

## Aspects of the Higher Evolution of the Individual

### 90: Is a Guru Necessary?

Friends, tonight, as you've just heard, after a period of some 8 weeks, we come to the end of our current series of lectures - a series which has dealt week by week, in one way or another, with the subject of the Higher Evolution of the Individual - and we end this series with a question. We end it with a very important, not to say vitally important, question; a question which arises, which cannot but arise, which inevitably arises sooner or later whenever one genuinely tries to evolve, tries to develop, or even just tries to be oneself in any authentic manner; especially does it arise if one attempts quite specifically with relative consciousness and awareness to follow what we usually call, what we usually refer to as, the spiritual path. And this question arises with all the more force and is all the more relevant, and all the more imperatively demands an answer, when one tries to follow that spiritual path in one or another of its oriental forms. And that question is, of course, the question that stands as the title of the lecture this evening, 'Is a Guru Necessary?'

Now, I'm quite sure that as soon as this question is asked, all sorts of pictures arise in people's minds, especially if they sit back and close their eyes, all sorts of beautiful, all sorts of wonderful pictures. Some people may see brilliant blue skies, some may see beautiful white snow peaks, and a little further down, just above the snow line, they see snug little caves; they may even see in their mind's eye pictures of well-built, square-looking, solid, picturesque, remote, Tibetan monasteries situated in the midst of beautiful scenery in inaccessible valleys, little Shangri-las and so on, and they may even, if they remain daydreaming and visualising long enough, see in their mind's eye benign, smiling pictures of wise old men with long, white beards, with starry eyes, and they may even see, if they look and gaze a little longer, they may even see pictures of bands of devoted disciples sitting at the feet of the wise old men, and gazing spellbound into their eyes. And perhaps they may even see pictures of these disciples, these lucky disciples, situated sort of floating up into the air, floating up into Nirvana with hardly any effort on their part at all.

But this evening, we are not going to indulge in pictures of this sort. We are going to banish all such pictures quite ruthlessly, and we're going to leave them aside, as it were, at least for some time. We're not going to let our imaginations run away with us as soon as we hear the magic word guru. Now, we're going to consider the whole question of 'Is a guru necessary' in a comparatively sober and matter-of-fact fashion. We're going to try to understand what a guru really is. We're going to try and understand what a guru is not, and this should enable us to say, of our own accord, for ourselves, whether a guru is necessary or not, and if he is necessary, in what manner, and to what extent. We shall also, towards the close of the lecture, be taking a look at some of the attitudes, eastern and western, which can be adopted in relation to the guru. Now, we're going to start with the negative first, and we're going to proceed after that to the more positive. We're going to try to understand, in the first place, what a guru is not. We're going to consider this question under four main headings. We're going to try to understand, in fact to see, that a guru is, first of all, not the head of a religious group, that he is not a teacher, that he is not a father substitute, and not a problem solver. First of all, the guru is not the head of a religious group. Now, by a religious group we do not, of course, mean a spiritual community. We spoke about the spiritual community and what that really is last week. By a religious group, we mean - or rather by a group of any sort we mean - a number of what I described last week as non-individuals organised into a power structure. This is what we call a group. We went into all this rather thoroughly last week, and we saw that groups in this sense of the term, organisations of non-individuals into power structures can be both religious in the more conventional, more established sense, and also non-religious. And the religious groups, in this sense of the term 'groups', are of several kinds. We've got sects, we've got churches, we've got even monasteries and groups of monasteries. And these all have their respective heads. If one turns to them, if one thinks of them, one finds that these heads usually have very long and very resounding titles. I tried to look up, as a matter of interest, the title of the Pope, but I discovered it was so long I couldn't include it in my lecture, and we usually find that heads of these religious groups, not only have very long and resounding titles, but are also regarded with great veneration, with great devotion, by their followers, in other words, by other members of the group to which they belong, and of which they are the head. But if one looks into it a little more closely, one finds that the other members of the group, the followers, are not devoted to the heads of the religious groups for what they are in themselves, what the heads of the groups are in themselves as persons, as

individuals, but for what they represent, what they stand for - if you like, even what they symbolise. Now you might think that they stand for, or represent, or symbolise something spiritual, and in a sense they do, but that isn't what they really represent, or what they really stand for, or really symbolise. What the heads of the groups really represent is the group itself. They're the heads of the group. That is their principal, their main significance. So therefore, members of such groups usually feel that an attack, for instance, on the head of their group is an attack on the group itself. Any disrespect shown to the head of the group by people outside the group is interpreted, is felt by members of the group, followers of the head of the group, as disrespect shown to the group itself.

