief in Meher Baba's declarations about the unity of the Spirit. Therefore, anything which creates or maintains the illusion of separateness is based on a false value. Conversely, anything which lessens separateness or upholds unity is based on a true value.

Detachment is the second avenue to gaining a spiritual understanding of what true values are. I witnessed an unforgettable incident of detachment at the Trust Office one day. It was on a Thursday. Eruch did not come to the Office. He stayed at Meherazad to welcome and be with the pilgrims. But Mani came regularly on Thursdays. On this particular day, she bounded out of the car with great enthusiasm. Everyone surrounded her desk as she regally presented a precious discovery—a previously unseen, old glass negative of Meher Baba from the early 1920s. She was very excited and made all of us around her very excited. A person entered the office, came in front of Mani's desk and

began to tell her something about some Trust work. Just then a long distance phone call came from Poona for her. In those days, the phone was not in her office. She had to go the lunch room to use the phone. I remained in the office along with this person. We were alone. The person suddenly turned to me with a horrified expression of his face. He had forcefully put his hand on Mani's desk to express a point, and his hand inadvertently fell on the glass negative and broke it. In disbelief we looked at each other. Now it was this person's inglorious task to tell Mani that the glass negative was broken. And this is the unforgettable moment. When Mani returned to the Office and he painfully told her what happened, Mani responded with remarkable poise, "Well, I guess Baba did not want it," without the slightest regret. She then picked up the old brown paper in which laid the broken glass negative, placed it on the window sill behind her and she continued with her work as if nothing had happened.

In all my years at the Trust Office with the Mandali, this one incident stands out as the epitome of detachment, and for that matter, acceptance of Baba's Will. Mani did not scream, yell or blame the person who broke the precious negative. She did not lose her temper at all. In fact, she did not say a word to this person. Her focus was on Baba and His will. It is a far cry from our usual way of blaming others for events that befall us. Naturally, Mani did not behave this way every time. She could be a taskmaster. But in this case, this is how she responded to the experience.

Detachment helps us understand what is of value. For Mani in this case, it was Baba's Will. No one else was involved. Regarding detachment, Eruch would often say to us about our overall attitude of passing events, "Give in, but don't give up." He would not say, "This is the way to be detached." But he wanted us to recognize the value of letting things go that ultimately don't matter, because for him, only God mattered.

With intuition, the third avenue to realizing true values, we see from Meher Baba's quote on page ____ that He plainly states that we evolve spiritually through the values we perceive through intuition. This is quite a statement—a clear, faultless one that reveals the way to live a spiritual life.

Now, how can we apply discrimination, detachment and intuition in a way that promotes true values? Taking an example from my previous book on service, let's say we're involved in some service which we feel is important in and of itself. We hope to attain a certain result. As often happens, at some point in the work we find ourselves in conflict with someone about how to proceed. A difference of opinion about how to

approach the work starts to smolder and smolder. At some point, we recognize that a fire of hostility may break out.

Now if we are able to discriminate between true values and false ones, maintain our poise and have some quality of detachment within us, we will remember that the ultimate intention of the work was in some way to help bring people to the Truth--that is, to uphold the oneness of the spirit.

Whether it is through our programs, pilgrim facilities at our Centers, or correspondence, it is all just to uphold the truth of the spirit which is the true worth of the action. Yet when we get so caught up in our ideas of doing this, and start projecting our personal values on the activity, it is likely we have forgotten to discriminate what is real and what is false. Moreover, we are not detached because maintaining our views has become a matter of pride for us.

Look again at what Meher Baba says detachment is: it is the condition that brings about the true evaluation of things. The simple fact is that when we are not detached, we are not seeing things as they are. We are only seeing things as we want them to be, using the force of our will. This blinds our attempts at discriminating between what is true and what is false. And because we are only listening to the voice of our own desire, we block the voice of God's guidance to us through intuition.

We come now to the main point—the critical importance that true values have in attaining spiritual understandings. In “The Life of the Spirit,” Meher Baba explains what the life of the spirit is based on. He says that “the life of the spirit cannot be a life of uncritical imitation; it must have its basis in the true understanding of values.”

Once again we see not only how Meher Baba emphasizes that we have to critically examine those beliefs that we have thoughtlessly accepted, but in addition, how He establishes for us the importance of true values as the foundation of the life of the spirit—thus making it a primary guideline for our lives.

In approaching spiritual life, we cannot be bound by conventional wisdom or individual personal beliefs. The life of the spirit is beyond that. It is based on true values that are universal and not personal and which lead to oneness and not separateness.

Meher Baba states the way to create this inner life in “Qualifications of the Aspirant: I.” “Those who would transcend the stage of external conformity and enter into the high life of inner realities must

develop the capacity to distinguish between false and true values, irrespective of conventionality or unconventionality.”

Moreover, Meher Baba explains in the same discourse that the life of the spirit is the very same thing as spiritual understanding. And since the life of the spirit “must have its basis in the true understanding of values,” we can readily understand why it should be a focal point in our lives.

I think it is important not to neglect these simple clues to living a spiritual life when Meher Baba gives them to us. It is easy to do. I know very well that I did for many years.

When at last I gave Meher Baba’s statements on true values the attention they deserve, I came to the significant conclusions that true values are the most immediate means we have to connect ourselves with our heart, and by putting them into action, we gain not just intellectual understanding of Meher Baba’s message, but more importantly, spiritual understanding that leads to a realization of the truth of our soul. This is confirmed by what we saw earlier when Meher Baba stated: “The hidden depths of the ocean of life can be gauged only by sounding the heart.” That is what we are doing!

Because of the great significance of true values, I will now focus on them as the way to gain spiritual awareness. Through the discourses, “The Avenues to Understanding,” “Maya,” and “The Termination of the Ego,” we will come to understand: the role true values have for the heart and the mind; how maya creates false beliefs and false values; and the obstructions the ego creates to spiritual understanding.

By looking at these discourses, I hope we will gain a better appreciation of the importance Meher Baba gives to true values. We will see how we can acquire spiritual awareness through them and learn how to put them into action. All of this information will help us to experiment with true values so we can perceive them in our lives and come to a spiritual awareness that is beyond the intellect. In this way we can begin to live a truly spiritual life.

However, we can only continue with our experimentations if our living faith grows at the same time. Otherwise, we won’t have the determination to continue to experiment with true values because we will not see the results of our actions quickly. It is like planting a seed in the ground. One has the understanding that with care and time the seed will sprout. Without that understanding, it looks like we are throwing the seed away. In our case, faith allows us to plant the seeds of true values

in our hearts so with care and time, spiritual understanding sprouts and grows.

THE HEART'S KNOWLEDGE OF TRUE VALUES

One of the most powerful discourses to me is “The Avenues to Understanding.” Because of its vital importance to spiritual life, I have referred to this discourse in the three previous booklets. I don’t want to repeat what I wrote in the earlier booklets, so I won’t even look at what I wrote in them, nor will we be discussing the entire discourse here. What is imperative for us to do is to review several key explanations that Meher Baba makes concerning the mind and the heart in spiritual life. Without our clearly understanding that they indeed have different purposes, both essential, we will be adrift in our muddled aspirations for the Truth. However, by intelligently using each one for its specific function, we will definitely gain spiritual understanding in general and of true values in particular.

Meher Baba hints at the role of the mind and the heart in spiritual life when He says, “In order to understand matter we have material means and in order to understand the spirit we have spiritual means.” We don’t ordinarily think of our world and everything in it as “matter.” Neither do we commonly think of a spiritual world. Like me, you will probably simply remember Meher Baba as often as you can in our world without thinking of matter and spirit. Yet it is important for us to explore this further.

When Meher Baba says there are “material means” to understand the world of matter and “spiritual means” to understand the spirit, what are those means? He says, “Matter is understood through the mind or the intellect working upon data given through the different senses.” In other words, this is how we use our minds in our everyday life.

But when it comes to the spirit, it can only be understood “through the spirit itself,” which means the soul knows itself without any medium. That puts all of us in an impossible situation of understanding the spirit, because only God-Realized souls are able to do this.

Then what do we do? Is there any way that we can approach the spirit? Meher Baba goes on to explain that although we cannot approach the spirit directly, there still is a way. He says, “The best approach for the

understanding of the spirit is through the heart not through the mind.” So much has been said about the heart. But let us stop here and ask ourselves why can’t we approach the spirit through the mind?

Well, think of how we use our mind. When we observe the world, we see objects. Even if we deeply think about something, we still are thinking in terms of objects. Because the mind views objects as separate from itself, in order to understand those objects its method is to receive sensations from them, and then to use the process of reasoning to think about them.

Approaching the spirit through the mind fails, Meher Baba tells us, because we also end up looking upon the spirit as an object, which it is not. Yet because this is how the mind functions, it is really hard for us to grasp the truth that the spirit is not an object.

But it is not this problem alone that makes the mind the inappropriate way to approach the spirit. Meher Baba further explains, “In its objective handling of the material world, mind is saturated with experiences of multiplicity and separateness.”

Sit back and reflect for a moment on how in our day-to-day life we are besieged by an endless array of events announcing that we are separate from each other and from what is around us. This experience of being separate “feeds the egocentric tendencies” within us, essentially dividing us from each other through selfishness and possessiveness. Therefore the mind cannot be the appropriate way to approach the spirit.

