

The Way of Transformation

Daily Life as Spiritual Practice



Karlfried Graf Dürckheim





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MORNING
LIGHT
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Note on Terminology

It should be understood for the purposes of this book that a distinction is made between the conditioned world of manifestation, that is the reality of time and space, and that which is wholly unconditioned—the reality of Divine Being. This unconditioned reality is, in effect, the essence of all that exists. The manifestation of any living thing is inevitably the result of the integration of two poles, the one representing that which is conditioned by time and space, and the other, Divine Being.

Essential being, again for the purposes of this book, is the term used in respect to the manner in which Divine Being is present in, say, a flower, an animal or a human being. It is the individual form that Divine Being takes in any particular manifestation of life. In human beings, once we become aware of its presence, it is experienced as an inner image and at the same time as an inner path for us to follow. This essential being, representing as it does the presence of Divine Being—which continually strives to manifest itself in and through us—is at one and the same time partly hidden and partly revealed by what we

call the world-ego. It is our destiny to so transform ourselves that our essential being and, as a corollary, Divine Being is able to manifest itself in its entirety in the world.

Insofar as such transformation is achieved we become a Person, which means to say a living form through which Divine Being may sound *personare*.

Personality here indicates that aspect which enables us to measure up to the requirements of the world in a way that accords with the world's traditions and values.

The concept of the Persona can be referred back to C. G. Jung. It represents the facade which, to a greater or lesser degree, corresponds to that image of ourselves which we fashion in order to represent the particular role we would like to play in the world. In our efforts towards this it invariably happens that we suppress and thrust into the unconscious everything that appears to be antagonistic to this image. Thus the Shadow is created.

Everyday Life as Practice

It is a truism that all work, all art and all professional activity require practice if they are to succeed. This we accept, and in order that we may establish ourselves in the world, it is obvious that we must be at pains in all our vocations, avocations and transactions to practice and assimilate experience. We do not sufficiently realize, however, that the success of our most important task—ininitely more essential than any of the arts or professions—also depends upon practice.

The destiny of everything that lives is that it should unfold its own nature to its maximum possibility. Human beings are no exception. But we cannot—as a tree or a flower does—fulfill this destiny automatically. We are only permitted to become fully what we are intended to be when we take ourselves in hand, work on ourselves, and practice ceaselessly to reach perfection. Here we must ask ourselves the question—what is our most important task? It is none other than ourselves, the making of ourselves into ‘true human beings’.

The reader may well ask—what purpose do study,

practice and the collecting and assimilation of experience serve when we are ourselves the task in hand? What steps are necessary in order to achieve this? What kind of experiences need to be thought of as essential and therefore to be integrated? In what does practice consist? What are the prerequisites of success?

Let us first consider what we conceive of as a worldly task. It is evident that the prerequisites for this to succeed are a mind completely at the service of the work in hand, a tenacious will, a capacity to assimilate the necessary experience, the efficient development of relevant talents and their proper techniques and, in addition to all this, the ability to achieve a continuous adaptation to the exterior world. As a result of such labors it is possible for human beings to bring to fruition that mastery through which worldly success is assured.

However, our inner task, if it is to prosper, must be the fruit of a complete maturity in all aspects. And the prerequisites of maturity consist first in the breaking down of the small 'I'—that is to say, the 'I' that rejects pain, is full of fears and is solely concerned with the things of the world. Then must come the perception, the acceptance and unfolding of our inborn, transcendental essence and, together with all this, the relinquishing of standpoints and positions which obstruct it. There must be an attitude of earnest acquiescence to such experiences as will lead to its perception, the attainment of a personal posture which corresponds to the inner essence and, throughout this difficult work, an absolute devotion

to progress along the inner way. By these means a person is led towards inner mastery. An all-encompassing attitude will thus have been achieved which will enable the process of inner growth and ripening to continue. Such a life attitude is the only one by which we may fulfill our own law and destiny, which is to become a Person, a human being who is at once transparent to the Divine Being within and able to express it in life in the world. Our inner task, unlike our work in the world, does not revolve around external aptitudes but has as its focal point the transformation of our being into an expression of Divine Being.

If and when it happens that the inner task prospers, it must not therefore be assumed that a person knows or possesses more than before. What happens is that the person is more. A change has taken place. Behind the worldly achievements visible to any observer there is the inwardly transformed human being who, very possibly, may be visible to nobody. But just as all valid capability in the world requires a certain level of human development, so also does the transformation which leads to inner maturity. This requires conscientious and responsible labor at the tasks *set by the world*. Inner and outer work are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, we are invaded, as it were, from morning to night, both by our inner being as well as by the threatening exterior world for which we are responsible. The field of our ceaseless effort to reconcile both sides is none other than our ordinary life.

Our achievements in the world may be said to be perfect only insofar as they consummate and realize the idea that is their inner meaning. Whether it be a work of art or a system of philosophy, the building of a house or the setting up of some organization, factory or technical apparatus, it possesses a valid form (*gültige Gestalt*) only when each of its parts accomplishes the underlying purpose of the whole. The same applies to the inner task.

A human being is also one of life's forms (*Lebensgestalt*), but this form, too, is valid and can endure only insofar as it fulfills, as a whole and in the unifying of all the forces, what a person is fundamentally intended to be. But what is a human being? What are we intended to be? Intrinsically—that is to say, in our essence—we are an aspect of divine being, whose purpose is to manifest itself in us and through us. Just as flowers and animals reveal Divine Being in their own way, so also must a person reveal it in the way of a human being. We can only be 'right' when our life-form, with all its forces, fulfills the destiny that dwells within us as our essential being.

For each of us, our essential being is the medium through which we participate in Divine Being. It may also be said to be the means by which Divine Being strives through us to manifest itself in the world—not as something apart from the world, a mere spiritual inwardness, but as a bodily presence. It follows that our human inner growth is necessarily accomplished within the framework of our worldly destiny, in the midst of ordinary life and the carrying out of daily tasks.

Our destiny is to bear witness, in our own special way, to Divine Being—which is to say, consciously and freely. Flowers and animals fulfill their destiny from necessity and unconsciously—limited only by whatever external conditions may hinder them from becoming what, in their essence, they are. We, however, unlike flowers and animals, have been endowed with consciousness, and it is by means of this quality that, as an ‘I’, we are able to stand and confront the world. Because of this we become, at least to some extent, independent and therefore responsible for our own development. Herein lies our great chance. But here, too, let us not forget, lies danger. For between this chance and this danger we may miss the mark.

The ‘oneness’ of that Life which is beyond space and time breaks apart in our ego-consciousness into two poles—one, the *historical world* which, being subject to laws of space and time, can be understood and mastered; and two, *Transcendental Being*, which cannot be encompassed by space and time and is beyond all ordinary understanding. Thus, inevitably, we experience ourselves as situated between heaven and earth. We live in a state of tension between two realities—the world, which confines us to latitude, longitude and duration, endangers our existence, tempts us with hopes of happiness, and demands our obedience to its laws; and the supernatural state of being hidden within us and towards which, even unknowingly, we yearn. Ceaselessly striving to find the light, this Being calls us forth beyond the laws and boundaries of our little personal life to the service of greater life.

It is essential that each one of us, in order to be able to endure our fate in the world and to master our own life, should amass knowledge of our self and of the way we exist as temporal beings. To become a 'whole' person, however, we must also come to have knowledge of the one we are in our divine essence, that is of our essential being, whose needs must also be satisfied. Only when we have acquired this knowledge will we be free to satisfy the demands of our inner being. However, the law of our development is such that in the beginning it is predominantly the consciousness which serves to establish our place in the world that is unfolded. This one-sided view of the world, which is dominated by the will to survive and the wish that life should have meaning and provide satisfaction, veils the Divine Being present in our own essential being. Thus we readily lose sight of the deeper significance of our existence which is, in effect, to manifest Divine Being within this life. Ultimately, however, we cannot escape from the fact that our wholeness and welfare depend on our fulfilling our inner mission and living from our essence. If, consciously or unconsciously, we concern ourselves solely with our work in the world and exercise and establish our world-ego alone, we are bound in the end to fall prey to a specifically human unhappiness. And this happens whether or not our personal virtues and achievements correspond to the values and expectations of the world.

The more we succeed in adapting ourselves to the world by mastering external life and the more we assume ourselves to be living blamelessly, the less we are able to understand the inevitable and, to us, inexplicable suffering which is brought about by our estrangement from our inner essence. This suffering, coming as it does from our still unfulfilled inner being, is of a quality quite different from any unhappiness the 'I' may experience in the world. Only that pain which arises from the depths of ourselves can finally compel us to look inwards and bring us to the realization that we have lost touch with our own inner being. In such a condition we may perhaps recall times when we sensed something beckoning to us from within and turned our back upon it; moments when conscience summoned us, and we were not able to listen. Thus we are faced with a decision—either to stifle the inner voice once again and continue in our old ways or to make a new start based on what we have learned from within.

Once, however, we have so awakened to our essential being that we can no longer ignore its claims, our life from that moment is governed by a new and continuous state of tension. Inevitably, now, we will be oppressed by the contradiction between the needs, duties and temptations of the world and the call of our inner nature. On the one hand the world will continue to exact its requirements without reference to the inner voice and, on the other, without reference to the world's voice, inner being will make its insistent demand.

Thus we are torn between the two aspects of our

human existence. And yet our life in the world, as well as our participation in Transcendent Being, are but two poles of the one self that is ever striving within us towards realization. It is through the development of this self that the oneness of life is realized in the human form. And, given these conditions, if we are upright within, it will inevitably mean that we are upright without. For this reason it is essential to discover in ourselves an attitude—even a physical posture—in which we can be open and submissive to the demands of our inner being while at the same time allowing this inner being to become visible and effective in the midst of our life in the world. And for this to happen we must so transform our ordinary daily life that every action is an opportunity for inner work. Our very efforts towards worldly efficiency may, under these conditions, become the means of spiritual exercise (*exercitium*).

The purpose of all living things, human beings among them, is to manifest the divine in the world. Our distinctive virtue lies in the fact that the great Divine Life becomes in us 'conscious of itself'. In the freedom of conscious life—as opposed to mechanical life—the divine can shine forth and take form. Therefore the true human being is one who, in freedom and with clear awareness, embodies and reveals the Divine Being within. The vividness of our inner life, the radiance of our being and the benign effect of our actions will all give evidence of our inner state. Such a state enables Divine Being, in all its plenitude, inner order and unity, to appear. It does not, however, develop along a straight line, for it must first pass through

a stage of existence in which the 'I' is determined solely by the world, thus preventing our awareness of our essential being. This so-called 'natural' manner of existing, whose center of consciousness is the worldly-ego, must of necessity be broken down, for this ego is not concerned with the need to ripen in accordance with inner being but is solely preoccupied with maintaining its secure position and competent functioning in the world.

A human being survives in the world by means of a certain kind of consciousness which, by its crystallized concepts, organizes life into a succession of rigid structures. Through these we perceive the world rationally, master it systematically, and order it according to fixed values. It is just this form of existence that veils our awareness of Divine Being. At the center of this way of life stands the ego which, by its very nature, is solely occupied in establishing and classifying 'facts', and around it revolve continually its own worldly desires. By means of this ego, we separate ourselves from our unconscious connection with the oneness of life and assume an attitude of independence and self-assertion in the world. As long as the ego takes up uncompromising attitudes and irrevocably fixed points of view, so will the oneness of life break up into the opposites of I-World/World-I and essential being. The ego's separation from the primal core of life and its determined orientation towards the world bring all growth, all true becoming, all transformation, to a disastrous standstill. It is true that we have need of an ego that is capable of objectively mastering the world. But

only when we succeed in evolving a form of existence in which our world-ego is sustained (though in such a way that it remains at the same time transparent to Divine Being within us) can we become a 'true' person—a 'person' in the ultimate sense, through whose life greater life resounds (*personare* = to sound through). To attain this state of mind requires ceaseless practice. In other words, every passing moment of the daily round must be used as an opportunity for such practice.

When we speak of the daily round, the phrase carries overtones of meaning and experience which distinguish it from the holiday. Compared with a holiday, the ordinary day may appear monotonous and grey. It is dull in the sense that we are used to it, the common round of activities always has an unchanging sameness. By this endless repetition the normal day threatens to mechanize us. It is a treadmill of repeated movements and actions, whereas the holiday stands for something unique, joyous, unusual. The ordinary day deadens, whereas the holiday refreshes. If one contrasts the freedom Sunday brings us, the ordinary day feels constrained and rigid; it stands for labor, for a round of doing, in contrast to the leisure promised by Sunday. Its sobriety is far from the festivity which a holiday brings. The ordinary day devours us; on holiday we find ourselves again. The ordinary day draws us outwards; Sunday enables us to be inwardly free. The ordinary day is ruled by the overbearing world which compels us to be efficient machines, but Sunday belongs to our inner, non-mechanical selves.

Need this be so? It must be so, as long as we are engulfed by our world-ego and so engrossed by worldly undertakings that they completely overshadow our inward self. There is, however, a way out. It needs just a single moment of insight, a flash of understanding of our situation, to make everything change. Such a moment, such a flash will light up not only our outer actions—particularly those most repetitive and familiar—but our inner experience as well.

It is proverbial that in whatever we do we assume a certain attitude. ‘What’ we do belongs to the world. In the ‘how’, the *way* we do it, we infallibly reveal ourselves, whether our attitude is right or wrong in harmony with the inner law or in contradiction to it, in accordance with our right form or opposed to it, open to Divine Being or closed to it. And here we must pose the question: what *is* our right ‘form’? It is none other than that in which we are transparent to Divine Being. And to be transparent means that we are able to experience Divine Being in ourselves and to reveal it in the world.

Let us suppose, for instance, that a letter has to be posted in a mailbox a hundred yards away. If the mouth of the mailbox is all we see in the mind’s eye, then the hundred strides we take towards it are wasted. But if we are on the way as human beings and filled with the sense of all that this implies, then even this short walk, providing we maintain the right attitude and posture, can serve to put us to rights and renew ourselves from the well of inner essence.

The same can be true of any daily activity. The more we have mastered some relevant technique, and the smaller the amount of attention needed to perform the task satisfactorily, the more easily may the emphasis be transferred from the exterior to the interior. Whether in the kitchen or working at an assembly-belt, at the typewriter or in the garden, talking, writing, sitting, walking or standing, dealing with some daily occurrence or conversing with someone dear to us—whatever it may be, we can approach it ‘from within’ and use it as an opportunity for the practice of becoming a true person. Naturally, this is possible only when we are able to grasp the real meaning of life and become responsible towards it. It is essential to realize that we are not committed merely to comprehending and mastering the external world. We are first and foremost committed to the inner way. When this is understood the truth of the old Japanese adage becomes clear: “For something to acquire religious significance, two conditions alone are necessary: it must be simple, and it must be repetitive.”

What does this word ‘repetitive’ signify here? It can happen that daily tasks, by their very familiarity, serve to free us from the grip of the ego and its quenchless thirst for success. They can also help to make us independent of the world’s approval and open for us the inward way. But this is true not only of familiar tasks. Even the practice and repeated effort needed to master something new can be put to the service of the inner work. In everything we do it is possible to foster and maintain a state of being which reflects our true destiny. When this possibility is

actualized the ordinary day is no longer ordinary. It can even become an adventure of the spirit. In such a case the eternal repetitions in the exterior world are transformed into an endlessly flowing and circulating inner fountain. Indeed, once repetition is established it will be found that our very habits can be the occasion for inner work. They enable us to make new discoveries and show us that even from the most mechanical actions there may issue forth that creative power which transforms a human being from within.

By dwelling exclusively in our I-world consciousness—which develops out of, and lives by, crystallized concepts and values—we lose touch with Transcendental Being. But in our essential being we are and forever remain a ‘mode’ of this Being. Without ceasing, it strives to manifest itself in and through us as a threefold process: as plenitude bringing joy, as order bringing meaning, as oneness manifesting itself through love—all three being invulnerable to the world. Thus we become aware that Being, with its driving force present and alive in our essence, is the result neither of wishful thinking nor of religious belief, but is the most real of all realities. Only for those who are entrenched in their worldly positions, rational concepts and rigid habits does Being remain an abstract idea. For those who have lost touch with the core of life it is, at most, a subject for metaphysical speculation or pious credulity. But for one who breaks through the mists of rationalization, it becomes personal experience. All religions, concepts and images are, in

their original meaning, interpretations of this deepest of all experiences.

When, however, religion is allowed to become a system of rigidly ordered principles and dogmas—forced into the confines of a doctrine that is required to be believed—it blocks the possibility of vitally experiencing Divine Being, or alternatively it tries to debase it by labeling it as a ‘merely subjective’ experience. But what does such a phrase connote? In point of fact, it means the existential truth of a human being as an experiencing and suffering subject—and to this condition we are brought solely through this so-called ‘merely subjective’ inner experience.

The time has come for us to free ourselves from the idea that only those things which can be rationally grasped and objectively verified are real and binding. With regard to questions of being and the meaning of life, we need to recognize the primal validity of the inner experience which, beyond all doubt and with unequivocal clarity, when it arises within us, brings joy, a sense of responsibility and transformation. The undeniable inner experience is the one thing that can truly touch, move and compel us to follow it. And only by completely experiencing Divine Being can we come to realize that the whole content of the world, as we see it, is itself nothing other than that Being. But for us that Being is clouded; we perceive it through the refracting and distorting prism of the ego—that ego which, being externally oriented, inevitably pins down and classifies everything it observes or experiences in terms of objects and opposites.

Such a rational ego-view inevitably has the effect of solidifying our consciousness, so that we take as real only that which fits conveniently into its preconceived scheme of things. Under such conditions, we lose awareness of our contact with Being. The only reality we then believe in is the one we intellectually understand, that in which life, under the fixed gaze of our ego, appears to present itself to us. The more we have shut ourselves off from Divine Being by this attitude, the more is our own inner essence repressed—that inner essence which is our only approach to the revelation of Divine Being. It is the suffering which comes from such repression that makes us ready to give proper weight to those rare moments in which Divine Being blazes up within us, bestowing joy, giving us a sense of freedom and calling us to serve its purpose. But we will only be able truly to value such an experience when we are able to recognize that other suffering which engulfs us when we allow the world-oriented ego to hide us from true Being. Only then will we be able to begin the process of withdrawing our ego to some extent from its world-pursuits. Only then will we become open within, free to sense greater life directly, able to hear its voice and thus to transform ourselves and all that surrounds us.