Now, in this connection, there's a little incident in the life of the Buddha. The scriptures relate that a certain monk, a disciple of the Buddha, happened to be travelling on foot, and as the road was long and dangerous, he went along with a number of other people. There were many dozens of them, so a number of them happened to be walking in front. He was walking behind, and he couldn't help overhearing what they were saying, and he soon came to realise that they were talking about the Buddha, his master, talking about the Buddha's teaching, and the Buddha's spiritual community. So he listened, but as usually happens with people who listen, or listen in or overhear, he did not hear very much good about the Buddha or about the Buddha's teaching. In fact, the scripture says that the monk, to his astonishment and dismay, heard these people speaking in dispraise of the Buddha, running the Buddha down, criticising the Buddha, saying he was no good for this reason and that reason, and listening to this, this monk became not only dismayed, not only shocked and disappointed, but he started becoming very very angry indeed. And he thought, 'Who are these people? Just listen to them running the Buddha down, running his teaching down.' He was getting more and more angry, and his anger was sort of burning within him as he was walking along behind them. So some days later he happened to see the Buddha, in fact he went to see the Buddha, and his anger was still burning within him, so he told the Buddha the whole story. He thought, apparently, that the Buddha would be angry too, to hear that people had been running him down in this way. But what did the Buddha say? The Buddha said: 'Look here, you know that I have sometimes spoken about anger. Now, you're angry, but what have I said about anger? What have I said on the subject of anger? Have I said that anger is conducive to the attainment of Nirvana? Or have I said that it is not conducive to the attainment of Nirvana?' So the monk had to hang his head and admit that the Buddha had said that anger, indulgence in anger, was not conducive to the attainment of Nirvana. So the Buddha said: 'Look, you are supposed to be a monk, a disciple of mine. You're supposed to be aiming at Nirvana. Why then this anger? Why have you allowed it to arise in your mind? By becoming angry with these people for speaking in dispraise of me and my teaching, you have merely placed an obstacle in the way of your own spiritual development and evolution.' Now, the Buddha didn't even let the matter rest there. He said: 'All right, suppose someone does speak in dispraise of me, runs me down, criticises me, or my teaching, or my order, my community', why get angry? Just consider the matter quite objectively.'. If the criticism is justified, accept it and act upon it. If it isn't justified, just put the whole matter aside, and forget about it. But there's no point, there's no need to get angry.' In other words, the Buddha was saying to the disciple, to the monk, that he should not treat him, not treat the Buddha, just as the head of a religious group. If we look deeply into the matter, we can see and understand that the monk was not really angry because people were criticising the Buddha. He was angry because people were criticising the group to which he belonged, his group, the head of his group. In other words, he was really angry because he felt that people were criticising him. Even questioning, doubting his wisdom, his intelligence in being a member of such a group and follower of such a person.

Now we get, I'm afraid, examples of this sort of thing, even in the Buddhist East today. I myself encountered a number of examples, especially, I'm afraid, though it may be simpler if I heard (?) more from this source, especially as regards Ceylon. I found that there were some Ceylon Buddhists, for example, who'd hunt through books on comparative religion and dictionaries of religion and philosophy and so on, looking for unfavourable references to Buddhism. And when they found them they used to get very very angry, and very very upset and very excited. They'd write off to the publishers and call public meetings, and organise protests and demonstrations, and you'd think that they'd really want to - well, almost to hang, draw and quarter the person who was responsible for the unfavourable account of Buddhism. But, the interesting thing is that they were always fully convinced that by getting upset and angry and excited in this way, they were thereby showing their great devotion to Buddhism, their great faith in the Buddha, their great orthodoxy, their great loyalty. But one can see quite clearly that what they were really doing was

just exhibiting their group spirit, which, of course, has nothing to do with the Higher Evolution at all.

Now, we can go a little further than this; we can say that the guru is not only not the head of a religious group, he is not even just an ecclesiastical superior, not just someone a bit higher up in the power structure of a religious group. Sometimes one has the experience that prominent religious personalities come from the east, and they are usually preceded, they are usually heralded, by quite a bit of advance publicity. And, sometimes in this publicity one is told that this particular personality is in charge, for instance, of an important group of monasteries, or that he is second-in-command of a very ancient and historic temple, or sometimes - and I've had this experience in India - one is told simply that he is very wealthy. I remember once I was in Calcutta and a very important monk was expected from Ceylon from a very famous temple, and I was told by the head monk for the temple where I was staying that I ought to go and see him, he was very important, and very influential. And I said, 'In what way?' So he said, 'He's the richest monk in Ceylon.' So I was expected to go on that basis and pay my respects to him. In this way one is expected to be rather impressed by facts of this sort, and expected to regard people of this type, who are merely higher up in the ecclesiastical structure, as gurus. But a guru is not this sort of figure at all, and people of this sort are not really gurus at all. They may be organisationally important or influential, but they are just that, nothing more.