Now, is the mind a bad thing? Like any kind of instrument, it depends on how we use it. As we read earlier, Meher Baba stated that to understand the world of matter we have material means because “matter is understood through the mind.” So if we are aware that we are to use our mind only to solve the problems in the material world, then we are using the mind properly. But if we get overwhelmed by the mind being flooded by stimuli that announce to us that we are separate from one another and therefore we feel justified in expressing separative attitudes, then that is a wrong use of the mind.

If the mind separates us through the way it functions, then what does the heart do? Although the heart’s function for humanity at large is to provide the quality of feelings and emotions in life, for those who are seeking the Truth of the Soul, the heart has the capacity to do more. The heart “feeling in its inner experiences the glow of love, has glimpses of the unity of the spirit.”

It is through these glimpses that we become convinced of the truth of the soul. What's more, the heart does not separate us from each other as the mind does. Instead it "in its own way feels the unity of life" and because of this feeling of unity, does not objectify these experiences but rather brings to us a feeling of oneness.

Essentially, Meher Baba says the heart "wants to fulfill itself through a life of love, sacrifice, and service. It is keen about giving instead of taking...and thus seeks expression through self-giving tendencies that unite humanity and make it selfless and generous."

Such feelings are very different from ordinary feelings and emotions from the heart. So how does the heart become the recipient of these unique feelings? Meher Baba explains that our innermost spiritual urge expresses itself through intuition. The heart receives these intuitions which then become the catalyst for us to live a life of love, sacrifice and service.

If we understand the distinct roles the mind and the heart have in spiritual life, we can use them appropriately. The mind is utilized to solve the material problems of life, while the heart, feeling the inner unity of all life, remains the foundation of our life.

Once we have a clear grasp of their functions, we can begin to consciously use each of them appropriately in our lives. As we do so, contradictions lessen because each is performing its rightful function. This attempt to use the mind and the heart for their appropriate function is a way of beginning to balance the mind and the heart.

It is likely that many of us heard of the importance of balancing mind and heart as we were coming to Meher Baba, and then afterwards never really considered how fundamental it is to our own spiritual life. In fact, it is so critical that we learn how to balance the expressions of mind and heart that Meher Baba ends the discourse's discussion by saying that it is the most important condition to a life of spiritual understanding. We should seriously reflect upon Meher Baba's declaration if we wish spiritual understanding to shine in our lives.

No doubt, like anything new, we will be uncertain of how or when to employ the mind and the heart. The attempt to balance them might seem a presumptuous, unattainable spiritual ideal. But as we come to understand how to use the mind and how to use the heart, Meher Baba tells us that "it is possible to arrive at a mode of practical life in which there is harmony between the mind and the heart."

We know that in balancing our personal relationships with one another, there should be some give and take as conflicts develop. Otherwise the relationship will snap. But in resolving our conflicts between our mind and heart, it is different. We come to understand that the heart focused on Meher Baba is always right because it is based on a deeper part of our being, having access to what is fundamentally true.

And therefore, we should not pay heed to the grunts of the mind's assertions of separateness, no matter how reasonable they sound! This is because, as Meher Baba says, "In most persons the mind accepts ends from the promptings of wants, but this means denial of the life of the spirit." This is a very significant statement for us, succinctly explaining that when we listen to our minds, we essentially turn away from the spirit.

The question then is what to do to have our minds help us move toward the life of the spirit? Meher Baba tells us, that, "Only when the mind accepts its ends and values from the deepest promptings of the heart does it contribute to the life of the spirit." And thus, we have no alternative but to train our minds to rely on the heart's intuitive understanding of true values that lead to oneness and not to be so easily influenced by our personal desires that cause separation. In this way the mind supports spiritual life.

That is why the heart must lead the mind. And in order for it to do so, we need to consciously maintain the heart's sense of what is true so we can use the mind to properly approach solving our material problems based on the heart's spiritual understanding.

When the mind and the heart perform what they are intended to do, it creates a harmonious balance between them. And this harmony or cooperation between the mind and the heart, as Meher Baba explains, "does not require the mixing up of their functions."

Ultimately, as we learn to use the heart and the mind in harmony with each other, spiritual understanding begins to awaken in us. And we experience for ourselves Meher Baba's words that, "Spiritual understanding is born of harmony between mind and heart."

Earlier we read that balancing the heart and mind is the most important condition to a life of spiritual understanding. Now, coupled with Meher Baba's statement here, it should be doubly clear how to proceed if we want spiritual understanding. Neglecting His guidance only allows our intellectual information about spirituality to remain on our tongues, never taking root in our being.

So to summarize how we can begin to achieve this harmony: since the mind is our ready companion we need to remember that “the mind has a place in practical life, but its role begins after the heart has had its say.” What is this “say?” It is the language of the heart expressing “its ends and values from the deepest promptings.” To be receptive to these intuitions, we have to be attentive to them. But without making repeated efforts to balance our mind and heart, our spiritual life will never gain momentum. However, when we disregard them and turn only to the seemingly justifiable needs of the moment, we may be doing so at the cost of the spirit. We will remain on the surface of our own consciousness talking about spirituality instead of living it.

Meher Baba further explains the harmonious relationship between the mind and the heart is when “factual knowledge [is] subordinated to intuitive perceptions.” In other words, the heart with its intuitive promptings must take precedence in our lives over the mind’s intellectual knowledge. Because through intuitive perception, we become aware of true values and through their application we arrive at spiritual understanding.

Meher Baba makes this important truth clear for us when He states,

Spirituality does not consist in intellectual knowledge of true values but in their realization. It is this knowledge of inner realization that is worthy of being called spiritual understanding.

And consequently, spiritual understanding is possible for us as we put into action the true values of the heart through the practical means of the mind. The heart leads and the mind follows. This is the balance, harmony, cooperation we want within our own being in order to attain spiritual understanding. Meher Baba further assures us in the discourse that we will intuitively grasp true values in our daily lives if we are focused on attaining spiritual understanding and not content with anything less.

Previously, we have seen that balancing critical reason and living faith is essential and primary. And they also have their place in helping us achieve a balance between mind and heart. Critical reason can calm our unruly mind and faith can inspire our uncertain heart. Critical reason frees our mind from thoughtless acceptance of past ideas that keeps us bound, permitting the mind to listen to the heart, while living faith can keep our heart aglow regardless of our success of putting the heart’s true values into action.

Thus, from the discourse, “Avenues to Understanding,” Meher Baba gives us basic intellectual understanding of the role of mind and the heart in spiritual life. When they are correctly applied, they bring us spiritual understanding. He also explains that understanding true values intellectually is not the same thing as experiencing them in action, because to experience them gradually brings spiritual understanding.

Our initial work then is to establish a spiritual life through daily experimentation of our ideas of spirituality. After critical review, we put them into practice through our faith in them. In this way our reason becomes “critical reason” and our faith becomes “living faith.” In this process we become more aware of true values and our intuition becomes purified.

To continue to be able to base our decisions on true values, we must understand the separate functions of the mind and the heart. Realizing it is only the heart which can perceive the spirit, we learn to follow its dictates. As we do this, we begin to move beyond mere intellectual knowledge of true values and begin to realize them. This is the basis of true spiritual understanding and helps us to apprehend the Truth of our soul.

OVERCOMING THE INTELLECT THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF TRUE AND FALSE VALUES

By now it has become clear that we must use our intellect and our reason to help us go beyond it. Perhaps in our discussion, it has even seemed as if this is a relatively simple and straightforward process. Unfortunately, it is not as easy as it seems on paper and we will now look at why that is. In the last section we saw that the mind is inherently unsuited to grasping the spirit because the mind sees and evaluates the gross world in terms of duality, i.e., object and perceiver. But we will now look at this more closely and see how even its reasoning ability can be perverted.

Since we first heard the word “Maya,” we could not help ourselves from sometimes muttering, in the midst of our difficulties, “It’s just Maya,” hoping by this simple recognition we would find some relief. Yes, Maya is the principal of Ignorance, but the overwhelming predicament for us is that Maya takes “possession of the very seat of knowledge, which is human intellect.”

Now this is quite a handicap. No wonder the search for Truth seems ridiculously impossible with Ignorance controlling our intellects. So it is very important in this discussion about attaining spiritual understanding that we have a serious yet brief review of what Meher Baba says in the discourses on “Maya”—how our intellects are under its sway.

Meher Baba tells us that the intellect maintains Ignorance through false values and false beliefs. “They are used by Maya to keep the soul still in ignorance in its clutches.” Moreover, it is through these means that the “intellect that plays into the hands of Maya creates obstacles to true understanding.” (True understanding is another way of saying spiritual understanding.) Because the intellect that is under the sway of false beliefs and false values creates obstacles to spiritual understanding, we need to have a firm grasp on what false beliefs and false values are, how they affect our lives, and how we can overcome them.

Concerning false beliefs, Meher Baba says that they are “citadels of Maya,” and being its fortress, they “play an important part in holding the soul in spiritual bondage.” The problem with false beliefs, Baba says, is that they “are so deep-rooted and strong that they seem to be self-evident. They take on the garb of veritable truths and are accepted without question.” These false beliefs are our complete acceptance that we are the physical body and the mind. But false beliefs also extend to the numerous beliefs that we have created to justify our behavior and outlook on the world.

Although it is certainly necessary to remember and seriously reflect upon the fact that we are not the body or the mind, surrendering these false beliefs is the final step we take. Therefore, I feel it may be easier to confront these monumental false beliefs by first confronting false values. I suggest this because it seems practical since we are continually choosing our values throughout the day in small and great matters. Moreover, Meher Baba explains that there is a vicious cycle in which “false beliefs implement false values, and they in turn gather strength from the false values in which the soul has been hung up.” So if we first confront our false values, they will in turn spontaneously and subtly lessen the burden of our false beliefs. So let us first confront our false values as the way to begin to overcome the intellect that maintains Ignorance.