The state of mind and body that blocks any awareness of the presence of greater being inevitably produces a special kind of suffering. It is the experiencing of this anguish that forces us to take stock of our life attitudes. This taking stock, if honestly carried out, brings us to so great a

pitch of desolation that it forces us to the point where we can perceive, sense and heed the call of the true essence towards which we now feel ourselves driven. If, in some propitious hour, we have been given this experience of Being, and if, through the failures of our world-ego and the suffering that results from them we have been brought to the great turning point, then at that moment we can find ourselves on the threshold of something new. Now without fail we must open ourselves to the mysterious, numinous content of moods and impulses that we can neither understand nor explain, still less translate into concepts, but in which we can, nevertheless, unmistakably sense something from beyond this world beckoning and calling to us. We must come to realize that through such experiences Divine Being, as has already been said, is present in our own being. We must train our faculty of sensory perception to feel and appreciate qualities which are beyond the limits of our ordinary consciousness. Our effort now must be to learn how to enable Divine Being to enter our own being and remain within us. And, in addition, we must strive to reach a state where our transparence to Divine Being endures, thus enabling us to draw life from greater life, even in our existence as an 'I' in the little world. To these ends we need inevitably to cleanse our unconscious and discard any element, spiritual or physical, that dams up the flow of our essential being. At the same time we must give entrance to and build upon all that is in harmony with this being. Furthermore, we must practice sustaining this state in our everyday life and, in so doing, we will infallibly come to learn that daily life itself is a 'field of opportunity'.

There is nothing -no event, no activity- that cannot provide a motive for establishing contact with inner being, nothing that cannot be used to bear witness to it. Any situation in life may be the means of furthering the bringing to birth of the 'true person'. For we are only 'true' when we listen inwardly to Being, and at the same time remain in accord with it in bodily existence in the ordinary world. It is not enough just to turn inwards, to experience Being solely from within. To express it outwardly is even more important, for it is imperative that human life in the world as well as in the body should derive from inner essence.

Side by side with the rediscovery of our humanity, which is the distinguishing mark of our age, a new consciousness of the body is becoming increasingly evident. The meaning which we give to our body depends on the extent to which we value our human existence. If we measure ourselves solely by our relation to the daily world that continually oppresses and threatens us with its endless requirements, then our body has no meaning except to make our performance and survival in that world physically possible. The whole point of bodily training is thus narrowed down to the development and maintenance of physical efficiency and good health, the sole purpose of which is to function smoothly at its own level. On the other hand, once we understand that the real meaning of human existence is to make manifest in the world the Divine Being embodied within us, then the true significance of bodily training lies in the need to reach a state

that makes such manifestation possible. We may be at the height of our physical powers, however, and yet not be able to achieve this. Our 'presence' may be, as it were, unbecoming. Indeed, our very effectiveness in the world, in a bodily sense, may actually obstruct our essential being. On the other hand, it is possible for those who are dying to be physically present in the right way if, serene and trustful, they are able to let go and give themselves up, allowing that which is meant by 'Death as Transformation' to take place. Divine Being, since it is beyond both living and dying, is revealed with equal clarity in life as in death; and a person, at the moment of death—even in the bodily condition—may become transparent to greater life. It is thus possible to distinguish three different kinds of physical 'conscience'. The demands of the first are oriented towards health, the second towards beauty and the third towards transference to greater life.

Today, it should be generally recognized that what we call 'body' and 'psyche' are not two separate entities; rather, they are the two modes by which we, with our rational, divided vision, perceive ourselves. They are the means whereby a person as subject realizes and expresses personal unity. That which is without is within, and that which is within is without. The unity which encompasses and comprehends this antithesis of body and soul is the Personal Subject. And the only kind of perception with which we can do justice to a human being as a personal subject is the one that sees each one of us not merely as an objective 'thing', but—by participation in our life—learns

to value us as a subject and recognize us as a 'Thou'. Here it is necessary to distinguish between the discriminating 'what' consciousness that is concerned with establishing facts and the understanding 'who' consciousness which alone can reveal personal truth.

As *subject*, we experience ourselves as part of a system which has little relation to the outward world in which all things are rationally ordered and fixed in unchanging positions. From the point of view of this world, we see everything materially—as something outside us. We even turn ourselves and other people into objects, into mere 'pieces of the world'. Insofar as we see ourselves and others in this way, we are obliged, as are all 'things', to fit into and function within rigid, worldly—and, on their own level, valid—systems and structures. However, when we relate to life as subject, as Thou, we experience and apply towards it a *person-centered point of view*. Then everything is seen in terms of the life that we ourselves *are*—that life which, in accordance with its own law, is forever striving towards consciousness, completion, liberation and fulfillment. In this way the world resolves itself into the field of our personal life. It becomes the mirror of all our desires, hopes and fears.

Life never stands still. Its order is never rigid, like that of some system established by the world. It is always flexible, always changing, always in the process of becoming. And so it is with human beings. A person is not merely an external form, but a Form-in-Time (*Zeitgestalt*) and

therefore forever in the act of becoming. The driving force behind this transforming process derives not only from the promise of possible realization which lies in our inmost essence, but also from the anguish which arises when obstructions prevent the fulfillment of this promise. It is *promise and pain together* that determine the personal nature of the world.

If a human being is to become a Person, however, inner mental-spiritual development is not the sole requirement: the body, too, needs to be developed. If we regard and treat the body merely as a thing, a piece of the world, we remain blind to its meaning. Even in the body, a human being as subject is not a thing, a mere biological organism. But what do we mean by the 'body' of a person? It is the mode in which one, as a subject, is visibly present to the world. Taken thus, the body, in a human sense, can only be rightly understood and worked on when we continually bear in mind the person who lives as this body, that person who—as a 'some-body'—is always renewing themselves, always striving to unfold and to *be* in the world, in accordance with their inner law. Thus the body is not only something which a person has, but the somebody one is in the world.

The true person is one who is present in the world in the right way. Whether dense or transparent, withdrawn into the self or open to life, in form or out of form, centered or without center, we are all these things with the whole being, which is to say, also with the body! Any and every gesture of ours reveals us to the world. And it is clear that when a gesture is frequently repeated and becomes more

and more habitual, the content it expresses also becomes, for good or ill, more and more crystallized. Thus the body, in its posture, its patterns of tension and relaxation, in the rhythm of its breathing and manner of its movement, is an infallible indication of the point at which any person has arrived on the way to becoming a Person. It may reveal how and where we are stuck in the ego and lost to the world or, alternatively, to what extent we have remained open to our being and on the way.

Practice on ourselves, in the physical and spiritual sense, is always of two kinds. It involves both the *pulling-down* of everything that stands in the way of our contact with Divine Being and the *building-up* of a 'form' which, by remaining accessible to its inner life, preserves this contact and affirms it in every activity in the world.

Our union with Divine Being is obstructed by everything within us that is in any way rigid. From the earliest years human beings develop, according to the degree of consciousness, a way of existing in which, as an I, each one is compelled to do consciously and from choice what can no longer be done unconsciously and instinctively. Thus, whenever the world threatens us, we begin—even in childhood—to develop patterns of behavior adapted to our surroundings (*Passformen*). These can help us to survive in situations that may be dangerous, antagonistic, even loveless, but if they become too rigid, they may well obstruct our contact with our inmost being. In such a case, *original trust* is replaced by a reliance on knowledge, on individual capacity, on possessions and all their false

promise of security; *original faith*, which rests on unconscious inner laws and the uninhibited evolution of the inborn image, gives place to reliance on conventional patterns and the effort of keeping up the appearance required by the world; *original union with life* is supplanted by dependence on the love and acceptance of others.

The still unbroken chains of our childhood, our imprisonment in the superficial social life, our falsely conceived adaptation to the world, and the ceaseless longing of our ego for security—all these have as their result a mixture of prejudices, ready-made formulas of behavior, and grandiose ideas of what we would like to be in the world. If such aspects of ourselves become rigid—as is usually the case—the first thing necessary is that they be recognized and, after that, dissolved. Of course, if this process of inner rigidity has gone too far and it has become neurotic, professional help may be needed to effect the dissolution. But the more we ourselves become sensitive to the claims of our essence, and the more ready we are to enter into and accept the truth, the more easily can we—if we are earnestly trying to find ourselves—recognize the inappropriateness of our one-sided worldly standpoint and become aware of those attitudes that estrange us from Divine Being. Gradually, under such circumstances, we become more and more able to transform ourselves. And it is our daily life and its practice that give us this opportunity.

One indispensable quality of all practice on the inner way is the presentiment, indeed the experience, of our

own essential being. Without a living contact with this, all practice is bound to go astray and lead into a blind alley. When this happens, we are at the mercy of the kind of self-discipline that, at the expense of inner truth, seeks health and virtue only in a worldly context. Those who are blind to their own essential being will interpret the suffering which they experience as an inevitable result of such a condition, as being caused by the world. They may attribute the decline of their efficiency solely to external elements, or feel perhaps that their distress arises as a corollary of some offense they may conceive themselves to have committed against the demands of worldly values, religious dogma or someone in authority. Thus the very virtues—so-called—of their all-too-rigid, hapless, worldly ego, drive them into still greater alienation from their essence. It cannot be too strongly urged that every attempt to realize the true self is doomed to failure unless the depths within are cleansed first. Only through this contact with our essential being can we become sensitive to what is genuine in us and ascertain what is needful for our self-realization. Only by the experience of our essential being will we come into contact with the Divine Source of Being. And only when this happens are we able to begin the task of creating for ourselves a 'form' which truly corresponds to our own essential nature and frees us from all falsely conceived methods of adaptation.

It would be quite impossible for us to make any statement about the nature of Divine Being were it not for the identifiable encounters, experiences and revelations which in the abundance of their power, significance and feeling

and in the sense of responsibility they bring, and which are so utterly different in quality from our usual experience of the world that we cannot help but see them as manifestations of transcendence. Experiences such as these are only possible when our hitherto impermeable worldly facade has become porous or, indeed, broken down. It is these experiences which can initiate the 'opening of the way' (*Wende zum Wege*). All exercises which serve inner transformation, if they are not the result of mere deference to a barren faith in one or other authority, stand under the sign of such experience. They bring a sense of liberation and responsibility by means of which life is seen to be 'here and now' and Being as inward knowing (*Innesein*). Thus, the first and most vital practice in everyday life is to learn effectively to value those moments in which we are touched by something hitherto undreamt of.

It can happen that from time to time we are given moments of illumination and decision when something moves and stirs in our inmost depths. When this occurs we feel bound to keep faith with the experience, we cannot but obey, and this despite—or rather, because—what has happened to us is inconceivable. It is, in fact, something which our rational 'I' cannot really admit. But, if we are able at times to really accept it, our fear of annihilation is assuaged. A deep contentment comes upon us. We sense that within us there is something indestructible which by its plenitude and power creates a new consciousness of life—and thus our trust is renewed. Or again, there may be occasions when we are thrown into despair by

some apparently meaningless paradox in our lives, by the 'absurd'. But if we are able to accept the incomprehensible, it may happen that in the very midst of our lack of understanding, we will sense within the situation some deeper implication. The reality which we understand with our reasoning mind is suddenly transcended and penetrated by another. The profound meaning of this reality only begins to resound in us when we have come to the end of our rational understanding. Here, at the point where our hitherto impregnable belief in the sense and justice of the world has been shattered, there will dawn for the first time a new, fructifying faith in life and its significance. Or something similar may happen when some blow of fate plunges us into utter desolation. We are intended to live in dialogue with others: we cannot fulfill our life in isolation. We need a partner and strive to find shelter in human communion and love. When it happens that life withholds this, or deprives us of it, we are driven to an extremity in which we feel we must perish. If, now, we can bring ourselves to submit and accept our situation, we have the chance to break through the tension and rigidity with which our enforced loneliness threatens us. If we can now yield trustfully to our inner truth, we may experience the sensation of being caught up and embraced by an unknown power which, at the same time, makes us receptive and open to the whole of life. Although we are forsaken by the world, something from beyond the world makes us feel at one with everything and somehow under the wing of love.

Such experiences may become the turning point

of our life. They are the means by which our inmost essence can speak to us. When our world-ego and its proficiency fail us—that proficiency which until now has seemed to be sufficient for the fulfilling and mastering of life—it is then that the inner voices become audible. It may happen that at the moment when the whole framework of our life is suddenly shattered—the framework which was intended to provide our ego with comfort, meaning and security—the chance of something new may appear. If we are now able to accept that which, with our ‘I’ alone, we *cannot* accept, we may quite unexpectedly experience the sensation of being borne up by Divine Being and filled with a new significance and sense of being comforted far beyond the comprehension of our normal consciousness.

It is this experience of greater life which makes it possible for us to look death in the face. There are occasions when, without any doubt, we sense this greater life in life, and these can occur a moment after we have been in despair at the thought of life’s meaninglessness. Or again we may suddenly feel at one with all that exists, although we are in fact, in the ordinary sense, completely forsaken. It is in such moments that the tyranny of our ordinary way of looking at the world is overthrown. These are our auspicious hours. It must be remembered, however, that the power of transformation inherent in such experiences can easily fall into the hands of the devil, who is ever ready and waiting to pounce. It is he who, in the guise of our skepticism, questions the veracity of every

experience which cannot be classified and made to fit into our ordinary concepts.

But it is not only those periods when fear and despair drive us beyond the limits of our own strength and wisdom that bring us these paradoxical revelations of eternal reality. It is also possible to experience moments of boundless joy, which have a quality of the infinite, and in which the plenitude of Divine Being seems to draw close to us. This kind of joy, it should be remembered, has no relation to any form of worldly pleasure.

However, these radiant, unforgettable, deeply moving and blessed experiences are not the only ones in which we become aware of that Divine Being which is the endlessly effluent source of life. There exist also those less outstanding moments and hours in which, quite unexpectedly, we find ourselves in that unique state where Divine Being may touch us. It may be that all of a sudden we are overwhelmed by an unaccustomed sensation. We seem to be wholly present—completely ‘there’, as it were—even though our attention is not directed towards anything in particular. In a strange way—strange because it is so unfamiliar and unexpected—we feel ‘rounded’ and ‘complete’ and at the same time open in a way that allows inner abundance to well up. Although firmly based on the earth, we seem to float on air. At once absent, as it were, and at the same time wholly ‘here’, we are full of life, able to rest completely within ourselves and still be closely related to all that is; apart from everything and at the same time within everything, bound to all things yet clinging to nothing. In some incomprehensible way we are guided and yet free.

Released from objects, aims and claims, we are poor in the world yet filled to the brim with inner power and richness. At such moments we feel penetrated by something that is at once most precious and most fragile. Perhaps that is why instinctively we step delicately and do not try to look too closely at what is happening within us. Some ancient knowledge warns us that the warm, semi-darkness of an awakened heart (*Gemut*) is more appropriate here than the cold beam of the rational mind which freezes every aspect of life. It is as if we heard a voice saying: 'See as if you did not see; hear as if you did not hear; feel as if you did not feel; have as if you had not!' But then, alas, this miracle vanishes. Suddenly it disappears. Indeed, for it to disappear, one has only to wonder and ask as 'what is it?' For whatever catches our attention—a thought, an impression, an event—either from without or within—immediately changes our state of consciousness. One moment it is quiet and calm, receptive and unquestioning, like a chalice open to the pouring in of wine; and the next it is a sword, sharp and deadly, which pierces the experience and rationally transfixes it. Now the world which, a second ago, was as if enchanted and all of a piece with ourselves, falls again into its usual pattern. How impoverished we feel, now that we are once again thrown back on our daily selves and face to face with the ordinary round. The experience vanishes like a dream. And yet it was certainly not a dream! It was the revelation of the true reality which rose up in us because, for a moment, we were open and free from the fetters of our ordinary consciousness. Through such experiences we pass beyond this ordinary consciousness

to that which is transcendental. No matter how brief the moments of liberation may be—lasting perhaps a fraction of a second—they make us aware, with compelling evidence, of that life which far surpasses our usual I-world impressions; that life to which in our essence we belong, which in our essence we are, and whose revelation is the goal of all our longing.

In order to recognize the reality of this experience of greater being, we need nothing more than the 'sacred sobriety' of common sense. This, in fact, is that transcendental realism which is neither clouded nor inhibited by preconceived concepts and rational thought structures. This sense of reality permits the unique, unclassifiable quality of the experience to be as it is, accepts and savors it, and because of its very incomprehensibility, is intuitively convinced of its truth. We need practice in order to acquire the possibility of recognizing the quality of this reality. By remaining alert and constantly prepared, we can learn to hear and feel the call of Divine Being in everything that happens to us. For this we need to work diligently in order to become vessels capable of receiving all that is poured into them. And this practice, remember, must not only begin but also end the day. 'Learn to live each day to its end in such a way that it becomes a part of Eternity,' as a poet says.

We need a new kind of discipline here, one that aims so to develop our inner experience that it is lifted to a higher level. The results of such discipline come not from the sort of practice that is the mere carrying out

of specific exercises, but from one that confirms the old saying: 'Each moment is the best of all opportunities.' Thus all things and all events become the field of practice on our journey along the inner way. Moving ever onward and keeping touch with our inmost essence, we transform ourselves, step by step, into a 'person' whose transparency to Divine Being makes possible the fulfillment of our human destiny.

The first condition of all 'correct practice' is that we should understand what that phrase means. It is not the pursuit of such capacities as will fulfill our worldly tasks that is meant here, but rather what may be called 'spiritual exercise' on the inner way. The kind of practice which aims at achieving a specific result in the world comes to an end when that result has been obtained. Inner practice, however, begins only after we have achieved technical mastery, in whatever activity it may be—even sport—and consists of endless repetition. Once the technique of some task has been perfected, each repetition of its practice mirrors our whole inner attitude. Every mistake that is made shows up a fault within ourselves. If this is understood, our efforts to accomplish daily tasks can, at the same time, become inner work on ourselves. In the same way, practice of right posture and right breathing can become 'spiritual exercise' only after we have fully mastered the necessary technique. Thus, by means of this continuous repetition, the true, inward person begins to emerge. In this way the ordinary daily round can be transformed into 'practice'.

The second condition for this kind of practice—continuous spiritual exercise—is that we must be resolved and prepared to lead our life in the world in accordance with our inner law, and this means living our life in the service of transcendental reality. We must at all costs grasp the truth which is that only by being faithful and committed to this service can we become whole (*heil*), and, that as long as we continue to live solely for security and happiness in the world, we will be unable to discover the right way. When all that we know and do becomes a means for the revelation of greater life in the world, then the way may be attained, and the ordinary day itself become one single field of practice. But so long as we try to gain something solely for ourselves through this practice—whether it be the acquisition of higher faculties, extraordinary experiences, or tranquility, harmony, even our own salvation—we are bound to miss the way.