Well, secondly, the guru is not a teacher. It's comparatively easy to understand that a guru is not the head of a religious group, but I think it will be news to quite a lot of people that he is not a teacher either. Not even a religious teacher. Most people think that is just what a guru is supposed to be. He's a teacher, a religious teacher, a spiritual teacher, a spiritual master. But then what is a teacher? Well, a teacher, obviously, is one who teaches, who imparts knowledge, who communicates information. A geography teacher obviously teaches geography - facts and figures about the earth; a psychology teacher teaches psychology - facts about the human mind, the human psyche, nowadays not only facts, but also figures. Now in the same way a religious teacher teaches religion. Well, that may be the theology of a particular religious tradition, its doctrine, its doctrinal system; it may be the general history of all the different religions of the world. But a guru, as such, is not a religious teacher. He doesn't teach religion. In fact, he doesn't teach anything at all. Of course, people may ask questions, and he may answer those questions, or he may not: it all depends on him. But he's got no special, as it were, vested interest in teaching. If nobody asked questions, well, he just wouldn't bother, he'd sit quietly as it were and amuse himself. The Buddha himself has made this perfectly clear. For instance, in the Pali scriptures he says in several places that he's got no *ditthi*, no *dristi*, which means no view, no philosophy, no system of thought. He says, 'There are lots of other teachers who've got this teaching and that teaching, and this *dristi* and that *dristi*, this philosophy and that philosophy to teach. I don't have anything, I've no *dristi*, no view, no philosophy which I am trying to teach, which I am trying to communicate to people, no system of thought.' He says the Tathagata, the Buddha, is free from *dristi*, free from doctrines, free from philosophy, free from teachings. He is quite emancipated from them; he has nothing to do with them. And then, in the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha says that he's got no Dharma to impart. We hear of all these Bodhisattvas and disciples sitting and waiting, expecting the Buddha to teach them something, or to impart a Dharma, doctrine or teaching, and the Buddha says 'I've no Dharma to impart. I've nothing to say, nothing to teach'. Then, in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the Buddha goes even further than that. He says, 'Don't be under the impression that I've ever taught anything. You might have heard me speaking, or you might not, but that doesn't mean anything.' He says 'The truth is that from the night of my Enlightenment, the night that I saw the Truth, that I became the Buddha, that I woke to absolute consciousness, right down to the night of my Parinirvana' - the night when the body just dissolves, and the Buddha, as we would say, dies, right down to that night, that whole period of five-and-forty years he says, 'I haven't uttered a single word'. If he hasn't uttered a single word, well, how can he teach? And if he doesn't teach, well then, he isn't a teacher, hasn't taught anything. So the guru is not a teacher.

All right, thirdly, the guru is not a father substitute. Now what does this mean? We may say, generalising, that, for various reasons, quite a lot of people never grow up. Perhaps this is the most striking fact about the human race as a whole; the majority of its members do not grow up. We went into this too a few weeks ago. Now, of course, people grow up physically, they develop,

they expand, they put on weight. They even grow up intellectually in the sense of being able to organise their knowledge into more and more coherent wholes. But they don't grow up in so many other ways. They don't grow up emotionally, not to speak of spiritually. Many of them remain emotionally immature, even infantile; remain emotionally dependent. And because they don't grow up, because they remain emotionally dependent, they want to depend on someone else. They want to depend on someone bigger than themselves, stronger than themselves, someone who is prepared to love them and protect them absolutely and unconditionally. They don't really want to be responsible for themselves, don't really want to decide anything for themselves; want somebody else, some other person, some other power, some authority, even some other system to decide it and settle it all for them. Now, usually when one is young, that is to say, literally young, one depends, one can depend, on one's parents, either father or mother or both. But as one grows - I won't say 'grows up' - older, one has to find somebody else. Mother and father may be no longer there, maybe you've left them, maybe they've died, and so on, so you have to find a substitute for mother and for father. And, of course, many people find this substitute, this person on whom they can depend emotionally, in the marriage relationship. And this is one of the reasons why marriage is so popular, and also, on many occasions, so difficult. A number of people, again, find their substitute, their parent substitute or surrogate in a concept of a personal god. One may even follow Freud in saying that God is a father substitute on a cosmic scale. And the believer expects from God the same love, the same protection, as the child expects from the parents.

It's very significant, I think, that in, say, Christianity, God is addressed as 'Our Father'. And again, a father substitute is often found in the figure of a guru, or one might even say, a pseudo-guru, because the guru is not really, not truly a father substitute at all, but only too often the followers try their best to make him such. We've all heard, for instance, of Mahatma Gandhi, great Indian politician, thinker, activist, even revolutionary, some people would say, a spiritual figure, a religious figure. Now, I think it's rather significant that for most of his life, he was addressed by people, especially by his disciples, as Bapu. Now what does Bapu mean? Bapu means father. And I remember that when I was in western India, I was in contact with quite a number of religious groups and gurus and so on, and I found that there were quite a number of gurus, who, for some reason or another, rather liked to be addressed as Dadaji, which means grandfather. And, it seems, that people used to like to address them as grandfather. This rather amused me, so once, just for a little fun, as it were, when I was in Kalimpong, and when I had with me a number of my own pupils, most of them were Nepalese, I asked them, partly from curiosity, partly for amusement, how they regarded me. At that time I was about thirty years of age and they were in their late teens and early twenties, so when I asked them this question, they clasped their hands together in great emotion and great fervour; they said: 'Oh Sir, you are just like our grandfather. This, I must say, took me rather by surprise. I've also known in India quite a number of female gurus. They are not very much in the news, they are not so well known in many cases, or in most cases, as the male gurus, but I noticed that these female gurus were invariably addressed as Mataji, which means mother. And I found at least one who was addressed by her followers and disciples as Ma, which means mummy. Now, I remember one in particular, and this is perhaps rather interesting and instructive. This particular lady was about - well, she was quite elderly - when I first got to know her she was about fifty-two or three, now she was in her early seventies, and she had quite a number of young men as her disciples, and they spent nearly all their time with her. And, I discovered, quite by chance, that nearly all these young men had lost their own mothers. They were orphans, or at least semi-orphans. And they used to sit around in the evening in the meeting hall and they would all sing Ma, which means mummy, in chorus, to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. And they'd sing nothing else. It was 'Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma' like that, all through the evening, sometimes keeping it up for two or three hours, and getting really worked up, and sort of gazing at her, singing in this way, 'Mummy, Mummy, Mummy'. They believed that this was a really new development in religious history. And they said, they used to tell me, that what they called 'Ma-ism' would be the future religion of humanity, the worship of Mother, this particular mother. Now, I wasn't surprised to find, after hearing all this, that there was very intense competitiveness and jealousy amongst them, and each of them clearly wanted to be the favourite son, if not the only son, and I also noticed that there was a certain amount of depreciation among them of other groups, just as you find among children; I mean, children get talking and arguing, and one child says: 'My daddy is much stronger than yours' or 'My daddy is much richer than yours', or 'We live in a much bigger