Very briefly, “False values are derived from desires or wants.” Meher Baba’s statement here may remind us of an earlier corresponding statement when He said, “In most persons the mind accepts ends from

the promptings of wants, but this means denial of the life of the spirit.” Thus by maintaining false values, we adversely affect our spiritual lives.

Concerning false values, Meher Baba further states that they are “the shackles that hold the soul in spiritual bondage.” We have seen in movies how a prisoner is held in shackles. How heavy they are. What a burden they are. So let’s not bypass His statement too quickly, nodding as if we can fully grasp our imprisonment. We can’t! Instead, at least let’s picture ourselves physically in a similar situation and ponder over the plight that not our physical body but our spirit is shackled by the false values we create.

How does our intellect come to be burdened by false values? Meher Baba explains:

They [false values] arise as a by-product of intellectual activity, which consists in the pursuit of certain accepted values. They come into existence as a part of the rationalization and the justification of accepted values, and they owe their hold upon the human mind to their apparent support of those accepted values.

When we thoughtlessly accept things, we create false values. And because we have made these valuations, our intellect ignorantly maintains them through justifying and rationalizing what we have thoughtlessly accepted. As we continue our unthinking behavior, we continue to shackle ourselves, becoming our own jailer!

As we read this, we may have recalled Meher Baba’s earlier guideline of “freeing the mind from the inertia of uncritical acceptance based upon blind imitation and stirring it to critical thinking.” We now are able to see more clearly the harmful role that the “thoughtless acceptance of established traditions” plays in our lives. And that is why Meher Baba continues to state in that guideline that we must stir our minds to critical thinking in order to free ourselves. Blindly accepting our values is not as harmless as it may seem.

The values we choose are of critical importance. Naturally the choices we make are based on the knowledge we have. Meher Baba tells us in “Maya” that “broadly speaking there are two kinds of knowledge: purely intellectual judgments about the facts of existence; and judgments of valuation, which imply the appreciation of the worth or importance of things.”

If we look a little more closely at these two kinds of knowledge, we can see that the first is based on the activity of the surface mind and the second on the activity of the heart. The significant thing for us to

recognize in considering these two kinds of knowledge is, on the one hand, the great importance our choice of values has in our lives because it comes from the region of our hearts, and on the other hand, how intellectual information when “divorced from values” has little importance.

When does intellectual knowledge become important? Meher Baba answers that by saying, “when it enables man to realize certain values by giving him control over the means to their realization.” This certainly applies to our service activities. We use the intellectual knowledge that we have in selfless service. Through our selfless service we realize certain values that bring us closer to the truth. The intellectual knowledge is the means to realize the values. For example, we want to irrigate our garden, so we use pipelines to supply it with water. The pipes on their own without water are useless (intellectual knowledge). But when we fill the pipes with water (our values), they now become the means to help the garden to grow. The water cannot reach the garden without the pipelines (the means) and the pipelines have no use without the water.

Meher Baba further explains how intellectual knowledge becomes important “when it enters into valuation itself as an important factor, modifying or in some other way affecting the accepted values.”

An example of this may simply be something like this. A person we know believes that there is no such thing as God. I suppose as a value system we could say he is an atheist. Then we come along and tell him about Meher Baba and give him some information about Meher Baba’s life and His message of love and truth. With this introduction of new information, it’s possible he will decide that maybe there is more to life than what he had thought. Thus this new intellectual knowledge begins to affect his value system.

Just as Meher Baba speaks of two kinds of knowledge in “Maya,” He tells us there are also “two kinds of falsehood: mistakes in accepting as facts those things which are not facts...which is due to irregular and loose thinking and mistakes in valuation...which is due to vitiated thinking.”

Once again we can see where one falsehood concerns intellectual information and the second concerns what we value or as I say, simply speaking, our heart. It is true that the purely intellectual judgments we make affect us, but not as much as our choice of values. Baba tells us that mistakes we make in valuation misguide us, pervert our minds and limit our lives. That summation alone may momentarily shock us into being a bit more careful about our choice of values. And although we may be unfamiliar with the phrases “irregular and loose thinking” and

“vitiating thinking,” by choosing such words, Meher Baba is helping us come to understand the way we process our thoughts.

Our thinking is “irregular and loose” when we make some mistake in the application of our intellect. These falsehoods are not so harmful to our lives. So often we pick up bits and pieces of information and from that we start jumping to ill-founded conclusions. Whenever we do this, our thinking is “irregular and loose.” We have become careless (loose) in not getting the complete picture (regular thinking). For the most part this is not harmful to our hearts because such mental activity does not touch upon our values. It might cause complications in our daily lives but because it does not touch upon our hearts, it is not, generally, harmful to our spiritual lives.

What is indeed harmful to us, however, is when our thinking becomes vitiated or impure which can then affect our values by altering or perverting them. From the spiritual point of view this happens when we are being overwhelmed by some momentary personal desire that blinds us to what is really important—the Truth of the soul.

So basically we have two kinds of knowledge and two kinds of falsehood in Maya. Each has a component that is not so harmful because it concerns information in our lives that only affects the surface mind. But each also has a component that certainly is harmful because it affects how we value things. And how we value things affects our heart, which in turn affects our spiritual life.

Thus, to re-emphasize, we establish our lives on the basis of how we value things. We have seen how Meher Baba has stated that one of the chief ways we are ignorant of the truth of soul is through false values. So perhaps now is a good time to hear from Baba in more detail exactly what false values are.

Meher Baba says:

False values are derived from desires or wants. They are dependent upon subjective factors; and being dependent upon subjective factors, they are relative and impermanent, and are liable to change from time to time and from person to person.

The key word here is “subjective.” Our subjective experience is based upon our personal desires which continuously change throughout our lives and even throughout the course of a day. It is these subjective, individual personal desires that create false values. That is an overwhelming conclusion, isn’t it?

It may be hard for us to really accept that the many little moments and big events of our lives are based on false values, but as long as we are driven by wants and desires this will be so. As Baba explains they are false because the value “is not inherent in the objects themselves.” This is critical to our understanding why a value is false. It is false because it is we who give it value according to our ever-changing desires. One moment we have intense longing for something and the next moment it is gone. There really is no real meaning to these objects. And having no real value, that is, lasting value, they are false. True values are just the opposite. As Baba says,

True values are values that belong to things in their own right. They are intrinsic; and because they are intrinsic, they are absolute and permanent and are not liable to change from time to time or from person to person.

Now that is quite a statement! So let us think what in our lives is permanent, that stands on its own without anything we can add to it. Are you stumped? That just shows how much of life is dominated by false values. Ultimately the only true value is God Himself.

But if God is the only true value, then how can we express true values in our life. And if we can't express true values, then how will we ever achieve real spiritual understanding? It seems we are, once again, in a familiar dilemma, like the one in the earlier section where we learned that the spirit can only be known through the spirit.

But just as Meher Baba came to our aid by explaining that we can approach the spirit through the heart, He once again explains that we can approach true values through the expression of what He calls “Relative Values.” We will now turn from the discourses on “Maya” for a moment and see in the discourse, “The Place of Occultism in Spiritual Life” how He brings this to light.

RELATIVE VALUES – THE WAY TO THE HEART

First Meher Baba significantly explains that, “Relative values arise when a thing acquires importance through serving the realization or expression of the Truth.” In other words, actions that help us realize or express the Truth have relative value. Because they lead us to, or are connected to what is absolute, unchangeable Truth, they are relatively true. For many of us, the Truth we know is Meher Baba. And by

extension, it might seem that in serving Him, we are automatically doing something of “relative value.”

However, just because we are serving His Cause does not automatically mean that our actions are connected to the Truth. It is still possible and in fact, easy to think we are serving God, when we are really only reinforcing the duality of separateness in the world.

We have to continue to maintain the balance between mind and heart, with the heart having precedence over the mind. False values always creep in whenever the mind with its false perspective of separation overwhelms the heart’s simple expression of oneness.

Based on what Meher Baba has said in “Maya,” another way of looking at the expression of true values may be this: when we use the two kinds of knowledge—intellectual information of the mind and the valuation from the heart—without falling prey to the two kinds of falsehoods (created by loose or impure thinking), then our actions naturally will be connected (related) to the truth.

Meher Baba further explains the significance of relative values by stating they are “the essential conditions for the game of divine life.” Without our expressing relative values, we would not be able to overcome the ignorance that engulfs us concerning the truth of our soul. “And therefore, though it is relative, such value is real and not illusory.” Baba’s explanation here assures us when we express values that have some connection to the Truth, although relative, they are nonetheless true values.

Earlier we had seen how discrimination was one of the ways to attain spiritual understanding. Now we can begin to use it in our choice of values. We end up expressing relative values that lead us to the truth rather than illusory values that lead us away from it. A simple way to discriminate between the two is that illusory values only have meaning because of a temporary personal perspective that will change in time. Relative values, on the other hand, remain no matter what the circumstances are in our lives.

For example, working hard at a job that we like may improve our worldly situation for a period of time, but it will not bring us closer to the God or the Truth. On the other hand, what can give the job relative value is working in ways that reinforce spiritual values—practicing detachment and loving kindness while upholding the truth of oneness, etc. Then our work becomes a means for us to practice spiritual qualities that have relative value.