In all true practice we are continually preparing ourselves to attain to the position where life in the service of greater being becomes second nature. This service will seem onerous as long as we are still cut off from essential being and living solely in our world-ego. On the other hand, once we are really committed to the way, we will shortly have experiences that bring us great joy and a sense of freedom.

The inner way, and the practice which enables us to progress along it, has little to do with our usual methods of disciplining ourselves—often against our own nature—to serve unselfishly some worldly cause or community. What

is involved here is not merely the discipline by which we master our instinctive drives and overcome our nature. Nor is it just a matter of acquiring those virtues through which we subjugate our small ego for the sake of the community and our labors in the world. Neither has it anything to do with the personality which loses face when it does not succeed in the world and is dishonored when it fails to accomplish its tasks or proves to be an unreliable member of the community. All these are steps that necessarily must be taken on the way towards true becoming and maturity. But we can only be said to have really begun our journey on the inner way when the injunctions we blindly obey are no longer those that conform to the world's scale of values, but rather those which accord with Divine Being within us—that being which constantly strives to reveal itself in us and through us to the world. Even the most correct and responsible behavior is unable to satisfy these high demands if it is solely the result of an ethical discipline instead of being an expression of our inner essence. This essence is able to manifest itself freely only when the depths in which it dwells have been cleansed and purified.

The most vital element in the practice of the inner way consists in learning to become open and perceptive to the inward experience of essential being. For it is out of essential being that Divine Being speaks and calls to us.

All day we are summoned by the world, which demands that we recognize and master it. At the same time Divine Being is perpetually calling us inward. The

world requires of us our knowledge and skill, whereas Divine Being insists that we lay aside knowledge and skill for the sake of inner growth. The world expects us to be continually doing whereas Divine Being requires us, quite simply, *to allow the right thing to happen*. The world tries to keep us on a never-ending treadmill so that we may achieve something that we in our blindness consider permanent. Divine Being demands that while remaining in touch with it, we refrain, at the same time, from becoming attached to anything at all—even though, in so refraining, we may fear to lose our hold on ourselves. The world encourages us to talk and to do interminably; Divine Being requires that we become quiet and act without acting. The world forces us to concentrate on security; Divine Being asks only that we risk ourselves again and again. To the extent that we comprehend it, the world does our bidding; Divine Being reveals itself only when we accept the incomprehensible. The power of Divine Being becomes apparent at the moment when we let go of the things that support us in the world. It is only when we are able to relinquish that which makes us rich in the world that we are enriched and transformed by Divine Being.

Practice in daily life has many aspects. It requires that we make a movement towards the center of our being and such a movement inevitably involves a complete change of direction in the world. Through practice we are led to relinquish the world so that our innermost being may reveal itself. But once we have experienced this inmost core

and awakened to our essential being, we begin to sense essence in all things. And so, in the midst of our life in the world, we become aware of Divine Being everywhere.

When essential being becomes inward knowing, we feel a sudden change in ourselves. Relaxed and free, full of strength and light, we are filled with a new and creative life. Those things that lie heavily upon us grow lighter, problems which have been causing anxiety no longer oppress us, and events that in our ordinary state would plunge us into despair now lose their potency. Where every door seemed closed all are now open. We who in ourselves were poor now feel rich, and in the midst of clamor we are peaceful and calm. It is as though we were bathed in an invisible light which warms and shines upon us. We sense about us a radiance that shimmers through everything. But just as this radiance can dawn upon us without warning, so can it as suddenly disappear. We have no power to make it happen nor to retain it once it is there. The most we can do is to learn to become prescient and aware of those attitudes which prepare us for such experiences and also, of course, those which prevent them.

The great lesson to be learned, when we are on the threshold of this process of transformation, is to recognize the vital importance of our inner experience and to accept and admit to consciousness those moods and impulses through which greater being reveals itself. Transformation inescapably concerns not a part but the whole person. The time has come for us to comprehend the full significance of this statement. It means that we must value ourselves—just as we do another person—in

all our wholeness, depth and unity, in a word, as a subject. Only then will we be able to work rightly at the two-fold task of cleansing our inner life and correcting our external attitudes. When we have understood that body and psyche are not two separate entities but merely two aspects of the whole way in which a person manifests, outwardly and inwardly, we come to understand that work on our inner being will inevitably affect the body, and that efforts to change the body will equally inevitably have their effect within.

Mention should be made here of two attitudes which particularly prevent self-realization. They are *tenseness* or *rigidity* (*Verkrampfung*) and *slackness* (*Aufgelöstheit*). The one reveals a person entirely in the grip of an ego which has completely lost touch with the powers that dwell in the depths of being and, because of this, is constantly concerned with its own security. The other discloses a person lacking in awareness and with a complete absence of any responsibility for that state which corresponds to essential being and is capable of revealing it.

Just as tenseness and slackness hinder all recovery from physical illness, so do they obstruct our self-realization and inner well-being. We all come to recognize, sooner or later, to what extent the constant swing between these two conditions prevents the formation of the central core that is so essential to our being. But, once we are aware of the significance of such a realization, we cannot but strive to overcome these two great enemies of the right way of being.

Where there is rigidity, we find that excessive self-will, persistent self-control and constant surveillance by an all-too-watchful ego block the flow of the forces of the Divine Being which, in accordance with their own laws, inevitably pursue their course in concealment. In order to be able to operate freely, these forces require from us basic trustfulness which enables us to give ourselves confidently to the life-giving and liberating Being which is present in our essence. All rigidity is an expression of a **lack of trust in Divine Being.**

Slackness, on the other hand, is a sign that we have let ourselves go and therefore forfeited our inherent form. We can never be 'correct' without a certain degree of awareness of the responsibility we bear for our total appearance (*Gestaltgewissen*). If we remain true to our conscience, it is impossible for us to be without form. The proper frame of mind will always reveal the combination of a trustful, passive attitude and an active attitude of individual responsibility. Most people have neither, therefore they lack the two most essential conditions for being in the right state of mind and body: *transparency and true form.*

Each one of us, as a Person embracing body and soul, develops and realizes ourselves in every gesture we make. But our personality is revealed most particularly through posture, tension and breathing. Nothing of what has been said, however, should be understood solely in a physical sense. Bad posture, wrong tension and incorrect breathing are all different ways in which a person's imperme-

ability and lack of form make their appearance. Thus it is that we are able to assist into being this Person who, while embracing body and soul, is beyond the contradiction of these apparent opposites. We can be helped to tackle the task of setting ourselves to rights by the proper practice of right posture, right tension and right breathing. It is the recognition of the need for this that opens up a field of possibility, accessible to all, through which the daily round itself becomes practice—practice that consists simply in learning how to be and how to behave in the world.

Correct posture is always determined by the right ‘center of gravity’. The ingrained bad posture of many people is caused by the shifting of the center of gravity too far upwards. This can be seen in those who are dominated by the habit ‘chest out, belly in’ where the drawing up of the shoulders is always an indication of tension. When we come across such instances of incorrect posture, the reason is never solely physical nor is it without importance. Indeed, it has great significance, since it is a sign of arrogance and an overemphasis on one’s own person. Such a posture is the defensive and protective mechanism of the person who is identified with the small ego and who therefore seeks above all to safeguard the ego and to hold secure its position in the world. Whenever a wrong posture has become deeply ingrained it blocks the redeeming, renewing and preserving forces that arise from the depths of Being. The complementary form of this attitude, which is often seen to alternate with it, is that

of collapsing, or giving away. In such a case, the innate image of a human being as an upright being is lost. Such slackness is evidence of a lack of feeling for, and responsibility towards, the correct form without which essential being cannot manifest itself.

Once, however, we become aware of the harmful effects of bad posture and consequently strive to develop and mature in accordance with our true nature—which means an unflagging search for the right center of gravity—we begin to perceive in ourselves far-reaching changes. We know without doubt that we are moving in the right direction.

The Japanese have a special term for that part of the body which is the correct center of a human being. It is *hara*. The word 'hara', known to many through the expression 'harakiri', literally means 'belly'. However, in its applied sense, it describes rather the general attitude of a person, in which, freed from the small ego—released from pride, from the desire to dominate, the fear of pain, the longing for security—one becomes firmly anchored in the true center. Thus centered, we are able to be receptive to the forces of Being which, with or without our awareness, transform, support, shape and protect us while at the same time enabling us to reveal these forces to the world by the quality of our work, our ability to create and our capacity for love.

This effort to attain the correct center of gravity is the fundamental practice by means of which we are enabled to live in the world in the right way. Thus resting

in the basic center, we are relaxed and free and at the same time feel ourselves supported. In the truest sense, here, we can be said to be upright. By means of this practice, the belly, the pelvis and the small of the back and their relation to each other form the basis of correct posture. When all movement flows from this relaxed yet firm center, all gestures, attitudes and postures—walking, standing, sitting—become, as it were, testimonies to true being. There is no aspect of daily life that does not provide opportunity for this practice. If, for one moment, we forget hara—whether it be in walking, standing or sitting—we cease at that moment to be fully and personally present. When the upper part of our body—the ego area—becomes tense and rigid, this rigidity cuts us off from our essence. On the other hand, when we sink downwards—dissolving into shapelessness—we lose the form which testifies to essential being.

All those actions which require concentrated attention and willpower have the possibility of endangering our hold on the center and our presence in hara. Whenever we aspire towards some goal or, being dominated by our worldly-ego, we fix our attention on a particular objective, we are in danger of losing touch with our center. Indeed, every kind of work or activity which is aimed towards a definite end can become the means—unless we are deeply grounded in hara—of shifting the center of gravity too far upwards. If we keep this in mind, it will be seen that every action provides an opportunity to practice correct posture. Each moment contains for us the possibility of establishing and consolidating the attitude

which frees us from the domination of our worldly-ego and allows us to exist from our essential being. To the extent to which we succeed in this, whatever work we undertake will flow more easily. Our knowledge and skill will be fully at our disposal, our labors crowned with success and, moreover, in relationships with people we will be relaxed, uninhibited and free.

Tension and relaxation are two aspects of every living whole. We moderns, however, tend to swing back and forth between the two mutually exclusive extremes of these aspects—‘tenseness and slackness’. Even when we talk of relaxation, what we usually mean is nothing but complete looseness—a condition which a moment later is inevitably transformed into a tension equally absolute. What has to be learned and constantly practiced is to relax without being slack. Correct relaxation induces the right kind of tension and has the effect of renewing us. The purpose of all true letting go is not some blissful condition where there is no tension at all, but rather a transformation by which a correct tension is achieved. It should be remembered that in this practice to achieve the right center, relaxation is never merely a physical or a technical exercise. It always implies a total transformation of the person. We need to learn to relax our *selves*—not only our bodies—in the right way. This entails far more than a relaxation of the muscles. Dropping the shoulders and letting go of our *self* in the dropping of the shoulders are two fundamentally different movements. The one is a technical exercise, with results that are merely external

and have no lasting effect; the other transforms the whole person. Rigidity bears witness to the fact that we are captive to the world-ego. Thus it is essential, in so far as we are identified with our world-ego, that we learn to let go not only at those times when we are tense, frightened, 'up in the air' or defensively clinging to the upper part of our body—but at all times and in all places. This should be our primary concern.

Whenever we manage to drop that ego which holds us fast in a state of tenseness, it will be noticed that a change in our whole person is brought about. Normally, we become aware of wrong tension only when we are troubled by some physical tenseness. But it should be realized that tenseness of any kind is always a sign of a wrong attitude to life. We have to learn to let *ourselves* go, as well as our attitudes. Only then, and only gradually, will we become calm and composed. It is impossible for us to relinquish, without falling apart, the support we gain from tension in the upper part of the body (the ego area), until we have learnt to anchor ourselves elsewhere—in a word, in the right center.

But that is not all. It should be remembered that the practice of right tension goes hand in hand with the practice of *breathing*. The inner significance of this practice of breathing will be missed if it is exclusively regarded as a bodily exercise whose sole purpose is to improve health and efficiency. When breathing means no more to us than the drawing in and letting out of air, it is an indication

that we have not understood that, in truth, it is the breath of greater life which penetrates us and all living things. It moves through human beings, giving them life as a threefold entity—soul, spirit and body. By means of this breathing, we open ourselves to greater life and close ourselves again; give ourselves away and again receive ourselves; lose ourselves and find ourselves. When breathing is out of order, not merely the body but the whole person is out of order. Every disturbance in breathing signifies a disturbance of the total person and has the effect of barring our way to ourselves. Wrong breathing impairs worldly efficiency. But what is more important, the deeply ingrained obstruction of essential being which it reveals affects the entire development. Continuous wrong breathing expresses a progressively strengthening inhibition of essential being. On the other hand, breathing that flows correctly indicates that the way is free for life to unfold out of essence.

The most widespread fault in breathing is found where a person breathes not from the center but from the upper part of the body so that the instinctive movement of the diaphragm is replaced by the activity of the chest muscles. In such a case an unnatural ego-breathing takes the place of that breathing which nature intended for us. This indicates that we are consciously or unconsciously *doing* something which, if we were in harmony with our essential being, would happen automatically. Whenever incorrect breathing becomes habit, the process by which a human being becomes a Person is obstructed. Such wrong attitudes to breathing are intimately related to

other aspects of the personality, to all those fundamental misconceptions that we allow to master ourselves and hinder our essential development in all spheres.

Throughout the centuries, human beings have invented many different kinds of breathing exercises that serve a variety of purposes. One may or may not agree on the question of their validity. But there is only one indisputable practice of breathing and that has neither been invented nor discovered by human beings. It is an essential part of us, inborn and in accordance with essential being and consists simply in letting breathing happen! Such practice merely involves establishing—or rather, rediscovering—the natural manner of breathing. This means that the breath should be allowed to flow outwards and inwards naturally in a rhythmic movement of giving and receiving. With regard to the wrong habits we acquire through the domination of the ego—which lead us involuntarily to resist the full exhalation and then too quickly to draw in the breath—the basic and most helpful practice of breathing consists mainly in allowing complete exhalation. If this is done, correct inhalation follows quite freely without any assistance. Let me repeat that this practice—like that of relaxation—should not be approached solely from the point of view of a physical exercise. With the exhalation of the breath, we should let go of ourselves trustfully and without reserve. When we can allow our breath fully to flow out, it is evidence of our deep trust in life. Whereas those who restrain their breathing mistrust both life and themselves! Thus—as it

was with the practice of right posture and right relaxation —so it is with right breathing: it is above all a question of letting go the clinging, self-protecting ego. This is the only way in which we can free ourselves from our exaggerated inhibitions and tensions and thus become receptive towards our essential being. In this union with being, it is possible for us to acquire the outer form which corresponds to our inner image.

Our happiness as human beings depends on the fulfillment of our deepest longings. In these we perceive Divine Being striving to manifest itself through us. Our most fundamental yearning is for something which in our essential being we really are and are intended to be. Our happiness, therefore, depends on the extent to which we are able to conform to our inner destiny. But such a consummation is only possible in so far as we freely fulfill this intention in our daily life.

The world in which we live is not a vale of sorrows which separates us from the peaks of the divine; rather, it is a bridge which unites us with those peaks. We need but penetrate the obscuring mists that lie between us and consciousness and tear down the obstructing walls that bar our way. This necessitates living the ordinary day as practice. No special time need be set aside for this. Each moment is a summons calling us to recollect and prove ourselves. There is no activity, serving whatever external purpose, that does not contain an opportunity to dedicate ourselves more ardently to the search for truth. No matter what we are doing—walking, standing or sitting,

writing, speaking or being silent, attacking something or defending ourselves, helping or serving others—whatever the task, it is possible to carry it out with a posture and an attitude that will more and more establish the contact with being. We must learn to make use of these opportunities in the practice of the ‘right gesture’.

Healing Power and Gesture



In human beings the process of ripening and maturing, in contrast to the natural ripening of a fruit, is not accomplished automatically. It requires conscious collaboration. In the realm of instinctive drives, it is nature that thrusts us towards the fulfillment of our desires and it is only necessary for us to yield to this irresistible force for such fulfillment to follow. The same does not hold good in the realm of the spirit; though here, too, the pre-condition for any change is that we are first seized by impulse. But unless we deliberately and consciously grasp that impulse and commit ourselves to achieving its realization, the current soon begins to weaken.

Spiritual progress inevitably brings about transformation. To this end it is necessary that a part of the former attitude to life be relinquished—some habit or requirement, some attitude or hard-won place on the ladder. In the long run it becomes indispensable for us to give up the prevailing convictions, apparently so natural, held by our world-ego. It is difficult for us to relinquish anything with which we have been habitually, though

unconsciously, identified. Spiritual transformation, for this reason, needs a great deal of hard work. It not only entails inner practice, but also the practice of our manner of being physically present. This requires a long and patient practice of the body, of gesture, movement and posture. One such basic practice whose purpose is transformation is that of meditation.

All genuine meditation consists of two stages. It begins with concentration, by means of which we collect ourselves with the help of our will and direct the power of the ego onto whatever may be the theme and purpose of the practice of transformation. Concentration is achieved through the powers of the ego, which is able to grasp thoughts objectively, differentiate between them and activate the will. Thus in concentration we come to a closer understanding of the theme of the meditation. By means of this effort we are able to recognize the faults in our physical posture and the disturbing factors that are at work within us. In addition it can bring comprehension and a clear perception of the object chosen for meditation, no matter whether this be a picture, a word, the following of the breath or some other theme. The whole process takes place within the tension of the subject and object. Without such concentrated preliminary tension, without the attention that collects the whole person—at the same time focused within the self and turned towards the object—no meditation is possible. None of the foregoing, however, is as yet meditation.

Meditation does not truly begin until that which the ego had seized upon in turn seizes the ego and by this movement changes rational analysis into synthesis. By this means the quality of consciousness is transformed from the masculine, active state which is, as it were, a sword, into the feminine, passive condition of the open chalice that is capable of being filled, as from an inner well-spring, without the active help of the ego. Thus action is transformed into passion, and doing into being.

The word 'meditation' comes from '*meditari*', which is a passive form of the verb meaning 'being moved to the center', rather than the active which is 'moving to the center'. But this center is not a fixed point on which we concentrate as we would on an object. Rather, the contrary can be said—that it *itself* concentrates us by drawing us inwards and collecting us there. This center is, after all, our own essence—our transcendental core. Eventually, with practice, the center is experienced as a particular state in which the antithesis of subject and object is gradually dissolved. When this occurs the meditator has the sensation of being centered. And so, step by step, essential being awakes and becomes an inward knowing that experiences itself as a personal life center anchored in Great Life. This forms the basis of a new consciousness of the world in which we sense ourselves as being reborn.