house than you do'. So, in the same way, one used to hear these same disciples disputing, and saying that some other guru they'd heard of or been to see wasn't nearly as great as their own guru. Their own was the biggest and greatest and so on, which is, surely, a very immature sort of approach. This reminds me of a Tibetan story, a story from my own experience. This concerns the different disciples of three great Nyingmapa Lamas whom I knew personally in Kalimpong. They were all three very, very great, well known, and had many disciples, and I think I may say that they, all three, were genuine gurus of great spiritual experience and attainment. They were all Nyingmapas; they all belonged to the Red Cap sect, that is to say the more strictly Tantric sect. And they were different. One used to wander around on his own in a sheepskin robe dyed red, and he was rather difficult to catch hold of, he would be always on the move. Another lived at home with his wife, sometimes wives, and children, and used to give initiation to hundreds and thousands of people - his initiations were supposed to be particularly powerful. And another was a monk, the head monk of a monastery, who was a very orthodox representative of the Nyingmapa tradition. And I was told by one of the disciples that once upon a time a discussion arose among their various disciples - because they had quite a lot of disciples in common - that is to say, people who take an initiation from either two of them or even three of them. So, the topic which arose among the disciples one day was 'Who is the greatest among these three?' The disciples were very curious to know this, whether one was greater, and the other two not so great, or whether two were greater and one was less so.

They were very curious and inquisitive to know all this, so they were talking about it quite a lot among themselves. In the end, one of the bolder spirits plucked up courage, and he went to one of these gurus and he said, 'Look, we've been talking like this: we're wondering among you three, who is the greatest? We've got great veneration, great regard for all three of you, but we'd like to know who is really greatest? Who has gone furthest? Who is nearest Nirvana?' . So the guru just smiled and he said, 'Look, I'll tell you'. He said: 'Amongst three there's one who is very much more highly developed than the two others, but none of you will ever know who that is.' This was his reply.

Now, having said all this, this is not to say that people do not need father substitutes; at least for a while, a lot of people do need them. They may be necessary, or a father substitute may be necessary, for their psychological development. It may help them to evolve, help them to grow, but it's not a guru's real function to be a father substitute. One can, of course, say that the function of the guru is analogous to that of the father, that is to say that the guru fulfils on a spiritual plane, on a spiritual level, the same function that the true father fulfils on the ordinary human level. But the guru is not a substitute for the father where the father has been lacking, or where he's still required.

Now, fourthly and lastly, the guru is not a problem-solver. Now what does this mean? What is a problem? I distinguish between a problem on the one hand and a difficulty on the other. A difficulty is something that can be overcome with effort. If we put a bit more effort in, a bit more energy, the difficulty can be overcome, it can be resolved. But, a problem isn't like that. If you've got a problem, and if you put a lot of effort into it, a lot of energy into it, to solve it, what happens is you make the problem worse. You increase the problem. It's like pulling, we may say, the two ends of a piece of string in order to untie the knot in the string. You may have a piece of string with a knot in it, so you take hold of the two ends, and you pull hard. But what happens? You only succeed in tightening the knot. So, putting energy into the solution of a problem is rather like that - you make the problem worse, tighter, more difficult to solve. Now, we may say there are two kinds of problems. There are doctrinal problems and there are personal problems, usually psychological problems, and I can say from my own experience that doctrinal problems are more popular in the East. There, when people come along to you, they want to ask questions about mind, about nirvana, about the *skandhas*, about *samskaras* and so on. All sorts of technical doctrinal questions. But, in the West, personal problems, personal, psychological problems are more popular. But one can say, in regard to the East, that even the doctrinal problems are very often psychologically motivated, they are, at least, psychologically oriented. In other words, one asks even the doctrinal question, even the abstract theoretical question, ultimately for personal, psychological reasons. But, usually, one is not conscious of this. Now, a problem embodies a self-contradictory situation, and it cannot be solved on its own terms. A problem cannot be solved on its own terms, or, if you like, to make it clearer, that which cannot be solved on its own

terms, or a difficulty which cannot be solved or overcome on its own terms - this sort of difficulty I call a problem. But the guru is asked to solve the problem on its own terms.