However, our ego will continue to subtly derail these efforts. Even if we engage in "selfless service" as some kind of employment, this is no more a guarantee that we are doing something of relative value than working for Meher Baba's cause, because our ego is so adept at using the label "selfless service," or "Baba's work," to maintain separateness.

I think a good rule of thumb is to look at the means and not the ends. If, no matter what we are doing in our lives externally, we are practicing detachment, discrimination, self effacement, etc. then we are doing something of relative value which will bring us closer to God.

And perhaps the surest guideline is love. It is love that gives true value to our experience. If it is love, then it will not change. If it is love, then it will not be based on our subjective desires of the moment. It will remain as it is, standing on its own. Of course, when we project our subjective desires upon love, then love no longer remains love. It has become tainted with selfishness. This is hard for us to avoid, but still, the chances are that any time when it feels that we are being prompted to act in a loving manner, there's a good chance that we are actually engaged in something of relative value.

I think Meher Baba gives us a direct and perhaps even stark guideline to gauge our daily choice of values through His words below:

In reality, the only thing that has importance is God; but very few persons are really interested in God for His own sake. If the worldly-minded turn to God at all, it is mostly for their own selfish and mundane purposes. They seek the gratification of their own desires, hopes, and even revenges through the intervention of the God of their imagination. They do not seek God as Truth. They long for all things except the only Truth, which they regard as unimportant...People pursue their happiness through everything except God, who is the only unfailing source of abiding joy.

When my full attention was finally drawn to this paragraph, I was a bit humbled by it, a bit silenced by it. I suddenly saw my image of longing for God through these words and the image was a bit distorted. The words that stung the most were, "They do not seek God as Truth." Here I thought I was doing all I could to serve God by serving His Cause at His Trust Office and serving His Mandali. But when I came upon this sentence, His words pierced me. I could not deny them. I questioned whether I was really seeking God as Truth. Or was I was seeking the fulfillment of my own personal preferences from the God of my own imagination, in thinking that by completing my work—because it was connected to His Cause, His Trust or His Mandali—it was connected to the Truth? Was I trying to secretly gratify myself and justify my personal

preferences because I had no other means than through His service? Was I upholding true values or relying on false ones to satisfy myself? Ultimately is my happiness based on what is true or on what is passing?

Taking Meher Baba's clear explanation into account, we all must become aware of how critical it is for us to recognize when we are maintaining false values in our lives. This is especially the case when we are involved in trying to serve His Cause. At that time, it is very easy to make mistakes in valuation if our thinking, even for a moment, has become impure—meaning not focused on the Truth. We have to remember that the project we may be completing in His name is only the medium to lessen the false self. We have to be careful not to project false values upon the medium. Therefore, unless we are upholding true values that come from the heart rather than false values that come from the mind, we are not serving His true Cause, which is to lessen the false self.

In order to uphold right values, we have to confront the false values we have been defending. As we saw earlier, false values are chiefly maintained by our intellect through the mistakes we make in valuation. To free ourselves from these false values, Meher Baba says, "It is necessary to purify the intellect." And it is by purifying the intellect that we overcome it. Really speaking, we remove the obstacles the impure intellect maintains that conceal spiritual understanding.

PURIFYING THE INTELLECT

Purifying the intellect is a process "of removing those desires and attachments that are responsible for vitiating (impairing) the intellect." This is similar to the process that reason has to go through to become critical reason through devotedly removing the obstacles of uncritical acceptance.

In a sense this is nothing new to us. We all try to get rid of desires, one way or the other. But the important point that Meher Baba makes here is that the "elimination of desires and attachments that vitiate thinking is not accomplished purely by sheer intellect."

Now that indeed is important to us. For what Meher Baba is telling us is that the obstacles "are not diminished by mere counter assertions of a purely intellectual nature." That is, we cannot sit back and just think our way to freedom. Then what do we do?

Meher Baba tells us that to free ourselves from that which impairs our thinking “requires right effort and right action.” I think we can safely say that “right effort” is the effort it takes to become aware of what impairs our intellect so that it creates false values. Baba describes this effort as “strenuous and furious thinking.” We may not ordinarily think that Meher Baba would want us to make such exertions, but He does. Through a deep exploration of our thoughtless acceptance of things, He wants us to free the intellect from the past habit patterns of thought and response, and seek true values. And it takes deep and focused thought to do so.

Meher Baba further explains that our thinking not only needs to be profound but also it needs to be “clear.” And for that He tells us “true clarity of thought is the fruit of a pure and tranquil mind.” Well, what can I say about that? Few of us have pure and tranquil minds. I certainly don’t. But what I think can help us move in that direction is to keep our hearts pure and tranquil. By that I mean if our heart’s motive is pure, it will help keep our hearts at peace, so to speak, and therefore tranquil. Again, this goes hand in hand with what Baba said earlier about letting our hearts provide guidance for our minds.

And again, this is reciprocal because as we use “strenuous and furious thinking,” we gain greater mental clarity which helps us discriminate better between true and false values. This in turn makes it easier to acquiesce to the heart’s guidance which promotes the perception of spiritual truths, purifies the intuition, and leads to a more tranquil mind.

But once again, it is critical to remember that it is not enough to merely think deeply about things or even to perceive the falsehoods within us. We have to actually get rid of them. Therefore, Meher Baba warns us that “not by armchair speculation but by the doing of right things shall spiritual truths be discovered.” We have to rouse ourselves to get up from the comfortable seat of His words and play the divine game by putting them into action—right action.

Meher Baba further prompts us by saying that “honest action is a preliminary to the elimination of spiritual falsehoods.” Through honest action, we enter the game.

Honest, now there is a word for you. It is likely that every one of us has a different view of what it is to be honest—honest in action. But let us recall the incident in Eruch’s life with Baba when Eruch came to understand from Him what it means to be honest. Baba told Eruch that the Truth always upholds or uplifts the spirit of another person.

Therefore to be honest is to take pains never to hurt or crush another person's heart.

With this kind of honesty in mind, we can begin to put our understanding of spirituality into action. It helps us understand how to take a stand for the Truth. And we will see in the subsequent sections just how critical this kind of honesty is.

Oh, by the way, because Meher Baba uses the phrase “true values” more often than “relative values,” we will continue to refer to relative values as true values, because they point us toward the direction of the Truth.

WHAT IS NECESSARY IS NOT WHAT IS IMPORTANT

Here is a fundamental principle that Meher Baba makes in the discourse, “Maya” that we should not forget:

The intellect that functions in freedom prepares the way to the Truth, but the intellect that plays into the hands of Maya creates obstacles to true understanding.

This simple statement clarifies that the intellect can help us or hinder us in the search for Truth according to how we use it. As we just discussed, for the intellect to help us we have to make the conscious effort to become aware of the obstacles that inhibit true understanding and then free it from these false values.

Meher Baba explains in detail what we all need to become aware of and what we need to do through the strikingly clear narrative in the discourse, “Nature of the Ego I.” So where do we begin? As usual, we begin with ourselves—our own ego.

In this discourse, Meher Baba speaks of values as well. He says that “the ego attempts to solve its inner conflicts through false valuations and wrong choices.” Let us stop here and reflect upon His statement. We already learned from the previous section that Meher Baba says that valuation is one of the major forms of knowledge and that false valuation is one of the major forms of Maya. Baba is making us aware here, and this is very critical, that whenever we enter a conflict, the unchecked ego left to its own predisposition or bias toward the false separative self, will falsely evaluate the situation and therefore make a wrong choice of action. We are so totally accustomed to evaluating every single moment

in terms of our ego—the narrow, limited separative self—that we don't give it a second thought.

However, with the understanding that Meher Baba gives us, we can rightly place our confidence in confronting the ego intelligently. We can begin to do this by making the effort to observe how we are evaluating the present conflict; how are we being manipulated by it. As we become aware of these manipulations, we can attune ourselves to choosing action that is not biased toward the ego. It is not a question of just making a simple adjustment to look at things differently in an isolated moment. It is a question of making the monumental effort of looking at things differently every moment.

How do we usually look at things? Meher Baba explains it this way:

It is characteristic of the ego that it takes all that is unimportant as important and all that is important as unimportant. Thus, although power, fame, wealth, ability, and other worldly attainments and accomplishments are really unimportant, the ego takes delight in these possessions and clings to them as “mine.”

Because this is a very broad, general statement, it may seem at first hard to apply it to our mundane, daily actions. We don't seek power, fame, etc. We usually associate such things with those on the world's stage. Nonetheless we may seek these things in a much smaller scale on the little stages that make our lives: the push for power, the need for prestige, the appetite for money, the triumph of accomplishments. We need to become aware how these false values affect us and our relations at work and with family and friends.

Yet there is another aspect to Meher Baba's words here that may be disconcerting to us. Setting aside power and fame, He says that “wealth, ability, and other worldly attainments and accomplishments are really unimportant.” If that is the case, then how are we to live our lives? We have to pursue our livelihoods for our own sakes and for the sakes of our families. Didn't Baba say that we have to uphold our responsibilities? Yes it is true; we do have to live up to our responsibilities. It is absolutely necessary that we do so. Then what do we do?

In order to solve this dilemma, we come to a very welcome differentiation that Meher Baba makes between what is important and what is necessary:

Bodily and mental comfort, as well as other worldly attainments and accomplishments, are often necessary; but they are not therefore important. There is a world of difference between necessity and importance. Many things come to the ego as being necessary, but they are not in themselves important...Spirituality, which comes to the ego as being unnecessary, is really important for the soul.