The transformation which is the object of meditation is a progressive process. Identification with the world-ego is superseded by identification with Divine Being. But not

until there is an integration of world-ego and our essential being does the true self, the Person, really exist. When this happens we are able to reveal essential being in our changed and now transparent world-ego. Thus meditation is not merely a process of thought but a transformation of the whole person; not only an inner happening but one which includes the transformation of the body. It will be readily understood, therefore, that the theme of our meditation is less important than our manner of meditating.

The prerequisite of any meditation worthy of the name is that the purpose of practice is understood to be progress along the inner way rather than worldly achievement or the enlargement of worldly capacities. In meditation there is a close connection between what is done and how it is done. It may happen that the contents of experience have such overwhelming power that they force us into certain postures or literally throw us to our knees. On the other hand, there are postures of such permeability to transcendence, such power to transform that through them all contents of meditation become transparent to essence and being. Provided we are wholeheartedly committed in striving for union with Transcendental Being, the releasing of the force which brings wholeness will depend more on the totality of the physical posture, than on the factual contents of the rational mind.

Our state of mind at any given moment becomes apparent in our way of being present, our behavior and our gestures. Whatever posture we may adopt in the world, it

will always be expressive of our total attitude. We reveal ourselves through our gestures, but the same means that manifest to the world can also lead us to find self-realization. Our gestures and general demeanor ring true when they rise freely and directly from essential being without having to pass through the barrier of habitual and conditioned inhibitions. To the extent that our gestures have been liberated from the prison of our world-ego, the greater the quality of purity they reveal. The greater the purity of the gesture, the more we are helped to healing and wholeness. For this reason it is possible to speak of the healing power which lies in the pure gesture.

There is a story that tells of Meister Eckhart's meeting with a poor man: "You may be holy," says Eckhart, "but what made you holy, brother?" And the answer comes: "My sitting still, my elevated thoughts and my union with God." It is useful for our present theme to note that the practice of sitting still is given pride of place.

In the Middle Ages people were well aware of the inexhaustible power that arises simply from sitting still. After that time, knowledge of the purifying power of stillness and its practice was, in the West, largely lost. The tradition of preparing for the breakthrough of transcendence by means of inner quiet and motionless sitting has been preserved in the East to the present day. Even in cases where practice is apparently directed not to immobility but towards activity — as in archery, sword fighting, wrestling, painting, flower arrangement — it is always the inner attitude of quiet and not

the successful performance which is regarded as of fundamental importance.

Once a technique has been mastered, any inadequate performance is mirrored in wrong attitudes. The traditional knowledge of the fact that it is possible for us to be inwardly cleansed solely through the practice of right posture has kept alive the significance of correct sitting. The inner quiet which arises when the body is motionless and in its best possible form can become the source of transcendental experience. By emptying ourselves of all those matters that normally occupy us we become receptive to Greater Being. As evidence here is a story of Dogen Zenzi.

The Zen practice of Dogen, founder of the Soto sect of Zen Buddhism, consisted in simply sitting still, without meditating on any theme or object. Esai Zenzi, the founder of Rinzai Zen, on the other hand, mainly practiced the *Koan*—the solving of an insoluble mental problem. When asked for his opinion of the Rinzai method, Dogen replied: "It is very good." "But," protested the enquirer, "They practice the Koan!" "Well," said Master Dogen, "some people may be able to sit still only when they have something to think about. But if this brings them enlightenment, it is not due to their thinking but solely to their sitting still." The practice of keeping the body motionless transforms the inner being. This story, like the one related about Meister Eckhart, points towards something that needs most diligently to be explored.

It should be understood that the transformation which is brought about by means of meditation is not merely a change in the inner life, but a renewal of the whole person. It is a mistake to imagine that enlightenment is no more than an experience which suddenly brings fresh inward understanding, as a brilliant physicist may have a sudden inspiration which throws new light on the work and causes a re-ordering of the whole system of thought. Such an experience leaves the person essentially unchanged. True enlightenment has nothing to do with this kind of sudden insight. When it occurs, it has the effect of so fundamentally affecting and shaking the whole person that the inner self, as well as the total physical existence in the world, is completely transformed.

To what extent the habit of sitting still can impress and change us becomes clear only when we have taken pains to practice it. After a short time we find ourselves asking: how is it possible that such a simple exercise can have such far-reaching effects on body and soul? Sitting still, we begin to realize, is not what we had imagined physical or spiritual practice to be. We are faced, therefore, with the question: "What is it we are really practicing if, although both are affected, it is neither body nor spirit?" The answer to this is that the person who practices is *being practiced*. The one who is worked upon is the Person in the original totality, who is present beneath and beyond all possible differentiation into the many and various physical, spiritual and mental aspects. Insofar as we regard and value ourselves as incarnate persons, certain manifestations in our life move from

their accustomed shadow into the light of understanding. Thus our moods and postures take on new meaning. So long as we think of body and soul as two separate entities, we regard moods simply as feelings, and look upon bodily attitudes and breathing as merely physical manifestations. When, however, the whole person is recognized as a 'thou', it is no longer possible to separate the body from the soul. Once it becomes a question of transformation, our basic inner moods, together with all the gestures and postures that express them, acquire new significance. They are the means through which we grow aware, manifest ourselves, and become physically present in the world.

We have seen that the purpose of all practice is transformation. It is the means whereby essential being is able unequivocally to prevail in our inner and outer life. The new state of mind and the radiance that now floods ordinary existence can permit Divine Being to be ever more clearly manifest—not only in the inner impulses and the newly-achieved sense of purpose but in the sense of blessedness that pervades everything we do. In our essential being we participate in Greater Being, and since it is this participation which gives life to our own being, our transformation brings about the manifestation, in the world, of the Transcendental Being present within amid the conditions of ordinary life.

During the process of growth from childhood to adulthood, we acquire the kind of consciousness—with its corresponding attitudes—that in effect prevents our par-

icipation in Divine Being. We develop an ego capable of the kind of logical thinking that enables us to confront and rationally master the world. The world-ego, as this 'I' is called, views life solely as a matter of establishing and sustaining certain fixed positions. It follows that when we are oriented theoretically, practically and ethically solely towards established facts, essential being is lost. Life, being a moving process, does not tolerate anything static. The loss of contact with greater life becomes evident in our relationship to the world, wherein we lopsidedly develop only those abilities which help us rationally to understand and dominate our surroundings. Such obstruction of essential being culminates in the delusion that we are autonomous, able to control life and give it meaning solely through our own powers. This delusion creates a barrier which separates us from Divine Being and plunges us into a specifically human suffering. Yet it should not be forgotten that this same suffering, which is the result of estrangement from Divine Being, can itself become the means whereby Divine Being may at some time shine out against the background of our misconceptions. For, when the suffering caused by estrangement has grown so great that we are overwhelmed by despair and by the fear of being cut off from our roots, we may, at that moment, find ourselves ready to open to Divine Being, which is all the time striving to deflect us from our lopsided concern with the world and turn us towards itself.

The conditions necessary to make possible this reversal in a life that has been oriented solely to the world are

(1) that the reality of Divine Being present within our being should ceaselessly strive to become manifest in and through us; (2) that with our rationally oriented mind we should have become estranged from and be in conflict with our essential being. Without this tension, this tug of war, we would be as little able to become aware of the divine ground of being as a flower; (3) that in breaking through the barriers of what is inevitably a limited awareness, we open ourselves to greater being and thereby awaken to the realization that the barrier has its origin solely in our rational ego; (4) that we are prepared to allow the Divine Will which summons us from within to become our own will, and to *decide* to follow the way to which essential being calls us. The reversal of direction—arising as it does from our suffering at being estranged from essential being and our joy at rediscovering it, signals our setting out upon the way.

The way is the never-ending practice which leads us from the reality that was shaped by our world-ego to the reality that is beyond time and space, and thence towards transparency and new becoming. Only those who, with the full force of their nature, realize that the whole meaning of their worldly existence lies in the manifestation of Transcendent Being, will be able to reach the way. When they understand this they will need to decide once and for all to become a witness to Divine Being in their ordinary life, to whatever extent it is given them to be so. They are thus no longer bound in vassalage to their world-ego nor even, in the final instance, to the advancement of the world and others. Beyond all these, they are committed

to the service of a new master—Divine Being. Insofar as this new master is rooted in inner experience and is not merely the result of blind belief, this service presupposes perpetual contact with essential being.

We may be moved by Greater Being in many ways and in different degrees. A yearning, of which we are almost unaware, may perhaps stir in our hearts. It is not only the great experiences of ‘breaking through’ that completely transform our relationship to life. The smallest incident may equally achieve it. The primary aim of all practice on the way is to prepare us for such experiences of being and by making us receptive to genuine contact with essential being, open for us the way of transformation. The purpose of this practice is to help us to bring to an end our separation from essential being and lead us back to the path of reintegration with our own inner being. This process serves our greatest well-being (*Heil-Werden*). But what do we mean by well-being or, in other words, being whole?

We may be thoroughly efficient and skillful, able to establish contact with and adapt to the world and thus successfully master our life, but if we are still deaf to our essential being, it does not yet mean that we are well and whole. We can be said to be whole only insofar as we are open to the redemptive ground of being and at the same time able to accept and obey the forces of renewal that give us direction and freedom. Those who, in the midst of all the confusion, poverty and disunity of the world, are able to manifest the plenitude, significance and oneness of

Transcendental Being are indeed whole. There is no one, however, who can finally achieve this state. All anyone can do is set out on the path toward it. We can be said to be healed (or whole) once our contact with being has produced a mode of life which keeps us on the way of transformation. Those who practice ceaselessly so that all gestures, postures and movements (which is to say, their bearing and ability to yield themselves up) are a true expression of their essential being—are healed and will be enabled to remain on the path that leads to wholeness. Thus, the purpose of correct practice is not to bring us to a state of tranquility but to keep us in a condition of constant watchfulness and prevent us from coming to a standstill on the way.

The so-called ‘peace’ of the world-ego, illustrated by the bourgeois aim of a ‘quiet life’, comes about when all inner movement and growth have stopped. Of quite a different quality is the peace of inner being and the life which strives to manifest itself through it. This kind of peace can only prevail where nothing further interrupts the movement towards becoming. To achieve such an attitude to life is the aim of all practice and meditation; it can never represent a state of ‘having arrived’ but is always a process of ‘being on the way’. Such practice, therefore, is by no means acceptable to all. There are many who throng to the so-called prophets who promise a cheap kind of peace to troubled humanity. But such ‘teachers’ simply betray humanity by hiding the real cause of our anxiety, which lies in the desire for transformation inherent in our inmost being.

How can we recognize the correct state of mind? What are the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving it? Strangely enough, the very manner in which we develop our I-world awareness is one of the chief obstructions. This is a form of consciousness in which the ego, intent on asserting itself, consolidates its rational view of and position in the world. Thus we see that the danger with which such an ego threatens the maturing person lies not only in the well-known threefold sin of seeking possessions, assuming importance and striving for power! The real cause lies rather in the fatal human tendency to remain static. The so-called natural ego is ruled by its inclination towards and capacity for holding fast to fixed positions that seem to promise security. Thought and energy are turned towards facts that have been rationally established, whether their purpose be to safeguard possessions in the world, to defend a system of thought or to cling to fixed values. Whenever the idea of holding fast dominates the mind, life itself is in danger. But where life is, nothing is fixed, all is in motion and engaged in the eternal process of crystallization and dissolution, growth and maturity, death and rebirth. If life is present, then even that which appears to be completed is open to further change, and that which may have finished growing still remains transparent and ready for new becoming. So it is with those who have awakened to life. Even those attitudes which have been established in them by the rational mind are permeated by the constant movement and transforming power that come from essential being.

Whenever essential being makes itself felt, an attitude is created in which the whole static order of the

world-ego is taken over by a new and dynamic process of continual becoming.

What is it that we mean when we use the phrase Divine Being? Divine Being is an abstract and, as it were, far-away term in relation to our conceptual thinking. But in the depths of our inner experience it is the one most concrete and closest to us. It is, after all, that with which in our essential being we are one; or, to put it more clearly, it is that which in our being we really *are*. For this reason it is able to shower upon us experiences of such force, radiance and plenitude that our rational mind is completely overwhelmed.

When we are thus seized by Divine Being, our basic mood entirely changes. Strength, joy and love seem to wake within us – experiences which, from the standpoint of the ego, are incomprehensible and without reason. Inevitably, the impoverishment, senselessness and uncertainty of our ego-centered worldly existence show up sharply and painfully when seen against the background of our first experience of Being. Henceforth, the responsibility for revealing Divine Being in all we do weighs even more heavily on us than does our former desire to enlarge ourselves in the world. Even so, whenever Greater Being stirs within us, through all the despair we experience when we recognize our imperfect state, and all the pressure of our newly-awakened conscience, we feel a radiant, warm and creative purpose streaming through us. But if Greater Being is to be enabled not merely to move us for a brief moment but constantly to be made

manifest *through* us, it will be necessary for us to find a way of life that extends beyond the moment—a way that makes us new in body and soul. This we can only discover and establish with the aid of ceaseless practice.

The experience of Divine Being and the transformation that is the result of contact with Divine Being are two different things. In the matter of the transformation that comes from Divine Being, we mean more than the mere acquisition of a new content to life or a new scale of values—more even than the step that leads from rational understanding to experiences rich in inner images. It is possible for us to have wonderful visions that herald the advent of Divine Being, without really tasting it. We may experience a foretaste of Divine Being in a dream or in a moment of great happiness, but such momentary influences will not be sufficient to transform us. In fact, we may have countless revelatory experiences without being changed by them one whit. They may even happen daily and leave us essentially unaltered. It is only when we really hear the summons that resounds in all genuine experience of being and, having heard, commit ourselves to reply, that our state of mind becomes sufficiently modified to correspond to it. In this way the new Person is born and life is filled with fresh meaning and impulse. Imagination, action and thought are now so impregnated with the transcendental ground of being that even the authority of the rational perception undergoes a fundamental change. It is no longer the ultimate judge of our understanding and the arbiter of all our actions. We must not, however, because of this, revile and

condemn it. The rational mind, after all, is that which distinguishes us from the beasts and is the prerequisite for spiritual growth. Neither rational thinking nor its focal point the ego are in themselves evil: they only become so when we identify ourselves with them alone and thus become estranged from the ground of being which is by its nature beyond realization. The real significance and purpose of all rational behavior should be to make room for Divine Being to unfold within us and, through us, to manifest itself in the world!

To change our attitude by means of the practice that accords with essential being requires, above all, that the world-ego be dislodged from its central position. Once we have realized this, it necessarily follows that in all those areas of life and experience which cannot be subjugated by the grasping, fixing ego, our interest is enlarged. Two realms of experience now acquire particular significance—that of sense and that of inner bodily responses. Whenever our hierarchy of values is ordered by rational principles, these take a back seat. But they can never be robbed of their quality of immediacy and freshness, even when they are experienced within the frame of a rationally ordered life. Their intrinsic quality enables them to become in us beneficent witnesses to Divine Being, provided we learn to live with them and let them be. It is a truism that, even when enmeshed in our rational activities, we are continually renewed by our contact with nature—country air, forests, the sea shore. Practicing the perception of the qualities of smell, taste,

sight, hearing and inner bodily movement can have a wonderfully refreshing and curative effect so long as we are able to experience them purely. By 'purely' we mean free from the ego's habitual process of labeling and naming all things according to their specific properties. There is a form of meditation in which, by sharpening our senses, we unlock the transcendental content that resides in them and thereby assist transformation. Even more important, however, than this freeing of the senses, is our need to experience our bodies—always provided that the body is not regarded merely as a thing, but as the means by which we manifest ourselves in the world as Persons.

Whether it be in repose or in motion, the human body is intended to carry, transmit and bear witness to essential life which is designed to assume a particular form in the world in accordance with its inner image. In this way, the body bears witness to that Being which is ever striving within it towards manifestation. The word 'body' here is not to be thought of in static terms: it implies rather the unity inherent in the changing pattern of posture, attitude and gesture by means of which an individual person lives out their life. This body, however, since it is subject to the distorting conditions of the world, can never become the perfect expression of being, nor the complete realization of that inherent image which is unconditioned by time and space. Whatever its momentary form may be, it will always mirror the imperfections that the world has wrought in it. Our physical state and the gestures that reveal it can give, on the one hand, clear indications of

the measure and manner of our accord with essential being and the extent to which we have become ourselves; or, on the other, it can provide indubitable evidence of how far we have failed ourselves.

In looking at a human being simply as a human being, we should not make any distinction between the body and the soul. If we are able to set aside this inevitable antithesis, we see that the most direct revelation of ourselves is through gesture. Indeed, the whole field of movement, posture and facial expression provides incontrovertible evidence of our inner and outer states. In respect to our work when we are on the way, the manner in which our bodies move is very significant, for it is here that we experience ourselves not outwardly but inwardly. To observe and register what happens from a purely external standpoint is very different from inwardly experiencing the rhythms of the breath and the inner sensation of movement.

Rational knowledge has not the same quality as inward knowing. On the other hand, if we are to achieve clarity in our inner awareness, a background of acquired knowledge is essential. The importance, for the practice of the way, of the inward knowing of the body's changing processes can only be realized when we understand that this body, in its existential sense, differs from the body comprehended analytically, as an opposition of spiritual and physical forces. The bodily existence of a living person has no relation to the corpse which is left behind at death. In its own way the body's manner of

existence shows how far a person's transcendental being has been able to express itself under the conditions of space and time. The common view, which differentiates between body and soul, is the product of the analytical, rational mind that cannot, by its very nature, perceive the unity of the living person. Whenever a human being is looked upon as a thing—a thing, moreover, logically determined—we lose sight of the Person. It follows that if we do not perceive others as unique, living wholes, we not only cannot help them on their way to self-becoming, but we fall into the fatal dilemma of dualism. With its rational distinction between the physical and spiritual aspects, dualism separates human beings into two different entities. This logical view can so mislead us in our practical evaluation of people that we tend to regard other people as important only in respect to the significance of their functioning in the world and to ignore their existential requirements. To reverse such methods of thinking is far more difficult than is generally supposed. High-sounding platonic assumptions of the unity of body and soul are no more useful here than our ineffective modern attempts to coordinate the practices of medicine and psychology. We shall not achieve any valid understanding of human beings by adding what we can deduce from the living corpse to our knowledge of the bodiless psyche. The concept of the unity of body and soul is the product of discursive thinking. It fails to take into account that vital Person who is to be met in another as a *thou* or experienced within ourselves as an *I*. Such an attitude makes it impossible, either theoretically

or practically, to come to any understanding that could do justice to a living Person.