Let me give you a few examples: for instance, a woman comes along. She's very upset, very distraught, in great distress, and she tells him eventually that she just can't live with her husband any longer. She's had enough; if she has to put up with any more, she'll just go stark staring mad. So, she's just got to leave him. But she also adds that if she leaves her husband, she's got to leave her children too, but leaving her children is no less impossible than continuing to stay, continuing to live with her husband. Not only will she go mad if she has to stay with her husband, she will also go mad if she has to leave her children. So she asks what is she to do, and, of course, she makes it clear, it's quite impossible for the children to leave their father. So she asks you what should she do. The guru is expected to solve this problem. Somebody else comes along and complains of lack of energy. They say: 'I'm always tired, always depleted, always exhausted. I can't do anything, I can't take any interest in anything. I feel like a limp, wet rag; I just lie around all day, lie on my bed, listen to the radio a bit. I can't do a thing, I've no energy, I'm drained of energy'. But, they say: 'I know there's one way out, one way that can save me; I can get energy through meditation. I know that, I'm convinced of that.' So, the guru says, 'Well, why don't you meditate?', and he says, 'But I haven't got the energy'. So, the guru is expected to solve this problem too. Another person comes along, and says that he just wants to be happy, that's all he asks from life. He just wants to be happy. And he can be happy, it's very easy for him to be happy if only some one will give him a really satisfactory reason for being happy. He can then be happy. He's examined all the reasons that people have offered, that religions have offered, philosophies have offered, friends have offered. But he's found none of them really satisfactory, so he can't be happy. So, will the guru please give him a reason for being happy? That's his problem. But, the guru, of course, knows that every reason that he can produce will be rejected as 'unsatisfactory', but still the man demands a reason. So the guru has to solve this problem too.

Now, if one were to ask, if one were to question these people, they'd all say that they want their problem to be solved, that's why they've come to the guru. They've great confidence in him. They firmly believe that he can solve the problem for them if only he wants to, but actually, this is not the situation at all. What do these people really want? What do they really want to do? What they really want to do is to defeat the guru. They present their problem in such a way that the guru cannot solve their problem without their consent or co-operation; and, of course, this consent they have no intention of giving. But, of course, they demand that he should solve their problem. Now, of course, there is a reason why they do all this. There's a reason for all this sort of devious behaviour, but we're not going into that now. One might just remark that some such people are often very cunning. It's amazing how cunning they can be, and very often, and one has noticed this especially in the East, very often they approach the guru with a great show of devotion and humility; they may bring offerings, presents; they bow down and they declare absolute confidence in the guru, and they say, 'Look, I've been to lots of other gurus, lots of other famous teachers and masters, and I've put my problem to them, but not one of them could solve it, and now I've come to you because I'm quite sure that you can. I've heard so much about you and I'm sure that you are the man, and you are the person who can solve my problem.'

So a guru who isn't very experienced, or even perhaps isn't a true guru, may be taken in by all this, but the true guru will at once see the situation, and he will refuse to function as a problem-solver. And the person putting the problem, or trying to put the problem, may, very likely, go away very discontented and very disgruntled, and will say that the guru is very unsympathetic, uninterested, unkind and indifferent, and that, in fact, he isn't a true guru at all. One might even say that some gurus have got very bad reputations for refusing to play this sort of game. Now, the fact that the guru is not a problem-solver in this way doesn't mean that he won't help people overcome their genuine difficulties, but he's not a problem-solver in this sense, even though people try to make him one.

Now, having cleared up certain misconceptions, it's time to proceed, time to press ahead and come to the second part of the lecture and say what a guru is. But, first of all, a word of warning against possible misunderstanding of what has been said so far. (As I remarked the other evening, the possibilities of misunderstanding are infinite.) I said that the guru is not the head of a religious group, he's not a teacher, he's not a father substitute, and he's not a problem-solver. But

that means - one must be careful to see - that means that the guru as such is not any of these things. The guru *per se* is not any of these things. But that does not mean that he may not at times, or from time to time, function in these different ways. The guru may even be the head of a religious group, though I would say from my own observation and experience this very rarely happens indeed, because, one might say, the qualities that make one a guru are not necessarily those that make for promotion within the ecclesiastical system. Much more often the guru may be a teacher, or be functioning as a teacher, outwardly, externally, and in Buddhism, this is very often the case. But it remains important to distinguish the teacher from the guru as such. Some gurus may be teachers, but this by no means means that all teachers are gurus. A guru may even provisionally function as a father substitute or a problem-solver, but the emphasis is on 'provisionally'. As soon as possible, he'll discard this role, and function as a guru. Because a guru can function, apart from functioning directly as a guru, can function in other ways; he can function, for instance, even as a physician, as a psychotherapist, as an artist, as a poet, as a musician, or even just as a friend; can function in these ways without being identified with any of these roles.

All right, what the guru is or what a guru is: It has been said that there are many different ways of being bad, of being wicked, an amazing number of different ways, but only one way of being good, which in the eyes of some people, makes goodness rather dull and uninteresting. One could also say that there are many errors, but only one Truth, and similarly, that there are many misconceptions about the guru, and only one true conception. So, there's quite a lot to be said about what the guru is not, and comparatively little to be said about what the guru is. In fact, what the guru is positively can be disposed of quite briefly, but this doesn't mean that it isn't important, or that it's less important. If anything, it means that it is more important, because, as I've said once before, the more important a thing is from the spiritual point of view, the less there is to be said about it. To begin with, perhaps above all else, the guru is one who stands on a higher level of being and consciousness than ourselves, or to put it in a word, one who is more aware; one who is more evolved, one who is more developed. In the second place, the guru is one with whom we are in regular contact. This contact may, of course, take place at different levels. It may take place on the physical plane in the ordinary manner, on the ordinary social plane, or it may take place on a higher, spiritual plane, as it were telepathically, the contact of mind directly with mind. Again, there may even be contact between the guru and the disciple in dreams or during meditation, but the ordinary disciple, the relatively undeveloped disciple, will obviously need regular, physical contact on the material plane. As far as his needs are concerned, it won't be enough just to see the guru at long intervals. Preferably, he should be in day-to-day contact with the guru, even live under the same roof. Thirdly, contact between the guru and the disciple should be what we may describe as existential. Now, it isn't easy to explain what is meant by that. One might paraphrase it by saying that there should be between the guru and the disciple real communication, which means not just communication or sharing of thoughts or ideas, or feelings or experiences, even spiritual experiences, but communication of being. If you like, action and interaction of being which implies each being as fully as possible himself in relation to the other. It isn't the guru's business to teach the disciple anything, it's the guru's business to be himself in relation to the disciple. And it is not the business of the disciple, as such, to learn. What he has to do is simply expose himself to the being and to the effect of the being of the guru, and at the same time, be himself in relation to him.