From this passage, we can infer that Meher Baba confirms that our physical and mental health, success in our careers, and other achievements are part of normal living and therefore necessary. Yet regardless of fulfilling these requisites for a normal life, they are not important. He goes on to say that what is important, and what is the only thing that is important is true spirituality (the elimination of the ego), which the ego, by its very nature, cannot endorse.

Meher Baba continues explaining what He means:

For example, if a person experiences some bodily or mental discomfort while doing work of spiritual importance, the ego steps in to secure the unimportant bodily or mental comfort, even at the cost of giving up the really important spiritual work...The ego thus represents a deep and fundamental principle of ignorance, which is exhibited in always preferring the unimportant to the important.

Faced with Meher Baba's clarification between what is necessary in daily life and what is important—true spiritually, how do we live a normal life focusing on the important and yet at the same time maintaining what is necessary to sustain our life?

I will try to answer this question by applying Meher Baba's example above with my experience at the Trust Office. Although we can no longer do spiritual work under His direct orders, we can volunteer to serve in His Cause. Usually when we volunteer to serve, we are fulfilling a purpose—some work needs to be accomplished. Naturally, then we focus our energies and talents on achieving successful completion of the task. By doing so, we feel that we have done something for Meher Baba or for His Cause.

Thus we can say that the work we have taken on is certainly necessary. At the same time, we cannot deny that we want to complete the work successfully. Otherwise why would we take up the work to begin with? The question is, in terms of Meher Baba's explanation, is the work important—spiritually important?

I see it this way: I need to remember that no matter how close a given project is to my heart, successful completion of it only takes place in the transient world. What takes place beyond the transient world is successfully upholding true values in my heart because it is connected to the source of my being. Thus, this is where the real importance of my action and my activities lies. Ultimately what is spiritually important is to lessen the false self in any way.

There is an ongoing delicate balance between achieving the result which is necessary with how the result is achieved which is important, because it is connected to values. This means that often, as Meher Baba alludes to above, I have to forego my mental comfort in order to secure the important spiritual work—expressing true values—which goes against the comfort of the ego. Even if I have convinced myself that what I am doing will help the Trust greatly, if my actions deteriorate into a series of result-based achievements, false values will arise because my actions are subjective.

The way I try to respond to activity at the Trust Office is by making the conscious effort to put true values into action even as I aim at the result. The important thing is always how I am doing it; what values I have upheld as I try to complete my responsibilities which are necessary. Overall, it is a monumental struggle where we gradually move from the subjective perspective, “I am the one” doing the work, to upholding the inner belief in the truth of “We are all One.” This can be attained through the expression of true values that touch the heart and reach toward the unchangeable truth within us—our soul.

In my own search at the Trust Office for what is important, I can share the following kind of experience. It helped lead me toward understanding the worth of true values and the importance of putting them into action.

Many times I would be asked by the Mandali to work on a certain project. I would complete the project, sometimes taking even a year or more. Upon successful completion of the work, I would present it to them. On several occasions, they told me that the work was no longer required or even rejected the whole project. The work I conscientiously carried out was torn down by the ones who told me to do the work in the first place. These were not easy times!

Yet I have to admit that it did eventually teach me something, although with a heavy sigh. It reminded me that all this work was only scaffolding. Their actions helped lead me to discover and experience for myself the significance of putting true values into action, regardless of what the outcome of my actions may have been. Perhaps that is why

Meher Baba instructed the Mandali to build up and tear down many of the edifices constructed for His work. He would explain to them that His work was not in the successful completion of projects. He was using these edifices only as a scaffolding that He used for His inner work—the work of the spirit.

So I have to keep reminding myself that if I hang on to the scaffolding then I may not be paying any attention to what is behind it, the invisible building of the spirit that is really important. It is an understanding that is exhausting—to put my heart into the work in order to free my heart from the work. Perhaps it is this very see-saw action that is cutting the shackles off my soul.

CONTROLLING THE SUBCONSCIOUS THROUGH TRUE VALUES

Let us write the beginning of a film scenario. We wake up and find ourselves in a spaceship hurtling through the dark void of the universe. No, forget that, that has been done too often. We wake up and find ourselves on a tropical island without a clue of how we got there. No, that won't do either. How about this: we wake up to our usual daily circumstances and discover that somehow we are being controlled. We have a sense as we move about that there is lurking power making us do things we don't want to do; it makes us feel things we don't want to feel; it makes us think things we don't want to think. As we come to this awareness, we feel panic running through us. Have we secretly been abducted by aliens who planted some kind of computer chip in our brains? We run to our next door neighbor and inquire how he is doing. He says that everything is fine. But then we notice in our conversation that he contradicts himself several times without realizing it in the least. We feel that he does not even notice that he has made these contradictions. We sense that he is, like ourselves, also being controlled, but is not even aware of it. We excuse ourselves and go outside. We breathe deeply to try to lessen our panic. We call up some friends and meet them for lunch. A short while after sitting down together, we notice how our friends begin to say things that they don't really mean. We know them, after all, for they are our friends. Yet they insist on what they say. We look at them with dread. Now we know that they too are being controlled by something unknown within them. We now are in a total state of panic for we feel that the world has been taken over by aliens who control us from within.

What do we do now? Is there any hope? We go into a bookstore to occupy our minds. We pick up a book and thumb nervously through the

pages. Our eye falls upon these words, “The mind rarely functions harmoniously because it is mostly guided and governed by forces in the subconscious.”

Our mind seizes upon the words “governed by forces.” We exult at finding a clue about what has happened to us. We almost feel relieved that what we were becoming aware of was not imagined but true. “Yes, we are governed by forces,” we mutter to ourselves.

We look at the words again, this time reading the whole sentence as if it was a biblical revelation about what is controlling everyone. The “subconscious” seems to be the prime suspect, so we try to interrogate it. We keep asking it questions, but it does not respond. It just sits there. But all the time, as we ask it questions, we hear a quiet murmur from it that we cannot understand.

We turn to another suspect, the “mind.” After all, the book says “the mind rarely functions harmoniously.” We begin to grill the mind. “So,” we ask in our best tough guy voice, “most of the time you cause conflicts, disruptions and disorder?”

Our suspect replies, “Isn’t it obvious?”

We respond, “So, you’re a wise guy, huh? We know what to do with wise guys!”

Our suspect responds, “You wish you knew what to do with me. That is your problem.”

At his words we are knocked off our heels. We fall into a chair, realizing that he is right. We don’t know what to do. We don’t have the skills at interrogating the suspect.

We shake off this reverie, and we are back in the bookstore, reading the next line in the book. It says, “Few persons take the trouble to attain mastery over these hidden forces that direct the course of mental life.”

We read these words and pore over their meaning as if a light is gradually being turned up in a very, very dark room. As the light increases, we find it is our own hand on the knob making the room lighter and lighter.

We come to the growing conclusion that nothing has been controlling us or our friends or anyone other than our own subconscious selves. In fact the author, Meher Baba, inspires us to take the trouble

and “attain mastery over these hidden forces that direct the course of mental life.”

With this understanding, the beginning of the film scenario ends as one great battle for control is over. That is the battle in which we thought there was an outside force controlling us.

What follows is the real battle that is yet to be written by us—the battle within us to understand and gain greater awareness of these hidden forces in our own subconscious so they do not direct our lives.

It really is astounding to grasp that we are at the mercy of our subconscious. Our days pass by with little recognition of this truth. We may think we are consciously in control of ourselves. But we are often largely manipulated and controlled by what is not conscious within us. It may be humiliating for us to admit that we are not in control of ourselves. We hate when others try to control us. We spend so much of our day fighting against being controlled. But when it comes to the truth that we are not in control of ourselves, that we are manipulated by an unseen part of our minds, we disregard it or perhaps casually admit it in order to go on with our day without considering why we find ourselves so often embroiled in conflicts—both internally and externally.

Meher Baba explains that there is a way out of the dilemma of human conflict in His discourse, “Nature of the Ego I.” He says, “The elimination of conflict is possible only through conscious control over the forces in the subconscious.”

We may nod our heads and say this is impossible. But we need to slow ourselves down and recognize that it is possible for us. Not only because Meher Baba Himself is saying it is so, but also because He is not talking about us knowing what is unconsciously contained within us, but what is subconsciously provoking our actions.

Meher Baba’s explanation concerning the elimination of conflict is another of His illuminating statements that can guide our actions to the Truth. If we are going to confront our conflicts intelligently, then we have to understand that what lies in our subconscious can adversely affect our actions. Once we understand that, then we can begin to consciously control it. What we want to achieve is to consciously make choices for ourselves, not for our subconscious to make choices for us. Otherwise we remain in the state of thoughtlessly accepting false values rather than intelligently choosing true ones.

I began to understand very slowly that I could gain conscious control over the subconscious by witnessing the mind. As I did so, I

developed the ability to see how the subconscious mind was affecting my conscious mind. I literally could observe how thoughts from the subconscious mind would, if I didn't prevent them, adversely affect my actions. But rather than let them do so, I would pluck out such thoughts like bad weeds pushing their way out of the soil of my subconscious. By becoming aware of what was in my subconscious, my choice as to what action I should take became much clearer. Meher Baba confirms that the only way to confront inner conflicts is to become aware of what is in our subconscious.

Meher Baba goes on to say about controlling the subconscious that, "This control can be permanently attained only through the repeated exercise of true valuation in all the cases of conflict presented to the mind." Once again, Meher Baba not only brings to our attention the important place true values have in our search for God, but also indicates that such control can be part of our daily life.