When we meet others as *thou*, when we are able to see them in their existential relationship to the world and to life—only then do they appear as Persons. It is possible now to see them as elements in a system of interrelated parts whose order has no relevance to the order so dear to the rational mind. We can, indeed, never do others justice with our rational understanding alone: our direct participation in their life and suffering is necessary for this. Only when they are present to us as *thou* can we feel and sense them in their personal, human existence, where they, like ourselves, are striving for happiness, meaning and fulfillment. When this happens we recognize them as brothers and sisters who are also on the way, borne along by destiny, as we are, towards the goal of becoming true human beings—which is to say, persons. Doctors, for instance, will lose sight of the human being if they look at patients simply as cases.

At every moment in our lives, we are, as persons, bound by our essential law to pursue our transformation according to our inner destiny. It is in the context of this law that our particular bodily form is to be understood and evaluated. By this means it is possible to discover whether we have strayed from or remained faithful to the way of transformation; whether we have moved forward or have become stuck fast at some inhibiting point. Any incorrect bodily form, any tenseness, any cramped

condition—understood existentially—is an expression of an ingrained wrong attitude. It is an indication that we have gone astray, as persons, or have been brought to a standstill on the way.

The dominating tension, existentially speaking, is that which occurs between our world-ego and our inner being. This corresponds to the tension between our bodily form, which has developed under the circumstances of space and time, and our essential form, as yet unrealized, but which is nevertheless always absolute in its demand for realization. The correct attitude necessary for the fulfillment of our life as persons is one in which our conditioned body has become transparent—in other words, made permeable for the revelation of our essential being.

That which, above all else, stands in the way of the realization of the person is the fixed attitude—or crystallization—by means of which we attempt to establish our security and to assert ourselves in the world. The physical expression of such a fixation is easily apparent in anyone whose ego is striving to attain security. As we have already said, it is revealed particularly in the posture, in the relationship between tension and relaxation and in breathing.

When we speak of posture, tension and breathing, it is necessary to make a distinction between their significance as a personal expression and their value as data for the rational-analytical view—as, for instance, in the practice of medicine. When we consider human beings

existentially we accept their demeanor and appearance as ways in which they manifest themselves. We understand that it is by these means they are able to be themselves and also to be present as themselves in the world; whereas, regarded from a logical or rational standpoint we may be aware only of some deformation of the body or of inner obstacles that inhibit their strength and efficiency. If our concern is with self-becoming we cannot fail—for the sake of our own understanding—to take into account the personal significance of posture, breathing and patterns of tension. No spiritual exercise can ignore these three elements, for the reason that our physical attitude does not represent only a bodily state but also our way of being present as Persons. And there are, as we shall see, exercises which serve the inner development of the Person by bringing about the correct bodily form.

The manner in which we are physically present and the degree of our permeability reveal the point at which we have arrived on our way to maturity—which is to say towards integration with our essential being. We may perhaps be physically ill and yet, as Persons, present in the right way because of our permeability to the demands of our essential being. In contrast to this, a thoroughly healthy athlete may well be present in the wrong way if an inward growth is obstructed by arrogance or self-love, either of which stand in the way of essential being.

The correct attitude is never static; it is not something that is achieved once and for all. Rather, it is a living, moving and changing process within which we can

remain receptive towards our essence, in spite of the fact that the bodily form we may have at any given moment is bound by conditions of space and time. This enables us to obey the striving of our inner being to become manifest, to remain always in a state of transformation and to become ever more permeable to Divine Being.

An attitude, or state of being, manifests itself and develops from moment to moment in the unity of all our gestures. As we speak of correct attitude, so can we speak of transparent gesture—which is one capable of manifesting the right attitude and, by repetition, becoming firmly established.

The transparent gesture may be said to exist when essential being is fully manifested in it. To make this possible, the gesture must be free of all fixations grounded in the ego and above all from the dominance of those attitudes by means of which the world-ego protects itself. Our concern is to become transparent to Divine Being and let it resound through us. The pure gesture can manifest essential being in accordance with the inner image. But no gesture, even though it may have in it nothing of ego, is really pure so long as it lacks form. It is by means of the pure gesture that the correct form is realized and able to prove itself. Such a gesture is not inspired by the ego but is a gift from our inherent image. Thus the correct physical form is the means by which the image can express and fulfill itself.

By the purity of their gestures we are enabled to see that individuals are present in the right way. This means that they are permeable to their individual essence as it

strives towards the revelation of plenitude, innate form and unity of Divine Being. When someone is present in the purity of gesture, the chief characteristics are a simple, unaffected trustfulness, a natural harmony, and an attitude of friendliness which can only exist when there is genuine contact with essential being. In a like sense, the pure gesture also liberates the healing spirit of which it is an expression. It is both the manifestation and the ever-living source of an attitude which enables us to respond appropriately to all situations of life. Each new circumstance stimulates the cycle of transformation afresh. Thus we see that the pure gesture is an expression of the law of movement, which is constant renewal. By means of pure gesture, we, as individual 'forms in time' (*Zeitgestalt*) are enabled to relate in our own way to the primal movement of life, wherein the forms which have crystallized in us under world conditions are repeatedly dissolved and remade in accordance with essential being. This is a process of continuous transformation.

The pure gesture is evidence of the fact that a vital way of life has been found, a way of living directly from essential being, which allows the world to be faced fearlessly. Thus, the more unequivocally we live from essential being and without regard to our world-ego, the more freely and without prejudice will we meet all that may, from moment to moment, confront us. This means that we are really open to life which, as we know, never repeats itself. Now we perceive even familiar things as if for the first time; no longer taking up fixed positions, we

are able to give our whole self, just as we are, to every passing moment.

The practice of pure gesture requires first that we have a continuous awareness of our usual behavior, our prejudices, habits, and processes of self-protection; and secondly that we should awake in ourselves a determination to retract and dissolve all these attitudes with which we deceive ourselves as to what the truth of life is.

The Wheel of Transformation



It is impossible to achieve self-realization as a person unless we are prepared fully to cooperate in the process. At each step this process depends on our wholehearted concurrence, for in the long run self realization can only be the result of a constant and tireless practice. Not until we have begun to practice continuously with complete awareness can we be said really to have joined the way. From then on the Wheel of Transformation never stops turning. Or, if it does stop, it topples over and we become stuck and unable to move.

The process of transformation consists of three stages:

1. All that is contrary to essential being must be relinquished.
2. That which has been relinquished must be dissolved in the Ground of Being which absorbs, redeems, transforms and recreates.
3. The newly formed core which arises out of the Ground of Being must be recognized, accepted, allowed to grow and personal responsibility for it undertaken.

Further—since that which conflicts with essential being must first be discerned in order that it may be relinquished—so

the newly-formed core must be assented to by the will, in order that it may ultimately be realized and made effective in life (reintegrated with the world-ego).

To this end, it may be said that the Wheel of Transformation has five spokes:

1. The practice of critical awareness.
2. The letting go of all that stands in the way of new becoming.
3. Union with the Ground of Being.
4. New becoming in accordance with the inner image which has arisen from the Ground of Being.
5. Putting to the test this new form, practicing it in everyday life and noting all failures by means of critical awareness. And so the wheel turns.

Each section of the revolving wheel serves in its own way to create an attitude that enables us to grow more and more transparent to Divine Being. To achieve this, no step may be omitted. Each one, if it is truly accomplished, contains all the others. Yet each has its own specific purpose. Here it should be said that it is helpful for the beginner—and which of us does not remain a beginner throughout life?—to lay special emphasis, in daily life or in set periods of practice, sometimes on one step, sometimes on another. The essential thing to remember, however, is that transformation is only possible so long as the wheel is kept turning. The steps have their use and meaning only within the context of the continuously revolving wheel.

One isolated experience of Divine Being, when in some unique moment we are possessed by feelings of liberation and responsibility, is, of itself, never enough to give us the strength to keep the wheel in motion. It is essential that we recognize and repeatedly grasp anew the proper purpose of such experiences—which is to bear witness to Divine Being in the midst of our life in the world. Further, we must strive for the fulfillment of this purpose by repeatedly affirming our decision, rooting it firmly in our conscience and absorbing it into our will. Only from fidelity to this process of ceaseless transformation can critical awareness, letting go, union, new becoming and our testimony to these in daily life be existentially valid.

Part 1 ~ Critical Awareness

Critical awareness bears upon all that obstructs our contact and integration with essential being, as well as all that stands in the way of true self-realization. Critical awareness is not a state of mind which can be reached once and for all, without further effort; it is a continuing process which has as its aim the growth of consciousness. It is not to be confused with the purely intellectual faculty but is, rather, an inner awareness, an inner knowing—indeed, a transforming power.

For instance, to take cognizance intellectually of the fact that there is a contradiction in what we think of as the ideal image is not at all the same thing as becoming inwardly aware of a wrong attitude. The latter process is, rather, an inward sensing of the way in which, as a

person, we are rightly or wrongly present—that is, in harmony with or antagonistic to our true nature. This sensing grows more acute the more completely we are committed to following the way, living in accordance with essential being and obeying our inner law.

The creative and transforming power of critical awareness develops out of an inner awareness of the body and not from some rational conception of what we believe corresponds to or conflicts with correct posture. For this reason transformation begins only after the necessary attitude has been inwardly experienced. Thus we find that, in order to be effective, our orientation towards the Divine and its manifestation—which should be the foundation of all other actions—requires far more than the conceiving of an ideal image and systematically striving towards it. It is not until we comprehend our inner structure that such orientation effectively begins to permeate all bodily movements. Only by means of a continuous single-minded effort can this process in the long run either bring about transformation or exclude all that stands in the way of such permeability.

With regard to the development of critical self-awareness, what element in it should we consider the most important to practice? It is the awakening of, the separating out and, as it were, the making articulate a new sense that can smell out inner truth. Such work requires the development of a sensitivity which will enable us reliably to perceive all deviations from the true inner order. In particular we need to become susceptible to that within us which

knows beyond any doubt whether we are wrongly or rightly centered. In this way critical awareness, being the means by which we progress, becomes active in each aim and aspect of our life. Through it we come to understand that what is required is the development of a new kind of sensitivity which will enable us to sense the correct center and to become aware of all deviations from it.

Few people, in these days, have any feeling for or understanding of the right center, even though there may be considerable technical knowledge available about right and wrong posture. Being correctly centered does not mean merely that we are so anchored in some central part of ourselves that we can, from that solid position, confidently confront the world. This is not enough. The right center is that which enables us to correspond to essential being. Once we have been truly seized by essential being and undergone the transformation that results from such an experience, our life will henceforth revolve around the determination to attain, preserve or re-establish that state of mind and body which can remain permeable to essential being. This revolution around the true center begins only when we are able to sustain the proper inward attitude without slackness. All distortion and loss of the correct physical form—that form through which we are intended to fulfill our life—is connected with the absence of the right center. But what do we mean by the term ‘center’?

In relation to the ‘what’ consciousness, which sees reality solely in the context of ‘things’, the word ‘center’

has merely a spatial or physical meaning. For the 'who' consciousness, however, 'being centered' signifies a state in which we move continuously towards our innermost nature; that is to say, our aim is centered in our essential mission which is to manifest Being in the world. The opposite of such an attitude would be one where we are exclusively oriented towards worldly values and a life that revolves wholly round the desires of the world-ego.

In other words, 'center', from a rational point of view, refers to a fixed point. In its personal meaning, however, the center is the center of our individual life, our driving force, reason and purpose. Understood in this personal sense, the word 'center' has a threefold foundation. It stands on the *strength* by which we live, the *meaning* around which we revolve and the *fulfillment* for which we search.

Inevitably our life is focused and nourished by a specific vital force, by a search for individual meaning and by a longing for personal fulfillment. Strength, meaning and fulfillment, however, have a different significance according to whether we identify ourselves with our world-ego or with our essential being. Strength from the standpoint of the world-ego is a quality that enables us to survive healthily and efficiently in the world; meaning may grow out of any kind of work—including service to the community—that is valid in and recognized by the world; fulfillment is brought about by whatever finally sets the mind at rest. When, however, we are identified with our essential being, strength is the result of contact with essential being, meaning derives from obedience to

the requirements of essential being and, once we join the way of becoming transparent, fulfillment is at hand. In a state of identification with our ego we are dependent on the world; we need the world and rely upon it to give ourselves meaning. The development and functioning of worldly strength, as well as self-confidence and the ability to survive, are conditioned on all sides by external factors. Under such conditions we are liable to be easily upset, touchy, quick to feel aggrieved and always on the lookout for security. We sway back and forth between states of restriction and abandonment, rigidity and slackness, elevation and prostration. We experience every condition except that of being firmly balanced. Why is this? The explanation is to be found in the lack of a center capable of supporting us, a center which cannot be shaken. Once we are anchored in our essential being, we become aware that a core that nothing can destroy exists in us. From this we gain stability and permanence. We acquire a composure that is independent of the world, a clear sense of inner direction, and above all, a self-confidence that is independent of the world's praise or blame. The personal significance of 'being center' is that we can so live in the midst of all the ups and downs of life that we receive strength, purpose and direction from essential being. Imperturbable and at peace, we ceaselessly pursue our inner destiny and so manifest Divine Being in this life in the world.

Stretched as we are between heaven and earth, our spiritual development and the possibility that essential

being will reveal itself to us depend, in the first instance, on being correctly anchored in the 'earth'. In other words, we have first to discover the right center of gravity. Understood in the personal sense, 'center of gravity' does not refer to any specific area, but to what we may call the root of personal or existential life. Nevertheless, it is possible to perceive whether or not a person is properly rooted in the physical body. When we have found this correct center of gravity in the body we can open ourselves to the forces that lie at the essential core of life and anchor ourselves therein. The 'vital or earth center'¹ contains all the energies of the Ground of Being, energies that bring to our aid a sense of liberation, a strong inner support and the possibility of regeneration. When we are relaxed and firmly based in this center, we experience these forces in our physical existence. We immediately lose them, however, when we draw ourselves up tensely, for such a movement cuts us off from the life-giving strength from below. The center of gravity is thus misplaced. Worse still, it can happen that no center of gravity exists at all—except perhaps for a fleeting moment—in which case tenseness or slackness are the result. It is the center of gravity which determines the total posture of the body as well as its patterns of tension and the character of its breathing.

That power which enables us to be truly centered lies, physically, in the middle of the body, in *hara*, or more accurately, in the pelvic region.² *Hara* (Japanese for 'belly') refers to an attitude by means of which we are

anchored 'below' in such a way that we are freed from habitual restrictions brought about by being top-heavily centered 'above' in the world-ego. This settling down into ourselves, this re-orientation of body and soul, allows the strength within our own being to support and mold us and to give direction to our life.

We may have an incorrect center of gravity or even none at all, and in either case this is a result of the extent and dimension of our world-ego—which is to say that we have either too much of this or too little. The more we identify with this ego, the higher in the body the point of anchorage will be. Caught thus in these extremes of the ego, our attitude will be determined by our intellect (head), our will (chest), or our all-too sensitive feelings (heart). Thus drawn up, tense and rigid, we will be totally at war with our instinctive drives and cut off from cosmic forces. If, on the other hand, our ego is underdeveloped, the connection to the center from which strength and form are derived may be almost completely lacking. As a result, we will fall apart or collapse, and become the plaything of inner and outer forces. We will be unable to be true to ourselves or to stand up to the world as a person. Thus we see that when the center of gravity has become fixed too far upwards in the body, we are cut off from the Ground of Being as well as from the liberating and supporting power of our own essential being, and thus we are trapped in all the menace and terror of the world. When, on the other hand, we have no center of gravity at all, even a minimum amount of self-possession will be lacking; we

will have no means of receiving the incoming stream of Divine Being since we have not developed that inherent form through which we could give it entrance and pour it out again in our work in the world.

The core of the practice of pure gesture lies in learning to anchor the whole of ourselves in the correct center of gravity. It is vital to awaken within ourselves an innate feeling for the true earth center. This should be our constant practice so that, with the help of critical awareness, we may bear witness to it in our lives.

No matter how manifold nor how complex the manifestations of the earth center may be, it never ceases to summon and entreat us. If we are prepared to listen faithfully, we will constantly hear its call. It rings out with equal felicity and promise, no matter what the situation: in conditions of joy or grief, dearth or excess, and in the warning voice of conscience that cries aloud to us when we lose sight of our inner destiny.

As we have already seen, the counterpart of a wrong or a nonexistent center of gravity is a tendency towards rigidity, with its inevitable compensation, slackness. Rigidity is an indication that the attention is predominantly concerned with seeking to consolidate a particular position. This kind of fixed attention will never relax its hold while we are held fast by our ego. Every type of tenseness, every kind of contraction, is an expression of lack of trust and reveals, whether actively or passively, attitudes of self-protection or resistance. Such attitudes cannot,

therefore, be corrected by purely technical means: only long practice of the fundamental gesture of trustfulness serves any purpose here.

Tenseness always goes hand in hand, as it were, with the kind of shallow breathing that takes place in the upper part of the body. This of itself is sufficient evidence of our imprisonment in the ego. It lacks the calmness and composure which distinguishes one who, being rightly centered, is in direct contact with Being. Here, critical awareness proves its value with its capacity for sensing the wrong center of gravity, incorrect tension and inharmonious breathing. It is important that this sensing of the center of gravity, tension and breathing should not be thought of (or practiced) in any rational way, but understood rather as an inward and personal attitude. Only thus can it serve as a means of fulfilling our basic, inner law, which requires us to be permeable to Divine Being and to live from our essence in our own particular form. But the ability to sense what is incorrect, as well as to establish what is correct, will only be present if the larger, existential search has already begun.

As long as we, although able theoretically to recognize what would be for us the correct state of being, still think in terms of the desires and anxieties of our ego—seeking freedom, comfort or security with our rational understanding—we will not be able to perceive the personal significance either of the center of gravity or of tension and breathing.