Now, communication is of two kinds: there is what we may call horizontal communication and what we may call vertical communication. Horizontal communication is communication between two people on more or less the same level of being and consciousness, and vertical communication is that between people on different levels of being and consciousness, one higher and one lower. And it's this sort of communication, this vertical communication, that we find taking place as between guru and disciple. Now, in all communication, whether horizontal or whether vertical, there is what may describe as mutual modification of being. In the case of horizontal communication this means that in the course of communication any one-sidedness that one may have is corrected. People who communicate, people who really communicate, become progressively more like each other. At the same time, paradoxical as it may seem, they become more truly themselves. Suppose, for example, a very rational person communicates, truly communicates, with a very emotional person. As a result of that communication, the emotional person will become more rational; the rational person will become more emotional. It's as though

each rubs off on the other; each will become more like the other. At the same time, the rational person does not just have, as it were, emotionality added to him from the outside. Through or by means of the communication with the emotional person, he has been enabled, or she has been enabled, to develop his or her own undeveloped emotionality which was, in fact, there all the time, as it were, beneath the surface. In other words, the communication, by enabling him to correct that imbalance, to bring up what was there, but in abeyance, has enabled him to become more himself. And it's the same with the emotional person.

Now this is what happens in the case of horizontal communication, but what happens in the case of vertical communication, that is to say communication between the guru and the disciple, how do they affect each other, how do they modify each other, how do they rub off on each other? Well, the disciple becomes more like the guru, but the guru does not become more like the disciple. The disciple changes, but the guru does not change. The disciple, under the pressure as it were of that communication, that vertical communication, rises eventually in the scale of being and consciousness. The disciple evolves; in fact, by virtue of his communication, real communication, vertical communication, with the guru, the disciple is even compelled to evolve. In a sense, he has no choice, he can only stop evolving by breaking off the communication, breaking off the relationship altogether. But of course, if he's a real disciple, he can't even do this. Sometimes it's said that the true disciple is like a little bulldog, a bulldog puppy. I don't know whether you know, but if you have a bulldog puppy, and you take a piece of rag, say a towel, or something like that and you just dangle it in front of his nose, he'll snap at it and seize it in his little jaws, and you can then pick him up and whirl him round your head, but he'll never let go, and the true disciple is like that.

Now, I've said that the guru does not become like the disciple, the guru does not change. But this is true only in a certain sense, in a limited sense. The guru does not change in the sense that he doesn't come down to meet the disciple halfway as it were, as the disciple comes up, he just stays where he is, he doesn't change. But, more than that, as the result of the vertical communication with the disciple, the guru himself evolves. The only guru who doesn't evolve in this way is a Buddha, an absolutely fully, perfectly Enlightened One, and even among gurus a Buddha is very very rare. In fact, it's sometimes said, especially in Tantric circles in the East, that disciples are necessary to a guru's further development. I've even heard it said in these circles, that nothing helps a guru so much as having a really good disciple. By 'good', one doesn't mean obedient, one doesn't mean docile, one means one who really communicates, vertically communicates, who is really trying to evolve, who wants to evolve. Of course, he may give the guru quite a lot of trouble, sometimes more trouble than all the other disciples, the good disciples, in the other sense, put together. It also occasionally happens, and historical examples are not unknown, that the disciple even overtakes the guru. So, a sort of reversal of roles takes place. The disciple then becomes the guru and the guru the disciple. But, of course, nobody minds because they are both heading in the same direction.

Now, perhaps we are in a slightly better position to answer the question 'Is a guru necessary?' I think we can see by this time that to evolve without one, without any contact with one, is extremely difficult. A couple of weeks ago I said personal relationships were necessary to human development, and I think this is axiomatic. It's also possible to say real communication is necessary to human development. Through communication with friends, we develop horizontally, we correct one-sidedness, we enlarge ourselves, we become more many-sided, more whole, if you like, more complete, and through communication with the guru we develop vertically, we evolve, we rise to a higher level of being and consciousness. And I will say that for the majority of people there doesn't seem to be any other way of doing this. The child develops into an adult mainly through contact with its parents. It's very doubtful if a child would develop very much if it was left alone on a desert island just with other children. It might grow bigger, it might grow stronger, it might grow more cunning, more clever, but there would be, I think, very little specifically human development, much less still spiritual development, if any. And it's the same, or much the same, in the case of one who wants to evolve. Contact, regular contact with at least one person more highly evolved, more highly developed, than himself is necessary. Not that the Higher Evolution is absolutely impossible without it, that you cannot make any progress at all even in an upward, even in a vertical, direction unless you are in contact with some more highly evolved being; but such contact certainly speeds up the intensiveness of

the whole process. Generalising, one might say that for the vast majority of people, evolution, Higher Evolution, does not take place without at least two factors being present. The first is the experience of suffering, and the second is contact with a guru in the sense of a being, a person, more highly evolved, more highly developed.