Let us look at this quote. It contains two powerful and meaningful phrases for us: "control can be permanently attained," and "only through the repeated exercise of true valuation in all cases of conflict".

The first of these phrases "control can be permanently attained" is an affirmation that declares we can achieve such a control. And we can do so permanently! In a world where nothing is permanent, it is remarkable that Meher Baba is stating that such a control can indeed be lasting.

However, I think we need to qualify this phrase for, like anything in this world, there are degrees. Let us say we are confronted by some challenging problem. We really make an effort to overcome it, and we eventually do. Now we are in full control of a particular action that was once affected by our subconscious mind. We have attained permanent control over one problem. Nonetheless, there are always new challenges to face in which we will have to exert ourselves and establish permanent control.

Through the second of these phrases—"only through the repeated exercise of true valuation in all cases of conflict"—Meher Baba explains how control can be permanently attained. He makes it clear that control can be achieved "only" if we uphold true values as conflicts arise, which requires constant vigilance and effort on our part.

It seems there is no getting away from true values if we are interested in living a spiritual life. Meher Baba expresses the importance of true values not only in this aspect of spiritual life, but we have been

seeing that Baba refers to true values as our guiding light in discourse after discourse, from one aspect of the spiritual life to another.

To emphasize the place true values have in spiritual life, here is a brief review of some of the things Meher Baba has said so far. Also note the connection each quote has with the title of the discourse, revealing the multifaceted relationship true values have in spiritual life.

In “Entering into the Realities of Inner Life” — we “must develop the capacity to distinguish between false and true values.”

In “Deeper Aspects of Sadhana” — “Realization of God comes to the aspirant who uses discrimination as well as his intuitions about true and lasting values.”

In “Reincarnation & Karma” — “Spiritual evolution consists in guiding life in the light of the highest values perceived through intuition.”

In “The Life of the Spirit” — “The life of the spirit...must have its basis in the true understanding of values.”

In “Avenues to Understanding,” — “Spirituality does not consist in intellectual knowledge of true values but in their realization. It is this knowledge of inner realization that is worthy of being called spiritual understanding.”

In “The New Humanity”, — “The larger spiritual understanding includes a steady perception of true and lasting values.”

In “Place of Occultism” — “Relative values arise when a thing acquires importance through serving the realization or expression of the Truth. The importance of such things is derived from their being the essential conditions for the game of divine life; and therefore, though it is relative, such value is real and not illusory.”

And now in this specific case of eliminating conflict, Meher Baba explains that when we put true values into action, we gradually attain spiritual understanding which lessens the conflicts that ordinarily plague our life. However, because we don’t clearly grasp that we really can eliminate conflict by upholding true values it is understandable why we fail to free ourselves from them.

Most people try to confront their conflicts using what they think are the best analytical methods for grappling with the subconscious. Whatever decision comes from such methods, Meher Baba says, the choice that is made is haunted by failure. This is true because, “Analysis

in itself may aid choice, but the choice will remain a barren and ineffective intellectual preference.” However, true values are not an intellectual preference. They spring from the source of truth that lies within the heart.

Meher Baba explains that for analysis to genuinely cause change in us, it has to be “vitalized by zeal for some ideal appealing to the deepest and most significant strata of human personality.” In other words, Baba says that the “motive power or inspiration,” to honestly change ourselves comes “from a burning longing for some comprehensive ideal.” He then significantly states that, “The establishment of a true ideal is the beginning of right valuation,” and becomes “the most important requirement for the satisfactory resolution of conflict.”

Meher Baba being the personification of God in human form is the all-embracing ideal. Inspired remembrance of Him allows us to honestly confront our conflicts and change ourselves. For by acknowledging who He is, we begin the process of replacing false values with true ones.

If we were still unsure what exactly true values are, Meher Baba’s words here should relieve us. Although we don’t think of it in this way, but in establishing Baba as our true ideal, He is also our gauge for true valuation! Gradually the whole depth of our psyche has to be brought to light, re-evaluated and refocused toward right valuation. It is a life-long process. Meher Baba explains this process in another remarkable statement that can illuminate our actions:

Right valuation in turn is the undoing of the constructions of the ego, which thrives on false valuation. Any action that expresses the true values of life contributes toward the disintegration of the ego, which is a product of ages of ignorant action.

So what we call our ego is “a product of ages of ignorant action.” No wonder this confrontation is never easy. We are going against actions bred on false values that have a life of their own because of countless experiences in past lives. Even with the best of intentions then, how are we to confront the ego when it is under such an enormous weight?

To overcome this gargantuan illusion of the false self, Meher Baba tells us of a way that thoroughly supports the steps we make to the Truth. He tells us that, “any action that expresses the true values of life contributes toward the disintegration of the ego.”

True values have so much power that any actions of ours that express them helps lessen the false self. This succinctly characterizes

why the path of true values is so important to us. It is a vital awareness that brings spiritual understanding into daily actions.

In describing the power that true values have, Meher Baba further describes a process by which we can choose true values over false ones. In the next section, we will look at this process and the guidance He gives to make the choices that brings us spiritual awareness.

HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE IN UPHOLDING TRUE VALUES

We want to put true values into action. We are enthusiastic about the challenge, especially after everything we have just heard from Meher Baba about true values. In “Removal of Sanskaras II,” Baba explains not only what we will face in trying to replace false values with true ones but also how to make our effort successful.

First, Meher Baba explains to us that our mind “does not find it easy to adjust itself to these new claims of its own perceptions.” We may think that because true values come from the source that our mind should readily yield and accept them. Unfortunately, it does not happen this way. The reason is because our mind is “accustomed to certain habits of thought and response” which creates considerable inertia in us for any change even if it is a change connected to the Truth.

Because of this inertia, to overcome the “impressions of previous modes of thought and conduct,” we have to enter a “process of readjustment,” as Meher Baba calls it, where we consciously replace our habit patterns with true values. You may be surprised to learn that He calls this process “controlling the mind.” And He explains its value and the results that it brings:

Control that has true spiritual value does not consist in the mechanical repression of thoughts and desires, but is the natural restraint exercised by perception of positive values discovered during the process of experience.

We often think of controlling the mind as something distasteful, mechanical and laborious. Yet the kind of control that Meher Baba is recommending is none of these. He makes it very clear to us that “this control is not a mechanical or forcible twisting of the mind.” He names this kind of control as “creative control,” because its purpose “is to make possible the free and unconditioned functioning of the mind.” In other words, what we are trying to do through creative control “is an effort of

the mind to overcome its own inertia...and arrive at self-adjustment in order to release the expression of the true values of life.”

Meher Baba says, “Creative control becomes possible because the source of light is within everyone.” He further explains to us that “though Self-illumination is prevented by the veil of sanskaras, it is not all darkness even within the boundaries of ordinary human consciousness.” Baba’s statement here struck me with the thought that if it is not all darkness then what light is within us that will help us establish creative control?

Meher Baba answers this question by stating, “The ray of light consists of a sense for true values.” A remarkable statement, isn’t it? It is what we have been talking about all along. And now we have Baba directly saying that true values are our light in this world!

Meher Baba continues to explain that true values guide “man onward with varying degrees of clarity according to the thickness of the veil of sanskaras.” What an interesting qualification Baba makes here. By stating that true values are perceived through “various degrees of clarity,” there seems to be no end to fine points when it comes to talking about true values in the spiritual life. However, essentially it comes down to the point that as we lessen our sanskaric burden, we will perceive true values in a new and clearer way.

So as we stated above, we want to overcome “the inertia caused by impressions (sanskaras) of previous modes of thought and conduct.” We all know how difficult it is to change, let alone to change something as deep-seated as our habitual patterns of thought and action. And yet that is what has to be confronted. We established this necessity early on when Meher Baba explained that we have to confront our thoughtlessness with critical thoughtfulness.

Another way of saying this is that we have to confront the false values we have ignorantly maintained and replace them with true values that we are beginning to perceive through our longing for a spiritual life. In fact Meher Baba tells us that, “Spiritual progress is thus characterized by the dual aspect of renouncing the false values of sanskaras in favor of the true values of understanding.” This is another unique explanation of the dynamic of spiritual life. Yet Meher Baba gives the same understanding to us from another unusual angle when He states that, “The process of the negation of sanskaras is at the same time the process of understanding true values.”

To simplify the whole thing, Meher Baba gives us a clear picture of what takes place within us as we try to put true values into action:

When some positive values come within the focus of consciousness, their claims for being expressed in life generate mental responses that ultimately remove all the tendencies obstructing a free and full expression of those values. Thus the tendencies for lust, greed, and anger are removed through an appreciative recognition of the value of a life of purity, generosity, and kindness.

The process of putting true values into action begins through the “appreciative recognition” of them. Once we consciously recognize a true value, we gather sufficient mental force that gradually overcomes anything that obstructs it from being put into action. In essence, this is the beginning of creative control—choosing the true value over the false value through spiritual understanding.

Meher Baba explains in “Nature of the Ego, I” not only what creative control is but also how to achieve creative control. He begins the explanation by saying, “If the mind is to be freed from conflict, it must always make the right choice and must unfailingly prefer the truly important to the unimportant.” We have seen earlier that the ego always chooses the unimportant over the important, the only important thing being God or the Truth of the Soul.

Therefore we have to consciously counter the tendency to rely on false values to maintain our separative selves, and choose true ones instead that uphold the truth of oneness. In practical terms this means, as we just read, that “the tendencies for lust, greed, and anger are removed through an appreciative recognition of the value of a life of purity, generosity, and kindness.”