Under such conditions, we will reason solely in physical terms. We will tackle wrong posture in a purely

technical way, attempting to correct it simply as a pragmatic necessity, for the sake of health and efficiency. In addition, we will mistake the practice of establishing the right center, and the firm anchoring in the pelvic region, for some physical trick that will be of use to our world-ego. In such a case, the practice of the right center, of stillness and of relaxation—if carried out merely for the sake of easing the mind—will turn into the opposite of what was intended. It will become the means for enabling us temporarily to retain our wrong postures and attitudes without discomfort and thus to remain caught in the ego, which by its nature unflinchingly tries to turn its back on suffering. The practice that relates to Being is quite different. It makes it possible for us to risk ourselves courageously, frees us from a fear of the world and, through the acceptance and endurance of the harshest tests, enables us to remain on the way of transformation. On the other hand, wrong practice will always keep us at a distance from Divine Being.

Part 2 ~ Letting Go

The more sensitive we are to those incorrect inner attitudes that signify an equally incorrect approach to life, the more it is a sign that we are interpenetrated by the Divine Presence. It can even be said that this presence sets a harmonious and receptive form free in us. A new feeling of conscience towards our way of being emerges, and this has as its corollary an increase in critical awareness. Eventually, this sensing of what is erroneous in our attitudes coincides with the impulse to let go that which

is wrong or stands in the way of the right attitude. The action of steering a bicycle or car provides an illustration of this. The continual instinctive adjustments that are necessary if the vehicle is to be kept on a straight course cannot be separated—any more than cause and effect—from the driver's awareness of the minute-by-minute deviation from the chosen direction. The more practiced a driver is, the more does the recognition of such deviation coincide with the adjustments.

What do we mean by the expression 'letting go'? It is evident that on the way to true being, there are many things from which we must inevitably be parted. This is best expressed by Meister Eckhart. According to him—and it is an ancient truth—the letting go with which we are concerned is the letting go of our ego. This movement enables us to extricate ourselves from the net in which our identification with our world-ego continuously ensnares us.

This letting go of the ego, however, means much more than merely relinquishing all those objects to which during our lifetime we have become attached. It entails the giving up of the entire life pattern that has revolved around the 'positions' taken by the ego. In this pattern all our thinking, feeling and doing is oriented towards whatever is firmly and finally established. Wherever we are held fast in the grip of any static system (whether of facts, attitudes or values) our life in the world is impermeable to its real meaning. This meaning is always personal and is always in the process of transformation. The only attitude through which it can

be discovered is one of inward knowing and existential realization. 'Letting go' means forsaking the brilliance of the rational mind and entering what may be called the semi-darkness of another form of consciousness in which is revealed an inner light. In this way alone can the rigidity which transfixes all thought and behavior be dissolved, and the kind of thinking that turns all things into objects give way and die. Only when we let those attitudes go in which we rely solely upon what we 'have, know and can do', will there arise a new consciousness in which the creative dynamism of life is contained.

'Letting go' requires not only that we relinquish those imaginings that have determined our understanding in the past but also the behavior that corresponds to them. The result of all rational, ego-centered points of view is a kind of willfulness. Therefore, the consequence of letting go must be the abandonment of any attitude that leads us to believe that everything depends on our own 'doing'.

An ego oriented towards rational aims is always concerned with notions as to how life really ought to be. By letting go in the right way, we learn to 'let in' and 'let happen' that which, in spite of all our ideas, projections, desires and prejudices, meets us directly in the shape of the world and comes from the constantly stirring essential being within.

The desire 'to do' prevents us from hearing this inner call. By holding fast to conceptual patterns and images, we block the road to our union with Diving Being. Only when we are finally able to give up our ordinary way of

thinking will we be able to receive and accept that which is and, as a consequence, give ourselves without reserve to all that arises.

Thus we see that letting go requires that we give up any idea that life must be what we expect and we desire. Time and again our faith is destroyed when the process of God's justice—invariably incomprehensible to us—does not correspond with our conceptions as to how things should be. Therefore, the prerequisite for genuine faith is to give up all such conceptions. True faith develops only when we are able to receive, from unfathomable life and absolute Being, that which, through all conditioning, strives towards the light in the form of our inner states, challenges and impulses.

As long as the ego, trapped in its fixations, dominates our lives, all chance of transformation is inhibited. The state of the ego, at any given moment, is manifested by us and recognizable to others by the way in which we are present. However, the process of letting go the faulty attitudes so revealed is by no means a purely inward process. It consists in relinquishing and, as it were, 'melting down' the incorrect physical postures which are themselves the incarnation and expression of the world-ego's desire for security. When this letting go occurs it will be obvious to the most casual observer from the way in which the hunched-up shoulders that speak so strongly of the safety-seeking ego are dropped, the lower jaw where the powerful and arbitrary self-will is established is loosened, the tense brow wherein the ego's gaze is transformed into a fixed stare is

relaxed, the rationally determined eye of the world-ego is withdrawn in favor of the receiving and accepting gaze of the inward eye, and the belly (which, when pulled in, cuts us off from our basic energy) is released and is made a broad, fluent and firmly rooted body-center able to swing freely in the pelvic area. It should be remembered, however, that in trying to overcome faults in posture we are not concerned merely with cramped 'bodily' states, but rather with the manifold manifestations of a person who is inhibited at the center, caught in the world-ego and unable to trust in life. For this reason, if muscles are merely technically relaxed, letting go can never be accomplished in any lasting sense; still less when, towards this end, use is made of injections and massage. It succeeds only when we learn to let ourselves go in our *ego*, which means to give ourselves trustingly to whatever comes. Wherever a particular tension makes itself physically felt, this is due to the fact that we, through lack of proper trust, hold ourselves in and become tense. Letting ourselves go requires, above all else, the inner conviction which enables us to feel, even if we relinquish our world-ego, that we will by no means fall into nothingness. On the contrary, we will be upheld by a state of mind which frees us from relying solely on ourselves and our rational mind and helps us to live from essential being and to participate in Divine Being. When we have learned to yield to our essential being, we have overcome dependence on and fear of the world.

The significance of letting go for what may be called our 'total posture' lies in giving up that center of grav-

ity which keeps us prisoner in the upper, ego-region of the body. As regards breathing, the importance of letting go lies in the change of emphasis from 'doing' to 'admitting', from 'taking in' to 'giving in'. In place of the 'high', predominantly chest breathing which separates us from the true center, there arises the natural diaphragm breathing, which at one and the same time liberates life and allows it to manifest in the true center.

Every form of letting go has a cleansing and transforming effect, but the reader should be reminded that this is neither a purely technical, physical exercise nor a wholly inner psychic process. It is a personal gesture that, in an analytical sense, is psychologically and physically neutral. At our present level of understanding it is all too easy to underestimate the significance of work on bodily attitudes and to look upon it simply as a technique for increasing the sense of bodily well-being. Such a conception quickly leads to a sort of wrongly interpreted yoga and falsifies the effort by allowing it to become mere physical gymnastics. Properly practiced, however, that which from an analytical point of view may appear as the relation between inner and outer processes is here seen as a twofold expression of the one—the Person.

Part 3 ~ Becoming One with the Ground

As the Wheel of Transformation turns, what significance does the phrase 'becoming one with the Ground' have for us? We have seen that letting go means relinquishing the forms and structures which in the conditions of our life in space and time have gradually evolved. These

conditions are the means whereby the worldly personality, revolving around fixed points and prompted by its desire for security, maintains itself by working simply for itself or for the community. To the extent that these conditions become crystallized, they obscure the vital Ground. We feel ourselves to be burdened with unused energies and impulses that, because they have been repressed, recoil upon us and may even paralyze and destroy us.

Psychologically understood, the transforming Ground is, in terms of human existence, the 'realm of the mother'. Any unresolved relationship between child and mother causes an obstruction in this sphere and hinders development. The effect is the same when the mother denies the warmth necessary for the child's growth or on the other hand holds on with a devouring, possessive love. In the first instance, when children become adults, they are inhibited and depressed because they reject the protests that rise from their depths, defending themselves against them by thrusting them down into the unconscious; in the second, they dread the power of all that embodies the Great Mother in the world for fear it should devour them. When the Ground has been thus blocked, they are robbed of the powers that reign within them for the purpose of redemption, protection and transformation. Thus they become wholly dependent on the world-ego, experiencing the repressed depths as frightening forces that either inexplicably attract or demonically turn against them.

On the other hand, the Ground is also the bridge by which we are brought to experience the maternal

aspects of Transcendental Being—that which nourishes, sustains, re-molds and liberates all that exists in the world. Thus, whenever we are cut off from this maternal Ground, we are always, at the same time, barred from the alternating rhythm of ‘death and becoming’ which itself is a part of life.

In all ages Divine Being has dwelt in human beings as plenitude, order and unity. Of old it was believed to be revealed in the power, wisdom and love of the Gods. But today we are beginning to realize that Divine Being is within the sphere of our own *experience*. This is particularly true for those who, in fear and despair, have come up against the limits of the strength and wisdom of their world-ego; and for others who, lacking the support of communities that are disintegrating, as once the old gods disintegrated, are thrown back on themselves.

Just as Divine Being, striving to manifest itself, is present within us, so the experience of union with it becomes at the same time an experience of our own being. And, equally, the experience of our own being is an experience of our oneness with Divine Being. If we have once become conscious of ourselves in our essence, we have become conscious of our union with Transcendental Being. We must, therefore, search for that Being which liberates us and inwardly determines our form, and thus discover within ourselves an ‘immanent transcendence’ far beyond the frontiers of our little ego. We shall not succeed in finding it, however, until our world-ego carapace has become permeable. On the other hand, our ability to do without

the scaffolding in which we are upheld by our world-ego depends on the strength of our contact with Divine Being. So it is an endless cycle. It is only to the extent that we learn to dissolve the rigidity of established forms and ingrained ideas of how we should be and act in the world that our essential being can lastingly awake within us. Letting go requires us to withdraw from all theoretical and practical positions by which, on the level of our worldly existence, we keep up the struggle against nature and destiny. When this struggle deprives us of our essential power, we are bound to attempt to free ourselves from our habit of rational classification—although in an intellectual sense this may well be indispensable. It cannot be denied that a proper understanding of the values that are accepted by the world in which we live is a necessary stage on the way to becoming a Person. It is, in fact, the means whereby the egocentric, natural pre-personal ego with all its violent drives is made to submit to order and custom. It teaches us to conquer our willfulness through service to something above us. When, however, the ego gives itself over to any paternal authority, to the community, to habit, a religious teaching or work in the world, the effect often goes beyond the control of the primary ego, the as-yet uneducated ego one finds in a baby, causing the individuality of our true being to be repressed. Such service and obedience may hinder and limit the immediate uninhibited contact with true life. From this point of view it is clear that the so-called reliable individual, the ‘strong personality’, is by no means also a constantly maturing Person or one permeable to Divine Being.

In order to become a Person it is necessary to be completely open to life and to accept and integrate essential being. But before integration can occur, essential being must awaken, come forth and face the difficulties of coming to terms with the world, whether the world be friendly or inimical.

Our discovery of essential being as a reality within ourselves entails also our concurrence in its demand that it become a reality in the world! Essential being is the unconditioned, creative, motivating power of human existence which demands to be given form and which no amount of conditioning has the power to stifle. For this reason, individuals, finding themselves imprisoned in those ingrained habits that prevent essential being from entering their consciousness and coming into contact with the world, are brought to the utmost extremity.

When our world ego is estranged from Divine Being (even though our essential being is inevitably linked to it) sooner or later we experience not only the suffering inherent in such estrangement but also the mysterious tugging of the cord that joins us to our hidden, inner self and from which we are never entirely free. To the extent to which we separate ourselves from our ego, we will experience this tugging as a painful longing for deliverance. We know ourselves summoned by conscience. Something is lovingly drawing us home. Our answer to this summons can only be the determination to work on ourselves in the right way.

The more obdurate and unyielding our concepts and attitudes have become through our conditioning in the

world, the harder it will be for essential being to emerge. Instead, its repressed energy will be transformed under such circumstances into a dark force which, in the shape of the Shadow, acts destructively in and through our unconscious. It is, of course, necessary that we should be ethically disciplined. If, however, this results merely in the erection of some ego-superstructure and does not bring about true transformation, it will also cause repression. We cannot achieve freedom until we cleanse the Ground, recognize our repressions and, by directing them into fruitful channels, renew our acceptance of the powers of the deep.

It should be remembered that the ascent to the bright peaks of true being is always preceded by a descent into the dark depths, into those areas which have been thrust down into the unconscious. It is only when we perceive and accept the Shadow, and painfully recognize our erroneous responses to life; when we perceive, assimilate and live through the archetypal figures which personify the repressed energies (such as the devouring mother), that the way towards true union with essential being is opened and the new self, born from essence, becomes free to grow. All such efforts are fundamentally an expression of obedience to the summons which bids us find the way from our state of alienation back to our beginnings—in other words, to enter into the Ground in order to emerge remade in accordance with essential being. It is a paradox, however, that we can only discover our true home by realizing the extent to which, in the world, we

have become estranged from it. But when, by contrasting it with our life in the world, we actually experience our essential home, we are in the position freely and responsibly to bear witness to it wherever, according to destiny, we may live and work among the structures of the I-world reality.

The chief objective of critical awareness is to recognize how and under what circumstances our state fails to correspond to our essential being and to perceive that the faulty state is inevitably reflected in faulty attitudes. The purpose of the practice of letting go is to free the way to essential being; and the purpose of the third step in the process of transformation is union with the Ground. There are many stages and degrees of union. The highest is that in which we are united with the maternal oneness of Being. Here, whatever is inimical to essential being, or has become static and rigid as a result of the workings of the world ego, is melted down and recast, in order that the new ego may be born. All lesser stages of union should be measured against this ultimate stage. From the standpoint of this, as we may call it, personal anthropology, all levels of development should be regarded from 'above'—that is to say, from the highest level capable of being achieved by any human being. We are intended, as our ultimate condition, to reach such a point; our true nature is, in fact, always striving towards this possibility. Even those systems of thought in which human beings are considered, genetically speaking, as at the 'bottom', in an undeveloped

stage, are deluded if they are not oriented towards the highest level for which humanity is destined.

When we speak of Transcendental Being and the transforming and liberating unity of the Ground, the question inevitably arises: is it not presumptuous to inquire into that which so obviously touches the deepest mystery of life and of humanity, and which is beyond all rational comprehension? Indeed, such inquiry is permissible only if approached with the utmost delicacy. Even so, we should not be so diffident before this great mystery that our diffidence makes us blind and deaf to essential being. The time has now arrived when humanity has sufficiently matured to experience a reality which has hitherto belonged solely to the realm of faith. Impressions that come, so to speak, from 'elsewhere', stirring us to our depths—rousing, enriching and transforming us—enable us not only to believe but to know without doubt that we participate in a level of Being that is 'quite other' than that of our familiar world existence—and which we call 'transcendental'. By means of such experiences we realize that in the secret core of ourselves we are far more than we are normally aware of being. In particular we discover that our unconditioned essence always surpasses what we in our worldly presence—created under abnormal conditions of existence—can ever become. Even so, we have, happily, the right to remind ourselves that the mystery of the Ground of Greater Life constantly penetrates our little personal life, with its continuous summons and its power of renewal. This can sometimes

occur with such intensity that we wonder, amazed, how it can be that the restrictive powers of the ego are so often able to hide true Being and repress such mighty energies. Unfortunately, however, for the sake of its own survival and its perennial preoccupation with external facts, the ego continues to work its will within us. Even so, Divine Being stirs in our darkness, bestowing on us, when at last the depths begin to stir and the veil of conceptualization falls, its illuminating experiences.

When an individual goes out to meet these intimations of Being and, faithfully pursuing a practice, breaks through the barriers of the system on which life habitually presents itself to the thinking and acting world ego, then the point of entering 'the way of the soul's initiation' is reached. Our generation is witness to a decisive turning point in human development: the opening of the initiatory way, formerly the exclusive province of the mystics, to all those who have arrived at this level of maturity.

Once the third step —union with the Ground—has been taken, then in the language of essential being, Divine Being arises in its threefold aspect: as *plenitude*, whose strength from then on sustains, supports, nourishes and renews us no matter what our difficulties; as *order*, from which there emerges a hitherto undreamt-of purpose that obliges us to create ourselves anew; and as an all-embracing *unity* through which we become aware and rest upon the world of 'one-ness' beyond this world. Such an experience making, as it does, all things new, sets us once and for all on the way and transforms us

from *subjectum mundi* to *subjectum Dei*—which is the ‘Great Experience’, the ‘Breakthrough to Essence’. We cannot achieve it by willing it, nor can we intentionally bring it about; all we can do is to prepare ourselves for it. This preparation is the chief aim of all existential self-exploration and practice, and by performing it we are committed to becoming, above all else, servants of Divine Being.

Many lesser experiences of contact with being may precede and act as pointers towards this ‘Great Experience’. They are like lights on the Way which lead towards the goal. But, in fact, any genuine meditation in which we succeed in letting go of our world-ego may bring a foretaste of what is to come. It is possible, too, that a spark of the light which pierces us during the Great Experience may blaze up in any life situation to which we fully give ourselves. It can happen at those times when we find the courage to forego all the ego’s prejudices, defenses and reservations and, no matter what the cost, allow them to die in order that truth may live. To the extent that the process of transformation takes root so that we learn at last to let go—affirming and yielding to all that is in our depths—so will the liberating, illuminating, kindling spark of the Great Light shine more and more frequently until finally it becomes a part of the basic stuff of life. This will occur all the sooner if we also find the courage to allow the pure primary impulses to arise freely from essential being—that is to say, those impulses which have not yet been classified and appropriated by the ego. If we can do this, there will develop, side by side with this,

a more stable attitude, a new and loftier way of being in the world. The center and meaning of life will now no longer be in the world but in Divine Being; no longer in the self-seeking, self-preserving world-ego but in the essence that is constantly bringing about transformation. This whole process results in the formation of *a new consciousness*. For, whereas the consciousness of the world-ego is formed from and made effective by such static concepts as rational determination, the need to classify and the habit of thinking in terms of opposites, the growth of higher consciousness (which is centered in essential being) is evidenced by the rising up of that strength which can face the bottomless abyss and accept the contradictions inherent in life while at the same time admitting the transcendental powers. When we are open to all these, we experience such an increase of strength that we are able to realize our own essential form, even under worldly conditions.