Now, we've seen what a guru is, what he's not, seen I hope that he's necessary, at least highly desirable; and it's time, now, to deal with one or two questions, and first comes the question how to choose a guru, how to know whether someone is really more highly evolved, more highly developed, than oneself, and obviously this is a very important question. It's important not to make any mistake. Now, of course, it's very difficult to know if someone is really more highly evolved, it's very difficult indeed. Perhaps it's impossible without prolonged contact. Some gurus in the East say it's impossible for the disciple to choose the guru. They say that it is quite presumptuous for the disciple even to think in these terms, to think that he can choose the guru, that he can recognise one, know if someone is more evolved than himself. They say that what actually happens, what really happens, is that the guru chooses the disciple, not the other way round. The disciple may make a choice, he may think that he's choosing a guru, but what usually happens is that he's really only choosing to belong to a certain religious group with a certain head, or he's choosing a religious teacher, or he's choosing a father substitute or a problem-solver. But he's not choosing a guru as such because he can't see, he can't recognise, who the more highly evolved person is. So what is the would-be disciple to do? Well, he must evolve as much as he possibly can by himself, must try to come in contact with a spiritual community, as distinct from a religious group, and hope that some member of that group will either take him on as a disciple, or refer him to somebody else who can. And, in any case, the would-be disciple should hold himself always ready, be receptive. Sometimes, of course, it happens that the guru just grabs the disciple, as it were by the scruff of his neck. The disciple, in a case of this sort, may not even have thought about the Higher Evolution, he may not have any interest at all in religion, he may not have any problems, he may be quite happy as he is, but the guru sees his potential, and he takes him, makes him a disciple regardless of his protests. This is the sort of thing that the Buddha did with Sundarananda. Sundarananda was a young man in the Buddha's day, Nanda was his name, but he was nicknamed Sundrananda. Sundara means handsome, because he was so good-looking that everybody noticed it. They called him Sundarananda, handsome Nanda or good-looking Nanda. And he was related to the Buddha, a sort of distant cousin. And one day, he got married, and the Buddha was invited to the marriage feast, so along he went, and apparently Nanda was married to this very beautiful girl that he'd been, as we would say, engaged to. And they had a wedding feast, so, of course, the Buddha produced his begging bowl, and he was served in his bowl, and after they had all eaten and everything was over, the Buddha had his bowl cleaned, and he got ready to depart and to go back deep into the forest where he was living, apparently under a tree, or something like that. So before leaving, he said to Nanda, Sundarananda, 'Nanda, come here'. So Nanda came along, and the Buddha said, 'Would you mind carrying my bowl just a little way for me?' So Nanda was quite pleased to carry the Buddha's bowl, so the Buddha blessed everybody, and he got up and walked out with Nanda following with the bowl. So the Buddha went pacing sedately on and Nanda was following behind with the bowl. And he kept looking back at his wife who was leaning out of the window and waving to him, with her long hair falling down, we are told. So, for the first few hundred yards, Nanda wasn't all that worried, but as he found the Buddha going deeper and deeper into the forest, he became a little uneasy, having heard things about the Buddha; so after a mile or so he got really worried, and the Buddha went on and on, and he was so much in awe of the Buddha, he didn't dare say anything, he just clutched the bowl, and looking back he couldn't see his wife any more, and he just went on. So, mile after mile, the Buddha led him into the depths of the forest until they came to a little clearing and a circle of huts, and there were other disciples, so the Buddha pointed to Nanda who was, by that time, trembling. He took the bowl from him and he said to the other monks 'Ordain him!' In other words, make him a monk. So, they seized hold of Nanda, they shaved his head, they stripped off his white robes and put yellow ones on, they forced him down on to his knees, and the Buddha said 'Now you are a monk, you sit under that tree, and you meditate!'. He couldn't meditate, he kept thinking of his wife, thinking how beautiful she was. He one day went to the Buddha and said, 'Lord, I just can't meditate. I keep thinking of my wife, I keep thinking of her looking just as she looked when she waved good-bye out of that window, and her hair all falling down - I'm supposed to be meditating and it keeps coming up in front of my mind, I can't do a thing.' So the Buddha said, 'Look, you may think

your wife is very beautiful, but I know women much more beautiful than that. If you meditate really well, I shall see that you meet some of them.’. So Nanda really sort of perked up when he heard this. The Buddha said, ‘Believe it or not, they live up in the sky, they live in Indra’s heaven, and’, he said, ‘they’ve got pink feet.’. So Nanda was really thrilled to hear all this, and the Buddha said, ‘Meditate, meditate - I’ll give you five hundred of these pink-footed nymphs if only you meditate really well.’. So Nanda sat down under the tree and he really meditated, he got on really well. But there was another problem: all the other monks started laughing at him, they said, ‘He’s the monk who’s meditating not for Nirvana, he’s meditating for five hundred beautiful nymphs! So he’s not a very good sort of monk.’ So he became rather fed up and disgusted with this, and he thought why meditate even for the sake of five hundred nymphs with pink feet? Why not just meditate? So, he just meditated, and sooner or later he got Nirvana, and Sundarananda, we’re told, became an *arahant*, became an Enlightened One. So this is how the Buddha dealt with him, this is just a little example from the Buddhist scriptures.