Meher Baba tells us that there are two qualities involved in making the right choice. The first of these is that our choice has to be intelligent. Interestingly, Baba explains that “an intelligent solution...requires an insight into true values, which have to be disentangled from false values.”

We may wonder why true values and false values would be entangled to begin with. This happens because we are not clear as to what they are. A common scenario in our life is that we instinctually express a true value because we are trying to live a spiritual life and moments later indiscriminately express a false one without understanding its harmful effect. One moment we are patient and the next moment we are angry. Patience is a true value because it enhances the spiritual life by lessening the ego, while anger only increases the false separative self. Of course, when we do lose our temper, if we are able to

humble ourselves and sincerely apologize, that is an act of kindness and, in a sense, a true value.

Once we can differentiate between true and false values, then we can make the intelligent choice of choosing the true value in order to solve the conflict. As we are able to pursue “true and permanent values,” Meher Baba tells us our mental life is supported by creating greater mental poise. However, when our choice is unintelligent and we have asserted a false value, He explains that although we “may temporarily overcome conflict, it is bound in the long run to curtail the scope of life... Moreover, the conflict will surely reappear in some other form if it has not been intelligently solved.” And thus such actions add further power to our subconscious which is ever ready to dictate how we should act.

Therefore, Meher Baba clarifies for us that, “The problem of the conflict of desires thus turns out to be the problem of conflicting values, and the solution of mental conflict therefore requires a deep search for the real meaning of life.” This is another key statement that gives us not only clear direction but also another way of looking at the problem of desires. It changes the usual focus on trying to rid ourselves of desires which may or may not seem palatable, to one of upholding values which are connected to the heart. Confronting desires may seem more of a mental exercise, but confronting false values and upholding true ones is an exercise of the heart, which may gain our willing interest because, being of the heart, it is central to our being.

Meher Baba concludes on why our choice of values has to be intelligent by saying, “It is only through wisdom that the mind can be freed from conflict.” An obvious statement no doubt, but do we really accept the necessary role wisdom has to play in our daily life? Don’t we often feel or hope that somehow Baba will enter into our conflict and save us? And it is true, sometimes even that happens through our prayers to Him. Nonetheless ultimately, it is the wisdom we have gained through the rigors of experience that frees us.

Meher Baba brings us to the second quality that is necessary in making the right choice. He explains, “Having once known what the right choice is, the next step is to stick to it firmly.” This is not easy at all because we have to overcome our habit of choosing false values. Baba describes and warns us of the difficulties we will face.

Although the competing tendencies in the mind may be quieted by choosing one particular course in preference to other alternatives, they still continue to act as obstacles in making the choice fully effective and operative. At times there is a danger of a decision

being subverted through the intensification of those competing forces in the subconscious.

As we discussed earlier, we have to be watchful of the subconscious. Although we can make our choice, at any time the subconscious mind, as in a wrestling match, might flip us on the mat and we lose the fight! “To avoid defeat,” Meher Baba tells us, “the mind must stick tenaciously to the right values it has perceived.” Witnessing the mind, reevaluating what motivates us, and being honest with ourselves will allow us to view things as they are bubbling within our subconscious mind. There is then less likelihood of being suddenly flipped over or having the mind’s tendencies subvert our decision.

Outside of the major struggles in our life, what is our daily mental life like where there is no major conflict? Meher Baba describes this as well:

Three quarters of our life is made up of ordinary things; and though conflict concerning ordinary things may not cause much mental agony, it still leaves in the mind a sense of uneasiness that something is wrong.

Sometimes I find myself sitting quietly in the evening or even at work and all of a sudden I find that I feel something is wrong. And I don’t even know what it is. There are no major conflicts going on. So I am a bit surprised. I wonder what is indeed bothering me.

The conflicts that turn upon ordinary things are rarely even brought to the surface of consciousness. Instead they cast a shadow on one’s general feeling about life as if from behind a screen. Such conflicts have to be brought to the surface of consciousness and frankly faced before they can be adequately solved.

So when these kinds of conflicts arise I begin to question myself. Often I find it is a small mishap that somehow captured some part of my mind unbeknownst to me and my mind is spinning. I have to honestly confront it, otherwise the problem may go further underground. If we are unsure of whether a conflict exists, or whether we are truly under a shadow, Meher Baba gives us a definite guideline.

The sure sign of a real hidden conflict is the sense that the whole of one’s heart is not in the thought or action that happens to be dominant at the moment. There is a vague feeling of a narrowing down or a radical restriction of life. On such occasions an attempt should be made to analyze one’s mental state through deep

introspection, for such analysis brings to light the hidden conflicts concerning the matter.

This is another time when analysis or honest introspection is very important. For we all feel this, and it is important to discover why we feel this narrowing down, why our heart is not into the moment before us.

So ultimately as Meher Baba says, “When the conflicts are thus brought to light it is possible to resolve them through intelligent and firm choices.” We have to allow all of the various kinds of conflicts within us, big or small, to come to our conscious mind so we can solve them. We should not repress them out of fear but face them with simple honesty.

In fact, in “Nature of the Ego, II,” Meher Baba said, “All the problems of the ego can be tackled only through intelligent and conscious action. Therefore, complete annihilation of the ego is possible only when all the constituents of the ego pass through the fire of intelligent consciousness.”

Because Meher Baba has explained how to confront conflicts, we can dare to begin to resolve the universal problem—the false separative self which exists through conflict itself. He gives us the intellectual understanding of how to do so. And if we put it into action, it will lead to spiritual understanding.

In order to confront conflicts we know that:

- (1) “The solution of mental conflict requires not only perception of right values but also an unswerving fidelity to them.”
- (2) “That not only does our choice have to be intelligent and firm it also has to be repeatedly exercised in *all* matters—small or great. For the ordinary worries of life are not in any way less important than the serious problems with which the mind is confronted in times of crisis...The roots of mental conflict cannot completely disappear as long as there is only intermittent exercise of intelligent and firm choice.”

We now have a clear spiritual goal—a life of choosing and upholding true values that brings spiritual understanding. Meher Baba tells us that such a life is possible when He says, “The life of true values can be spontaneous only when the mind has developed the unbroken habit of choosing the right values.”

When we express true values, they bring about a growing sense of oneness. As we begin to sense this oneness, it inspires us to express true values more frequently. Thus we develop the habit of choosing true values over false values.

As a final point, just as we can approach the spirit through the heart, through the expression of true values we can approach the Truth. And because whatever love we have gives us the motive power to persevere in our attempt to express true values, by doing so, ultimately we are led to Love itself.

DOWN TO BRASS TACKS

Now we have seen that Meher Baba has given extraordinary explanations of how to live the spiritual life in the “Discourses”. And specifically how to replace the false values we have been ignorantly maintaining with true values so we can live a spiritual life. There is much to experiment with and put into action. Like any new enterprise there is always the initial enthusiasm. Leaving the old behind always gives us a fresh outlook on life.

So we start off experimenting as Meher Baba wants. We try our best again and again and again. Within a while however, regardless of Meher Baba’s guidance through all His words we have been discussing, we may begin to wonder in what way all this experimentation leads to any recognizable progress. Such feelings arise occasionally. I know they do with me. I suppose I feel this way because of taking a new course of action without being sure of anything other than that this action is eventually supposed to bring spiritual understanding. This uncertainty can make me wonder whether my actions are worthwhile at all.

In the beginning of our search for God, the choices we had to make may have been simple. Often startling circumstances precipitated our calling out to Him. Because of their intensity, the feelings these circumstances engender may be termed birth-pangs. We celebrate the birth of our spirit by retelling our story to other followers of Meher Baba. The story is often dramatic. It is fun to recount. But unlike the growth of the physical body which can be easily measured by outgrown clothes, how do we determine the growth of the spirit?

We may take some comfort in Meher Baba's explanation in the discourse, “Arriving at Self-Knowledge” when He says, “The physical body of a child grows very gradually and almost imperceptibly, and the same

is true of the spiritual progress of a person once he has entered the path. The child does not know how its physical body grows; in the same way, the aspirant also is often oblivious of the law by which he makes headway toward the destination of his spiritual progress.”

Although Meher Baba does not explain outright what that law is, He does explain how we make progress toward Self-Knowledge. He says we move forward as we carry on our purposive experimentation by putting spiritual values into action, which is what we have been discussing.

Nonetheless, progress is difficult to judge as we carry on this experimentation through the tangle of our own sanskaras and the experiences of joy and sorrow, happiness and suffering, success and failure, effort and rest, clarity and confusion they bring. In fact, as we go through these experiences, Meher Baba says we forge our way to Self-Knowledge much like an explorer hacking his way through a wild and thick forest to reach his goal. Picture that, will you! And then think how difficult it is to do that. All the obstacles that are before you! There no path exists other than that which we cut for ourselves!

This is the truth about our spiritual journey. This is our daily dilemma. And because it is, it is easy to understand that at times we may feel uncertain whether we are making any progress at all and if what we are doing is worthwhile! Meher Baba explains that we feel this way because we are “generally conscious of the manner in which [we have] been responding to the diverse situations in life but rarely conscious of the manner in which [we] progress toward Self-knowledge.”

So at times we feel adrift. We try to put the spiritual ideals we have come to value into action, but we do this in the swirl of our own sanskaras. We become uncertain exactly what to put into action and at times misjudge the situations of our lives brought on by our sanskaras. However, if we faithfully uphold Meher Baba’s guidance as we have been discussing, then gradually our critical reason and our living faith, our mind and our heart, our use of discrimination, detachment and intuition will all become clarified and we will proceed with growing confidence. But this takes time and we have to be patient.