It is inevitable that our first approach to Transcendental Being should shake the structure of our ordinary life. Such encounters occur much earlier in life than is generally supposed. 'First experiences' may arise in early childhood during the transition from one level of consciousness to another. They often occur at the moment when the original oneness is shattered and the child discovers that the 'I' and the world are not one—that, in fact, they are in opposition to each other. A child cannot attempt to grasp the purpose that lies behind this incomprehensible experience, but an adult feels compelled to

try to understand intellectually the breaking up of the old shell that brings the experience of Being; and this compulsion can have disastrous effects. As long as our world-ego remains dominant, we immediately transform any recurrent awareness of Essential Being into mental concepts. In the same way, the adult, when sought out by the Divine, will always be tempted, at the moment of encounter—the moment when it might be possible to discover what has been searched for all through life in essential being—to label, fix and classify the experience. And by so doing it is lost. We cheat ourselves of the benefit of any shock that may have been vouchsafed us when we try to reduce its incomprehensible and, for that reason, frightening content, to familiar concepts and images. As a consequence, the numinous core of the experience and the sense of blessedness that arises from it are lost. If we are to be receptive to the Ground of Being, we need to have the courage to meet the unknown, to renounce the right to cognize and tabulate, and to endure the mystery that cannot be conceptually comprehended—in short, to pause and inwardly dwell in that to which we are all too unaccustomed, the radiance of Divine Being.

The practice of becoming one with the Ground—the third spoke in the Wheel of Transformation—requires above all, practice in learning to endure the awakening of Essential Being in the conscious mind. Therewith a new dimension arises which is forever inaccessible to the world-ego. Everything that serves to undermine the foundations or to destroy the supports on which the

world-ego hitherto relied and established itself implements the exercise that prepares us for this kind of inner knowing. Not only does it now become necessary for us to question every apparently secure and consolatory opinion, the ego's fear of pain and annihilation—which arises from its concern for its own survival—has also to be conquered. It is only when we have learned to risk over and over again all that has seemed assured that that which is forever unknowable can break luminously upon us. Only then can Greater Life bestow on us its light as well as its darkness, only then can Divine Being enfold, renew and transform us.

The ones, who being really on the way, fall upon hard times in the world will not, as a consequence, turn to friends who offer refuge and comfort and encourage the old self to survive. Rather, they will seek out someone who will faithfully and inexorably help them to risk themselves, so that they may endure the suffering and pass courageously through it, thus making of it a raft that leads to the far shore. Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over again to annihilation can that which is indestructible arise within us. In this lies the dignity of daring. Thus, the aim of practice is not to develop an attitude which allows us to acquire a state of harmony and peace wherein nothing can ever trouble us. On the contrary, practice should teach us to let ourselves be assaulted, perturbed, moved, insulted, broken and battered—that is to say, it should enable us to dare to let our futile hankering after harmony, surcease

from pain, and a comfortable life go, in order that we may discover, in doing battle with the forces that oppose us, that which awaits us beyond the world of opposites. The first necessity is that we should have the *courage to face life* and to encounter all that is most perilous in the world. When this is possible, meditation itself becomes the means by which we accept and welcome the demons which arise from the unconscious—a process very different from the practice of concentration on some object as a protection against such forces. Only if we venture repeatedly through zones of annihilation can our contact with Divine Being, which is beyond annihilation, become firm and stable. The more we learn to confront the world that threatens us with isolation wholeheartedly, the more are the depths of the Ground of Being revealed and the possibilities of new life and Becoming opened.

The encounter with essential being which sets us free from all the bonds of the ego, and the awareness of Divine Being which puts an end to all worldly attitudes, are joyous and liberating experiences. But the process of becoming one with Being through the dissolution of all that opposes true life should not be thought of as an end in itself. When the world-ego is, as it were, cancelled, the experience of Divine Being must not be allowed to ebb away. Rather, it must be converted into a creative impulse towards a new form. Only thus is union with the Ground of Being fulfilled. The whole point of the painful tension between world-ego and Essential Being is that by this process the secret meaning hidden in this

tension becomes clear. In a word, it is to lead us from the wrong way to the right way—not to bring us home safely to some kind of ‘eternal resting-place’, but rather to draw us on towards the painful, rewarding, never-ending process of transformation. By this means alone can we approach the fulfillment of our destiny—which is to become a Person in whom and through whom Divine Being is revealed in this life.

Part 4 ~ New Becoming

(The inner image and decision)

I remember the case of a woman who, being seriously ill and, as she believed, dying, felt herself finally entering into the Spiritual Ground. It was a blissful state of being, she said, in which she was absorbed into a boundless sea of love. She remembered, too, how joyfully and unresistingly she felt herself passing over into this state of all-redeeming infinitude. And then a strange thing happened. Suddenly, in the midst of all the brightness, she became aware of herself as something distinct from it, a shining nucleus. At the same moment she knew that she was not to be permitted to depart, but was required to return to life. The feeling of being herself a nucleus of light coincided with the impulse—even, she felt, the sense of obligation—to return to the world. And this impulse had, at the same time, such authority that she could not but obey. So she remained alive.

This incident shows very clearly the essential elements that characterize the dawning of New Becoming. These are: the entry into the Ground, the encounter

with the nucleus and the making of a new start. The purpose of these stages is clearly revealed in the Great Experience. The principle of these three steps governs each correctly accomplished spiritual exercise (even that of meditative sitting). It also applies to every situation in daily life that is carried out according to the demands of our essential being.

The Great Experience—which leads to *metanoia*, to a reversal of the old life and to new birth—contains two elements: the experience of oneness, in the stillness of which all things are rendered down, and the encounter with the special way in which we as individual beings participate in Being as Greater Life, which drives forward with dynamic force into the ‘light of the world’. Our experience of Divine Being as the Life which strives within us to manifest in the world is none other than Essential Being. The Great Experience necessitates first the melting down of the world-ego structure and this, when it happens, has the effect of liberating us from our hitherto compulsive obligations towards it. The second requirement is that we must encounter our own essential being and experience its drive to become manifest in a certain form, and thus arouse our creativity and our sense of responsibility towards life. Liberation from the ego allows us to take the step that leads to the birth of the Person. The birth itself, however, occurs only when the experience of Essential Being is felt as a compelling summons. Thus we can see that the encounter with our essential being, which presupposes release from our old selves, does not merely bring us

to blissful awareness of our own individuality, or a feeling of jubilation at personally participating in Divine Being, knowing 'that one *is oneself it*'. It has the further effect of reminding us of the heavy responsibility of our human mission, which is to give evidence of our participation in Transcendental Being in terms of our own individuality in the life of space and time. Once we open the door to Essential Being, we are required to make an irrevocable decision to be answerable for the realization of its image in a form that is viable for life. Furthermore, we must henceforth, in each fresh contact with the world, affirm our relationship with Essence and bear witness to the fact that we are indeed that 'someone' we knew ourselves so absolutely to be in that first real encounter with the Great Experience. Indeed, that which may be experienced in some propitious moment as the Great Experience may resound through every contact with Divine Being, no matter how slight it may be.

The summons to realize and give proof of our essential being amid all worldly conditions is an absolute demand. It refers not only to our own development but equally to the ordering and shaping of the *world itself*, with which we are so closely linked. But while we are absorbed in mastering or serving daily life, it is essential that at the same time we bear witness to Divine Being. Thus, in the final instance, the purpose of our service to the world lies not solely in our personal aims and personal salvation nor solely in the perfecting of the world, but in our service to both. We are, in fact, intended to take up the cause of vital

Being both within ourselves and without. In the course of the Great Experience we discover that in our essence we are destined to become a particular 'someone'. At the same time, we become aware of the nature of the task we must undertake, the task of fashioning ourselves and the world to a specific requirement. The particular character of that form which is humanity's and the world's destiny to achieve lies in its transparency towards Divine Being. It is only through the 'becoming-transparent' of the created world that that which someone has experienced as an inner image and sensed as a call to the inner way gains concrete reality. The human mode of this corporeal reality of the inner image in the world is the person. This can never be a static form, for it must participate in the endless process of transformation and by this very process become transparent. Here we have a formula for life, a means by which, if we accept the ceaseless alternation of death-and-becoming, we will more and more experience Divine Being as plenitude, form and oneness.

For the perception of the true self, for its evolution and the power to put it to the proof (as well as for the proper guidance of others) there are three essential requirements: a capacity for experiencing the inner image as the manner in which we and the world are destined to participate in a never-ending process of transformation and becoming; an ability clearly to perceive and steadfastly to retain the concept of the Way; and the skillfulness, in special periods of practice (as well as the general practice of daily life), with which we can transform ourselves and

our world so as to become continually more transparent to Divine Being.

In these days, when the efforts made towards redressing the neurotic disorders that prevent our ability to work and to make contact with ourselves and the world are teaching us more and more about the way we function, it is to some extent natural that the main emphasis should be placed on the significance of our personal history. Such emphasis, however, should not be allowed to blind us to the true image of human beings or to the law that governs the way. Apart from our personal history, we are required to manifest super-historical life in the historical world, and in this lies the real purpose of human existence. There are few today who properly value, either in theory or in practice, the innate image of a human being or the inward way—and neither of these aspects can be reduced to psychological or sociological elements.

What do we mean by the term 'innate image'? Let us suppose, say, that we come upon a drunken woman. Why does such a sight shock us? Is it not because she is violating 'the essential image' of a human being? Is it not this that offends us, quite apart from the life story or the particular life situation that might explain her drunkenness? Such a spectacle can sometimes so deeply repel our sense of 'inner propriety' that though we may understand and even sympathize with the woman's situation, we are outraged by such a violation of human dignity. The extent to which this dignity is apparent in any human being is

evidence of an attitude of fidelity to Divine Being. Such an attitude is dependent on the degree of the ability to keep faith with that which we have called the innate image of a human being.

The innate image should not be thought of as a mere idealized or abstract conception. On the contrary, it is the basic reality of our human existence. By its power to shape life, to awaken conscience, to bid us harken to the summons that calls us to follow the individual way, the image we bear within us proves its reality. We could even say that fundamentally the innate image is our 'innate way'. We are continually driven to find a manner of life that corresponds to and manifests it. If this drive is repressed and its demands unheeded, the result will be a harmful inner condition and even physical illness. The innate image is indeed no other than our essential being, understood as the driving force, the feeling of obligation and the fundamental longing which determine the particular pattern of growth through which Divine Being may be revealed. According to this pattern, which is not solely biological and is quite independent of the external conditions of life, a definite succession of stages leading to the state of transparenance is sharply delineated.

The innate image is the inborn way that leads to our real Self. This inner way has absolute validity for everyone—not merely for the particular life of the individual. Its realization can never be dependent on circumstances whatever they may be. Its inescapable demand for realization proves the reality of the innate image, and

when we ignore or repress it, we become physically or mentally ill.

The need to be given its due, which is inherent in the innate image, is experienced as an immanent summons to realize ourselves and our world according to the pattern appropriate to our particular nature. For this to be possible, our state of mind and body must be such that it enables us to act in harmony with essential being under all circumstances. No special pleading arising from difficult life situations has any validity here. It follows, therefore, that in the presence of someone who is suffering the consequences of having failed themselves, a mere theoretical understanding of the situation is quite useless: they will need something more.

In these days, when our insight into the psychological conditions of human development is becoming increasingly enlarged, we are able to recognize more and more clearly the origins of distortions in behavior. Such discernment, however, can easily mislead us into becoming all too 'understanding' of conditions that have arisen of necessity from circumstances of space and time. If we take the line that as well as perceiving the origin of someone's error, we must also excuse it, we may well be transgressing the inherent law of their personal growth. By taking such an attitude we will inhibit the hidden yet ever present need in each human being that the absolute claim of essential being be taken seriously and each of us needs to be shown the way to its fulfillment. In offering only 'understanding', commiseration and forbearance,

we may be bypassing someone's chance of freedom and their possibility of achieving personal responsibility. In the mistaken belief that we are helping them, we may in fact be barring them from the way of transformation.

It can happen that someone who has missed the way towards the realization of their essential self may so suffer as a result of this that they are brought closer to spiritual birth than someone who has been denied this special kind of anguish. Those who feel themselves lost in utter darkness in the world which, so long as they are caught in their ego, thrusts them into fear, despair and loneliness, may be uniquely ready to hear the call of their essential being—ready to respond to the summons that, breaking through the ego-shell, brings them to the awareness of their inner core. Thus, when those entrusted to our care have fallen, perhaps, into utter despair and reached the limits of alienation from Divine Being, it may be necessary for us to find the courage to deny them sympathy and consolation. Bearing in mind their innate image and our own allegiance to truth, we may rather need to call them to enter upon their innate way in order that their essential self may begin its struggle towards the light. This is the whole purpose for which their state of darkness was given to them. But our attempts to remind them of the true self must not be an authoritative or regimental call to order. By protesting against such a command their egos would only be further strengthened! We should rather appeal to them through the medium of their innate image and so call them back to their essence. A real person would prefer to suffer the consequences of being faithful to Essential Being rather than buy freedom

from this suffering at the cost of betraying it. In the long run it is disastrous when our health and efficiency, lacking contact with Essence, do not correspond to our true nature, or when our easy adaptability to the world—by seeming to make such contact unnecessary—hinders it. On the other hand, the very fact of being confronted with the innate image releases a miraculous, all-transforming power. We may therefore confidently trust in the healing force of the innate image and rely on it not only to dissolve the painful rigidity of our mistaken response to life conditions but also to release the power of the Ground.

The emerging and unfolding of the innate image, and the process of becoming one with it, is not only an inner experience: the body itself undergoes transformation at the same time. We can, in this respect, speak of 'the corporeality of the innate image'. But what do we mean by this expression? It conveys that fact that Essential Being, through practice, becomes apparent with our physical life-form (*Lebensgestalt*). That is to say, Essential Being is manifested in the manner in which we are present in the world. The permeable, ever-changing form which we acquire as we progressively bring to birth our inner image is very different from our inflexible, impermeable I-world form which, being born out of desires and fears, indicates our mistaken drive for security. Different again, because it has not grown from Essential Being, is the Persona, which represents a conception of the perfect form but in doing so buries the Shadow.

It is as little possible for a perfect form of the innate

image to exist as it is for a perfect, so to speak, form of life conditioned by the world to exist. In the latter case, even where adaptation to external situations has clouded Essential Being, the innate image still fitfully shines through; and in the former, even under the most favorable circumstances the appearance of the innate image is always to some extent conditioned by the world. A valid life-form (*Lebensgestalt*) depends on the right relationship between both. In every approach we make towards understanding and guiding others, these two aspects should be kept in mind. In the process of becoming, the predominance of an orientation towards the world is inevitably succeeded by one which gives precedence to Essential Being. Only in this way can the demand which arises from within be fulfilled and the never-ending inward journey be faithfully followed.

Our life-form, which begins to emerge during the process of growing up, is largely a result of our confrontation with all the historical circumstances of life. In seeking to come to terms with these factors, we try to conduct ourselves in such a way as to enable us to adapt as painlessly as possible to the demands, opportunities and dangers of the world.

When it happens that human beings grow up under difficult circumstances, or from lack of love and understanding inevitably become distorted, they are thrown back upon themselves. Inevitably, they react to such conditions by developing postures which are the result of continuous adaptation. By means of these they protect their natural egos, but always at the expense of the growth

of their individual essence. Such forms of adaptation hinder the arising of the vital strength that lies at the very root of themselves. Furthermore, they injure the essential drive to acquire individual form (*Gestalt*) and reduce the capacity for love. The more rigid such habits become, the more does their confidence increasingly depend on their own efficiency, their possessions, their intellectual knowledge and all their worldly capacities. Thus their reliance on the outer world continues to expand, and as a result they become the prey of loneliness and isolation. If it should happen, however, that they find the way back to the fundamental energy of their essential being, then the awareness of their own real strength and innate worth helps them to become again independent of the world, while at the same time remaining inwardly united with it. For through their essential form, Divine Being, though it transcends the world, penetrates and links together all aspects of human existence.

Those who, as a result of being in accord with their innate image, are genuinely present, impress all who meet them. Representing, as they inescapably do, our own embodied conscience, they become for us a mirror in which our own search is reflected. For within everyone lies the hope—and the wish—that they may not only be described but challenged by their best elements; this is true even when, as a result of unfortunate circumstances, any distortion in themselves might seem to be justified. Fundamentally our longing for essential self-realization is always stronger and deeper than the desire to be acquitted of our shortcomings.

From the moment in which we encounter our innate image and hear its summons, it becomes necessary for us to heed the call. It is not enough to have been momentarily seized by it. Of our own free choice we must also affirm and decide freely to accept the impulse from Essential Being that has taken possession of us, and this requires that we in turn consciously seize upon it. We must renounce the self-will of our worldly-ego and accept instead the responsibility for that which comes to us from the fundamental Ground. It is a misconception to suppose that, in obeying Essential Being, we are giving away our liberty and our will. On the contrary, only by submitting our world-ego to the demands of Essential Being do we truly acquire that free will we are intended to possess in our relation to the world. This worldly will itself becomes productive and mature only when it is put at the service of a wish that does not stem from the world-ego, but from the experience of the transcendental Ground of Being.

To return for a moment to the Wheel of Transformation, it should be said that each of the five steps which together compose it may at certain moments in our lives be experienced with particular intensity. For instance, in such moments we may suddenly become aware, with a feeling of anguish, of some longstanding wrong attitude we may have held towards our nearest and dearest. In this realization we may vividly experience a state of self-critical awareness. Or again, we may realize that some blow of fate has cracked the shell in which we have been enclosed

and has flung us into a situation where we find ourselves letting go of everything we had hitherto clung to with all the strength of our being. Again, it may happen that we find ourselves so inwardly shaken that we are carried beyond the narrow limits of our human understanding and capacity and are thus enabled to break through to the core of our true selves. Quite unexpectedly we may find ourselves brought into contact with Divine Being, the way to which had hitherto been obstructed. Finally, in some propitious moment, we may encounter our essential being in such a way that we are instantly freed from that life-form wherein in our adaptation to the world, we had betrayed our own being. Thus, transformed by such an experience, we will feel the responsibility to find the life-form (*Lebensgestalt*) that conforms to our innate image.

At any time in our daily life it can happen that we find ourselves secretly searching for, and even unexpectedly coming upon, that which, in some unique past moment, we once deeply experienced. It should be remembered that—through practice—the possibility exists for us always to be in a state of readiness for this. Once we have really grasped the purpose of our life and committed ourselves to the way of transformation, everything that happens becomes an occasion for bringing about the right state of mind. To this end we need to devote ourselves to the continuous practice of special exercises (*exercitium ad integrum*).

One fundamental exercise, which incorporates all the elements necessary for the process of transformation, is the

practice of correct, that is to say, upright sitting. Throughout the Eastern world—from India to Japan—meditative sitting is the foundation of all spiritual practice. Such sitting, however, should not be thought of as being the prerogative only of the East. There is no one among us in the East or the West who, critically aware and practicing correct sitting, does not very soon realize—by observing posture, tensions, and breathing—that there is something wrong with our way of existing. This realization goes far beyond mentally noting our physical distortions. Its prime purpose is to make us actively aware of our wrong attitudes and our whole way of being in the world. By abandoning those tensions in the upper part of the body that indicate the ego's desire for security; by letting ourselves down into and becoming one with the center (Hara); by sensing and admitting the true, upright form which arises from contact with this center; and finally by attempting to give proof of it in the wider context of everyday life—all these processes, through the medium of correct sitting, become opportunities for the practice of a right attitude towards every aspect of life.

All too often I find someone sitting opposite me in a posture that inevitably robs them of all their central strength. The sunken chest, the bent head, the drawn up knees, the concavity of the torso, are all characteristic of someone who, as *a self*, is not really present in any sense. If I should then say: "What kind of posture do you call that?" inevitably there would be protest. Young people, in particular, like to make it clear that they are not in favor of the 'sit-up-straight' attitude. It reminds them

unpleasantly, they may say, of an authoritarian parent. This is certainly understandable. But if one then asks: "How do you *prefer* to hold yourself?" the reply is usually, "I just like to sit comfortably!" It takes no more than a few minutes to show such people that—between one posture in which they are unnaturally drawn up, stiff as a ram rod, and another in which, losing all sense of themselves, they collapse like a folded umbrella—there is a third possibility. In this third kind of sitting they are able to be present in their center in such a way as to be both upright and balanced, freed from any rigidity that could do violence to their form and at the same time insured against the kind of collapse which pulls them downwards towards dissolution. In this new posture they will soon discover that they are both at ease and rightly ordered and—what is more important—that they are present as *themselves*.

This is what we experience when we give up our false ego-posture—an attitude that is as much apparent in rigidity as it is in dissolution. We are now able to let ourselves rest serenely in our basic center, admitting (and permitting to enter our will) that which comes to us as the right form. It is worth noticing that whenever our shoulders are hunched up and our center of gravity displaced too far upwards we are as significantly without a true center as we are when we sink down into formlessness and inertia. Whether it be correct or incorrect, every attitude is the result—conscious or unconscious—of our own will. As we all know, an animal can sleep standing up, but if human beings fall asleep while standing they

very soon collapse. It is incumbent on human beings, therefore, to be constantly watchful. Not for a moment are we absolved from responsibility for the way in which we are present at any given time.

Correct upright posture should not be thought of as having anything to do with being 'puffed-up' or taking on the extravagant stance that is the mark of an artificial persona. On the contrary, it is always an expression of true humility. There is a certain modesty about correct posture in that it rejects anything that surpasses its own measure, whilst accepting and revealing unreservedly as much as corresponds to that measure. Therefore, to remain below our true level is false modesty; and false modesty is as ego-centered and existentially untruthful as the pretense that we are something we are not. It is clear, therefore, that correct posture has as its primary requirement that the innate image be allowed its appropriate form. Only under such conditions can we be sure that it is we ourselves who are really present, ready and able to respond to life without either fear or presumption. Here is a case in point.

Some time ago, a young Hungarian who had been hard-hit by life came to consult me. Up to the age of fourteen, while growing up at boarding-school, he had built up such an ideal image of his long-absent mother that she became for him, in his mind's eye, the most perfect of loving parents. However, when he met her in the flesh, he was shocked to find that she turned out to be—for him at any rate—all that he most hated. The force of his dis-

appointment plunged him into the role of the perpetual avenger, of one inwardly compelled to destroy what he loves and to devalue and debase those things that others hold sacred. Together with all this, he was immensely talented, a successful designer and actor, and a fully trained dancer. It was this last factor—his dancing—that made it possible for me to yield to his request that I should, without insisting on any preliminary training, teach him the practice of *hara*. So, I undertook to show him how to come to his true center. The process of letting go was no problem for him; his difficulty lay in standing upright correctly and allowing the true form that corresponded to his innate image to emerge. At last, however, he was able to do this correctly, and I left him standing there, in the middle of the room, letting him talk to me while I myself sat down. I used this as a test in order to discover whether, when left to himself, he would immediately fall back into his old destructive rebellious attitudes. In fact, the opposite occurred. Since he was in the ‘right posture’, it did not wound his feelings to be left standing. Indeed, to my astonishment, he suddenly but politely interrupted my conversation by saying: “I must tell you something. A very strange but, I believe, important thing is happening to me. At this moment I am experiencing, for the first time in my life, what is probably called humility.” And now, I saw for the first time the light of truth in his eyes.

This, of course, was only a first experience, and such an occurrence by itself does not signify transformation. But the first is, nevertheless, always a decisive experience, and in this case it had a tremendous effect. For this young

man, at the moment of experiencing his own truth, a new life began. This is an example of how, through the assumption of a right inner attitude, a liberating impulse can emerge. The healing power of this impulse comes from the fact that the innate image is simultaneously realized and manifested by the pure gesture. This, of course, can also happen during practice, without, as in the case above, being related to such difficult life problems.

Part 5 ~ Proof and Practice in Everyday Life

If we are to grow into Persons, it can only be by repeated resolutions of the painful contradictions between the transformation which the law of our essential being requires of us and our desire to cling to those acquired methods of adaptation that seem—though mistakenly—to set us free from friction. Even when we have reached the highest possible point of our development, we are able to respond to the claims of super-historical or absolute Being only through our historically conditioned and, as it were, outer manifestations. We are never able entirely to divest ourselves of what we have become. None of us can measure up to the image, or form, of the essential being that exists within us. What we can do is to so practice that our personality—which is conditioned by the world—becomes as transparent as possible to that image.

Practice may be thought of as having a twofold aspect: firstly, we must at specific times abstract ourselves from the daily round and by correct breathing or meditative sitting practice let go, in order to achieve oneness and to

be made new; secondly, we must live the ordinary day as practice. Each of our daily actions not only has an external import with regard to its inevitable results in the world but, by the manner in which it is carried out, it also reveals an inner significance and provides an opportunity for inner growth. Once we are on the way, every act and every task can be the means by which the Wheel of Transformation achieves another revolution. By means of critical awareness of our incorrect postures, by letting go, by surrendering so completely that we become unified, by admitting into ourselves the innate image and demonstrating it in the rightness of our actions, the five steps are accomplished.

Insofar as we allow our daily life to put us continually to the inner test, we are, in effect, practicing the fifth step. Thus, amidst the conditions created by any fleeting situation, we should endeavor to bear witness during the daily round to that which we may have experienced with particular clarity while carrying out special exercises in the quiet and privacy of our room. Practice itself is simple, but it is not at all easy to become *one who practices*. The fact that we may have succeeded in some particular exercise, privately practiced, is no assurance that a similar success will be available to us in our life in the world. To realize that an attitude, which may have brought us our first contact with Divine Being during isolated practice can so easily be lost, is always a painful experience. This may happen not merely from the pressure of adverse circumstances but is, in fact, the common result of our being in the world. Such suffering is inevitable: it comes

from our daily failures to permit unconditioned Essential Being and Divine Being to take shape within our historical existence. Indeed, for a human being to achieve this with any degree of continuity is possible only to a certain extent, however great the effort.

When we look at a tree, we see in its form, on the one hand, the manifestation of its innate image, and on the other, the result of the conditions that have governed its manifestation. Certain trees have living shapes that seem to correspond fully to their essential form. There are others whose bizarre contortions—as, for instance, the old weathered beeches at Schuainsland—speak so vividly of the many storms they have endured, that it is evident that their original innate image has almost entirely disappeared, or appears only as a negation of it. And yet, are not these very beeches the most convincing witnesses to what happens in daily life? And does not the very manner in which they deviate from their own innate image actually reveal it?

In the same way, each individual's worldly form discloses this double origin. But unlike plants and animals, human beings are responsible for the extent to which their innate image is enabled to reveal itself and develop, no matter under what adverse conditions. However, the fact that this is never more than partly possible must be accepted as an unalterable element of human existence.

Sometimes it may happen that in talking with a friend about somebody else, the question will arise as to what kind of person that 'somebody' really is. This inevitably

brings us up against the contradiction—as it appears to us—between her essential being and her empirical personality. In the light of the latter, we may perhaps judge her personality too harshly. But if we measure her against her innate image, making allowances for what she may have suffered, we may perhaps put aside our criticism of what, through worldly conditions, she has become, and feel ourselves bound to admit: “But, after all, she is a real human being!” In making such an admission we may find ourselves taking into account the many vicissitudes of her life and will honor and credit her for simply and honestly accepting her life-body. (*Lebensleib*)! It may even be that, for this very reason, we feel ourselves drawn to her in human fellowship. We begin to see that by not dissembling her imperfections, she gives evidence of the corporeal unity of that which is ordained and made possible for a human being. In the end we may even come to value her for the fact that she neither pretends to be less than she is, nor wishes to be more. Here we are confronted with a mystery. When anyone, trying to do—and to be—what is right, simply accepts what they have become, they thereby grow transparent to their essential form even when they are not fully in accord with it. Thus, as long as they stand fast to whatever is their own truth, their inborn, super-historical being glows like a light in the midst of their ordinary existence. And this can happen even when, under the adverse circumstances of space and time, the life-body has been gravely wounded. Whenever anyone struggles to be true to themselves and at the same time stands simply and honestly

by that which they have become, accepting themselves in all their weakness and imperfection, their essential being inevitably shines through.

In the same way that our inborn, fundamental perception of the way, in which momentary states of being do or do not correspond to our innate image, can be awakened, so we can train ourselves to recognize the genuineness of our attitudes when confronted with what we actually are. By means of constant practice we can develop our awareness of those attitudes that correspond to our innate image as well as strive to become sensitive to the genuineness of our gestures, actions and behavior. We endanger this ability when, for the sake of some idea—usually false—of how we should be, we dishonestly cover up what actually is. Only extremely rarely do we succeed in the twofold task of developing our awareness of our true attitudes while at the same time refraining from hiding those we feel to be less creditable. For this reason we should respect—indeed, revere—the purity of those gestures and postures that enable the light of our Divine Ground to shine out undisguised, even through the often (to us) painful affirmation of our worldly manifestation.

All those who have really entered on the way are bound to discover that henceforth they will never again be free, even for an instant, from the responsibility for attesting to essential truth in their attitudes and their life. They must ceaselessly endeavor to fulfill this responsibility, knowing very well that, no matter what they may achieve, it will always be inadequate compared with the demand of the

innate image. Above all, they inevitably learn that whatever light may shine forth from them and their works, it is never they, themselves, who have created it—all they can do is receive and accept it, in the sure knowledge that it does not originate in them. The most important prerequisite for any success in our practice is that there should appear in all our actions the awareness that anything we may achieve in regard to transcendence is not done of ourselves. All that can be said is that we have been able for a moment to accept and admit that towards which the Divine Being constantly impels us. There is a blessing indeed to be received, but it only comes when, by gathering all our energy into the effort towards self-realization, the compulsive conviction 'I must do it all myself' increasingly diminishes. We need to learn to trust and to accept that which reigns concealed within us. On the other hand, when we become aware of our own weakness, the conscience that enables us scrupulously to develop the form that corresponds to the innate image must without fail take root. Recognition of conscience and obedience to such recognition should always go hand in hand if we are fruitfully to serve the manifestation of Divine Being in our lives. It should be remembered, too, that each time we become aware of falling short of what is demanded of us, and with each new insight into our failures, the fifth step once more becomes the first. For it is through critical awareness that we are enabled to realize how and when we exist and behave in a manner unbecoming to one who bears witness to Divine Life.

Bearing witness to Divine Being in the right way has as its corollary the continuous turning of the Wheel of Transformation. For this continuous turning two factors are responsible, the most fundamental being the fact that Divine Being, quite without our assistance, keeps us constantly moving. By means of this activity it incessantly works within us. It responds to our every deviation from the form appropriate to it with a more or less gentle homeward pull. We are never entirely set free from our oneness with Divine Being. The longing and restlessness in our hearts and the pressure of our conscience progressively makes us aware of this bond.

The second factor that keeps the Wheel of Transformation turning has its origin in our free will. It must be remembered that only in the measure that we have unconditionally incorporated the Divine Will into our *own* will are we able to stay on the way. Sooner or later the time comes when we have to decide, once and for all, to remain open—not only to everything of good or bad that life inescapably brings us but also to that which joyously flows through us from the depths of Essential Being and makes upon us its absolute demand. There will inevitably come a time when we must discover in ourselves a state of readiness to bear witness to this under all conditions of existence. For it is only by means of our *becoming* that Divine Being can be revealed in the world. As Meister Eckhart says, “Divine Being is our Becoming.” However, such essential Becoming can only be manifested by an attitude that embraces every spiritual and physical expression

of our life. And only this way of being 'in form' enables Essential Being to express itself more and more freely in all our postures and gestures and to strengthen the Person in our progress towards becoming more and more transparent. There is no pattern inwardly alive in us that is not reflected in the pattern of our physical behavior. The more deeply we become aware of our whole disastrous attitude to life and the way in which we live it, the more surely, as we approach transformation, will we begin to recognize the extent to which the distortion and rigidity of our postures have become physically ingrained. Henceforth, perhaps, we will undertake to practice those gestures which further that transparence to Divine Being which is preordained for human beings.

Some years ago, a lady came to see me asking: "How is one supposed to pray?" "Can you kneel?" I asked her. My question must have touched her on a sensitive spot, for she retorted irritably, "What do you mean?" "It is quite simple," I said. "You just kneel down by your bed and give yourself up completely. ..." At that she trembled, rose from her seat and left the room, without a word of goodbye. The next day she reported the following incidents. After she had left me, she had, she said, staggered as if struck by a blow, then suddenly she had begun to run, faster and faster, until, arriving at her hotel, she stormed up the stairs, locked her door and fell upon her knees. And then it had suddenly come over her. She did not understand what had happened; all she knew

was that in this posture she had been powerless and, as it were, extinguished, and at the same time delivered up to something that protected her, and—yes, now she knew what it was all about!

This is an example of the healing power of pure gesture.

One prerequisite of our being able truthfully to bear witness to Essential Being in our existence in space and time is that we must inevitably pass through a zone of annihilation. The notion that it is possible, once and for all, to achieve the ecstatic state of living in the presence of Divine Being, is erroneous. Similarly, the conception of the 'perfect person', fully rounded and at one within, is a delusion. The tales one hears of those who can no longer be influenced by anything and over whom the world's opposing forces of light and dark have no power, are misunderstandings, if not betrayals of the truth.

Only those who do not fall into the error of imagining that they are complete are able to give proof of Essential Being in the midst of life. Only those who know that they will never come to the end of their efforts can cope with the world as it is—indeed, for these people its very insults have the effect of unifying them still further, to the extent that they are even ready to take up the gauntlet and do battle with it. What matters here is that they fight in the right way! And this depends on the degree to which they are right in themselves.

To be right in this sense, it is not enough for those who

wish only to defend themselves and gain their personal ends to take up the fight simply from the standpoint of their pragmatic thinking and all the familiar techniques of their egos. Nor, on the other hand, are those right who, in the service of the traditionally established values of their community, suppress their egos and make great sacrifices. Indeed, we must go further and assert that not even they are right who, by relating themselves solely to the forces of light, ignore and deny the dark forces—those primal powers that are dark simply because they are repressed. By disregarding these and failing to give them their due, they actually call them into being, both within themselves and without. Only those who are able to stand fast and imperturbably allow the darkness within and without them to approach, making no attempt to evade its menace, can give proof of Essential Being in life. We are capable of this, however, only when, in obedience to that law of life which permits no respite, we risk repeatedly whatever worldly position we may have won. We must be prepared to test the form that seemed to be comfortable with our essential being over and over again in renewed encounters with the threatening world. Our task is not merely to conquer the primary ego within us, nor to overcome whatever form, corresponding to the world's requirements in the matter of efficiency and social conduct, inhibits our essential being. It is even necessary for us to hazard that very state of mind which, from the time when it began to manifest itself, has grown out of contact with Essential Being. Without knowing it, all human beings, as soon as they have recognized the core of their essential being,

begin to build a temple around it. But this is the very edifice that needs to be destroyed—not once but again and again—in order that Divine Being itself may remain alive and renew its light within us. And for this no temple is necessary—all that is needed is transparency.

Divine Being is beyond all opposites. It is undoubtedly present within us, but it cannot flourish in this life of ours if, ignoring the multiform and conflicting aspects of the world, we remove ourselves from the marketplace and dwell in a place apart. We can only grow from the root of Essential Being when we allow even those things that are repugnant to approach us. We must without reservation confront the powers of the world just as they are, neither avoiding the dark nor lingering in the light. It is only by freely and repeatedly choosing new encounters, by marching on and, when necessary, yielding up that which has been most dearly bought, that the skin, so to speak, of the inner being (which is necessary for our survival in the world) can develop and grow strong, and the instruments needed for the building of a new, more valid structure be tempered and given a cutting edge.

In contrast to the hard and impermeable shell of the little ego (or the personality), the living skin of the inner person that is conformable to Essential Being and at the same time adapted to the world must become transparent; that is, as well as being permeable to Essential Being, it must also be so to the repeated deaths of the ego. This inner coating is the means by which we increase in strength and

form and are able to contain within ourselves the plenitude and unifying power that comes from Divine Being. It should be remembered, however, that this 'living skin' remains alive only when, both in thought and in action, we repeatedly risk the form that has arisen during some precious moment of release from the ego and inward union with the Ground. At such times the temptation to draw apart into some ideal state of quiescence is very great. By succumbing to this temptation we inevitably relapse into our former condition.

It is impossible for Essential Being, thus enshrined and, as it were, protected from the world, to give light or to become creative in the world. Only when the personality has become transparent is Essential Being able to pursue its redemptive processes and pierce with its rays the shell of the world-ego. Therefore, those who have woken to Essential Being fulfill their service to Divine Being by the way in which they do 'the one thing necessary': that is to say, by manifesting the Divine in the midst of the world in all their striving, all their creativity and all their love.

Notes:

1. See Dürckheim, *Hara: The Vital Center of Man*. Rochester, NY: Inner Traditions, 2004.
2. There is a French expression: *Il n'est pas dans son assiette*. 'Assiette' means 'plate' or 'pelvis'. When one says of someone, "He is not in his pelvis", it signifies that at present he is hypersensitive, irritable, unrelated and easily disturbed. In short, he is unbalanced.



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