Before I really started to try to uphold Meher Baba’s guidance, I usually just hoped that it was Meher Baba who was prompting my action. But when I finally began to look at myself, I started to wonder if this really was the case or whether it was merely wishful thinking. I started to wonder, “Is Meher Baba prompting me through intuition, or is it my own sanskaras disguised as intuition, manipulating me to react to

situations under the guise that I am searching for Self-Knowledge?” This was a dilemma for me.

Eventually to my surprise, I learned that Meher Baba brings up the same point in the discourse, “True Discipleship” when He says, “The disciple cannot have a clear perception of his own higher Self until he is God-realized...often that which comes to him as his duty is really a prompting of some sanskaras interpolating themselves between the higher Self and his field of consciousness.”

When this sentence finally captured my attention, I was stunned by it. It is a jewel of a sentence. For here Meher Baba is making it abundantly clear that what I was calling service to God or the search for Him was, often times, my own impressions prompting me into action.

Fortunately Meher Baba continued, giving me a way out from this problem by stating, “The disciple therefore must always test his own promptings by means of the standards or orders given by the Master.” We don’t have Baba’s direct orders, but we have seen how we can test ourselves through His messages.

And what better way to do this than to carry out a steady vigilance of what motivates us by using our critical reason as we explored in the discourse, “Entering into the Realities of Inner Life.” This removes the mystification that our actions, being directed by unseen forces, have some hidden meaning. By using our critical reason, Meher Baba states we are to “thoroughly reexamine [our] own ideas.” He guides us further by stating, “Almost always a little reflection is sufficient to complete [your] own thinking and to perceive the basic harmony between the true dictates of [your] own higher Self and the requirements of the Master.”

What a relief this understanding gave me. In this way, I could be more confident in determining whether it was Meher Baba guiding me, or my own ego-drives manipulating me. I could proceed and simply take responsibility for my own actions without wondering what the hidden spiritual meaning behind my actions might be. Now it was my choice which value I wished to uphold. This understanding then allowed me the freedom to consciously accept Meher Baba’s guidance, as we have been discussing, and put it into action.

Thus a healthy-minded approach is simply to take responsibility to understand what motivates us, as we put spiritual ideals into action and then as Meher Baba says, leave the rest to Him. Although we may not see how we are growing spiritually, He assures us that we are.

We have many words that explain what our actions are supposed to be motivated by: selfless service, detachment, harmony, love, etc. And specifically in this booklet, we have been looking at such spiritual ideals as true values, discrimination, intuition, awareness, spiritual understanding, and creative control. Meher Baba has dictated message after message explaining what these words mean. Nonetheless, it is we, ourselves, who have to be careful when we apply these words to describe our actions. In fact, Meher Baba explains in the discourse, "Violence and Non-Violence" that we have "a tendency to cling to catchwords and to allow [our] actions to be determined by them almost mechanically without bringing [our] actions into direct relation with the living perception that these words embody."

We may not have thought that such words as selfless service, love, detachment, true values, spiritual understanding, etc. were catchwords. But we are caught in our inclination to make them so by the Lord Himself. What may have begun by us as embracing these words with enthusiastic innocence ends up with us hanging our actions on bare principles that have no inner meaning because we have not truly put them into action. This happens when we have yet to understand what His words really mean so we can apply them in a way that is a benefit to all. No one wants to act mechanically. But often times we do out of expediency to daily demands. So Meher Baba guides us in this critical matter by saying that, "if action is to be intelligent, it is imperative that the meaning these words are intended to convey should be carefully analyzed and fixed."

Therefore, as part of our experiment of putting spiritual ideals into action, we are to take Meher Baba's explanations, search for their real meaning and then honestly contrast them with our actions so we can begin to live by them. Meher Baba tells us that, "Words have their own place and use in life." And this is their use.

Meher Baba has given us some work to do on ourselves. We can't be lazy about this or we will be caught. Well, we will be lazy and we will be caught, but eventually we will free ourselves from the hook of barren principles.

Getting off that hook, however, is not easy. That is why Meher Baba warns us, "Spiritual life is a matter of perception and not of mechanical conformity to rules, even when these rules are meant to stand for the highest values." Because regardless of the enthusiasm of putting a fresh perspective into action, our hearts tire at the exercise of maintaining some truth that greatly appealed to us initially. And then what happens is that the spiritual perception we embraced so gladly gradually depreciates into a spiritual principle we cling to for warmth.

Finally, it turns into a rule—a flag signifying the truth that we wave, to comfort ourselves that we still adhere to our beliefs.

This cycle of experience happens slowly over the course of time without us recognizing it. Truths that once captured our heart drift to our surface mind and remain there, to be dutifully upheld.

Spiritual life is something we live by, not something we “think” we live by. Therefore when life is truly approached from a spiritual viewpoint, problems “cannot be decided by any formal enunciation of a universal rule.” To solve them involves “many delicate spiritual issues and implications.” In a sense there is no right answer. How many times I witnessed this in observing Mani, Eruch and Bhauji solve problems. There was no rule because everything was according to the situation.

Meher Baba warns us that,

“Action, therefore, should not be governed by means of any slogans (however high-sounding) based upon incomplete and insufficient ideas...It should be a spontaneous outcome of divine love, which is above duality, and of spiritual understanding, which is above rules.”

Very directly Meher Baba states what spiritual life is based on—perception which brings spiritual understanding. We cannot rely on thoughts, words, concepts alone no matter how good they may seem. We have to do something more.

This something more is explained by Meher Baba as He continues to talk about spiritual perception.

It implies an understanding that goes beyond all words or formulations. All words and formulations have a tendency to limit the Truth. Therefore, those who seek to bring out the spirit underlying these formulations often have to launch upon a searching analysis of the formulated principles and to supplement this analysis by constantly retaining touch with concrete examples taken from life.

Here then is our new direction. We experiment in our daily lives by trying to put our spiritual ideals into practice. As we do this, they give us a new and deeper understanding of those ideals. And then, naturally, we must put those new ideals or deeper understandings into practice. This is not easy and it can even be painful, but the reward is a spirituality that is directly perceived, understood and felt, and not just a collection of intellectual ideas.

When our minds and egos resist the effort, which they continually will, we should remind ourselves that we really have no choice. Because if we don't make this effort to put our ideals into practice, our inner life will never develop, no matter how much we talk or read about spirituality. However, if we persevere, we will be gradually ushered into a spirituality where we become aware of the Truth of the oneness of the spirit.

THE REAL RESPONSIBILITY

We have been graced to spend our lives trying to get closer to Avatar Meher Baba and the truth of our soul. But as we saw in the last section, at times it can be discouraging trying to follow the path that Meher Baba has laid out for us. It seems hard because progress for the most part is not visible.

Meher Baba offers us some reassurance in, "Good and Evil," that we are "unconsciously gravitating towards the final emancipation of Truth-realization." Just as the earth is constantly spinning, but none of us can fathom that while simply living our lives on the surface, so too, we are all unconsciously gravitating towards the Truth. Perhaps how this is done is explained in the same discourse when Meher Baba says, "There is a natural tendency in the mind to invite to itself just that opposite which would meet the spiritual requirements of the situation."

And this turn of mind, I feel, begins to "reverse the process of perception," which frees us from the false notion of being a separate entity, as Meher Baba explained in "The Place of Occultism." What is reversed is that instead of upholding what we see—the manyness—we begin to uphold what we don't see but have faith in—the oneness.

Although the phrase "reversing the process of perception" may sound beyond us, we are indeed doing it when we begin to use critical reason with living faith, by balancing the mind and the heart, by overcoming the ego, by replacing the false values it maintains with true values that lead to spiritual understanding and the awareness of the spirit. And although we don't ordinarily look at it this way, these actions are actually designed by Meher Baba to help free our souls in order for the soul to ultimately attain God-Realization, which is the goal of all Creation.

We normally think that God-Realization is so far beyond us that it is absurd to think about it and perhaps presumptuous on our parts to think that we can work towards it. But once we become conscious of the goal of Creation, we have a great responsibility to consciously move towards the Truth.

In fact, He makes it clear that every moment of our life, whether we know it or not, we have the awesome choice to make—whether we wish to move towards the Truth or not. Meher Baba proclaims this in His message entitled, “Eternal Now” in “Life at its Best.” He says, “Each moment with which man is confronted can either tighten the grip of the false or deliver him to the Truth.” His either-or statement is shocking, isn’t it? How could we have ever imagined that this is our moment-to-moment predicament?

Meher Baba states this same enormous dilemma from a different angle in “Action and Inaction,” when He says,

All action, except that which is intelligently designed to attain God-Realization, creates a binding for consciousness. It is not only an expression of accumulated ignorance, but a further addition to that accumulated ignorance.

So now that we are aware of the goal of Creation, we have a great responsibility to consciously move towards the Truth. And how do we do this? By acting upon Meher Baba’s guidance, as we have been discussing. When we do this, regardless of upholding it imperfectly, we will be intelligently moving, step by step, toward God-Realization. By taking our stand on the Truth, and attempting to put true values into action, even when we make mistakes, we will not be adding to our ignorance. Indeed, this is action designed to ultimately attain the Truth. It is action that lessens the grip of Illusion on our souls. It is action that, as we proceed, slowly illuminates our inner landscape with the light of spiritual understanding. The moment of truth is not something that we have to wait for but something that resides in each step as we make our way to the truth of our soul.