But we’ve lingered rather a long time over all that, so it’s time we came to the third and concluding part of the lecture. It concerns Eastern and Western attitudes towards the guru. It’s very difficult to generalise, and we must be brief, we don’t have very much time, but I think we can say that in the East the guru sometimes at least tends to be overvalued, and in the West, usually undervalued. Now what do we mean by overvaluing the guru? In a sense, the guru cannot be overvalued. Nothing can be more valuable than the person who helps you to evolve, to develop, but when I say that the guru in the East is sometimes overvalued I mean that a false value is attached to him in a very exaggerated way. For instance, people in India sometimes say the guru is God, God, the All-Powerful. In fact they say he’s all the gods rolled into one, not just as a figure of speech, but quite literally. We’re sitting in front of the guru, we’re sitting in front of God - there’s God sitting there on the floor, on a cushion, not just a human being, it’s God. So, being God, he knows everything. He’s sitting there, looking just like an ordinary human being, but he knows everything that’s going on in the whole universe. and he knows everything that’s going on in your mind . He can read all your thoughts, he can see exactly what is happening. If you’re sitting there and thinking of home, he knows it, if you’re sitting there and thinking of him, he knows it, if you’ve got a problem, he knows it, you don’t have to tell him, he reads all your thoughts like an open book. Not only that, but he can do anything he likes. Being God, he’s powerful too. He can do anything he likes with the disciple - he can bless him, can give him riches, can make him famous, get him promotion in his job. He can give him children if he wants, if his wife is barren.

With just a blessing, just a word, he can do anything he likes, rescue him in time of trouble, in danger. He can even give him Enlightenment if he wants. It’s all in the guru’s hands. It’s all the grace of the guru, as they say. So, it’s often said, faith, is of the very greatest importance, faith that the guru is God, that he’s just like this, he can do all these things. And if the disciple only has enough, the guru can work miracles on his behalf. But, of course, there are little difficulties. It sometimes happens that the guru appears not to know something. He appears to be ignorant of something, and sometimes he even appears to forget something that you’ve told him. It’s as though you hadn’t told him. So you may get a bit upset by this, but the true disciple isn’t upset because he knows that all this, this not-knowing and this forgetting, is all a test, that the guru’s only pretending. He wants to test your faith. So he doesn’t really not know, he’s only pretending not to know so that he can see whether you believe in him still or not. He doesn’t really forget anything, he’s testing you just like tapping a pot after it’s been baked, just to see if there’s a crack in it or not. So in this way, over the weeks, over the months, over the years, the disciple comes to inhabit a whole fantasy world, a world in which the guru is all-powerful and whatever happens is happening on account of the guru’s grace and the guru’s will and the guru’s wishes. And if the guru isn’t careful, he may come to inhabit this fantasy world too, especially if he isn’t a real guru. After all, it isn’t easy sometimes to escape - if someone comes and tells you that his child was sick and has recovered due to your blessing, well, even though you hadn’t even thought about the child, you didn’t know anything about the child, if you are told that the child has recovered due to your blessing, you may not be inclined to dispute that, you may just accept it and say, well, I suppose it’s so.

Now, obviously, not all disciples go to this sort of extreme. Some see quite clearly after a while that the guru isn’t really God. They begin to see that he’s a human being, that he does have his

limitations. He can't do everything. He's got a certain amount of insight and experience, sure, but he can't read your thoughts, not all of them anyway. So what do such disciples do? They conclude that he isn't a true guru. So they go and look for somebody else. They go off and look for someone who is a true guru, and the same thing happens all over again. When they first meet him, they think, 'Ah, here's the real guru - he's God.' Then they start noticing little discrepancies, so they get disillusioned, they think he's only a human being and they go and look for somebody else. And this sort of process can go on for quite a long time. Now, I remember a Tibetan friend of mine, a Tibetan lama and guru, talking to me about his own experiences and saying that he remembered that when he first came to Kalimpong, which was the town where we were staying, everybody flocked to him, all the Nepalese Buddhists, because there was no other great lama there at all at that time. They all flocked to him. They brought him wonderful offerings and took initiations, they sang his praises, and he was there for five or six years, and in the end they got a bit tired of him, and he was very amused by this, and they used to come, but they didn't bring quite such big offerings as before. And then a new lama came, a new guru. He was, actually, a friend of the first one, and when he came everybody else went off to the new one and left the old one high and dry, and they were both rather amused by this. And sooner or later, as the Chinese Communists started taking over in Tibet, more and more gurus came and the poor people got very bewildered, not knowing what to do, they couldn't get there quick enough, as soon as a great new guru had arrived, you'd hear how such and such a guru has come. He's the greatest in this or the greatest in that. We haven't seen anybody like him. They would rush off to make their offerings, and then before they really got over this excitement, another one was coming, so they'd quickly get together another lot of offerings and off they'd run to this one. He was the real one. And they must have gone, in this way, to about nineteen or twenty gurus, until one day they both came and they didn't know what to do at all.

So this is the sort of thing that happens. One might even say that this sort of thing can happen even in the West. You get someone coming from the East and people think he's marvellous till the next person comes from the East, and then they switch over to him. And in this way it goes on.

Let's try to understand why the guru is overvalued in the East in this way. I think it's very clear what is happening. The guru is being regarded in cases of this sort as a sort of father substitute, regarded as being all-knowing, all-powerful, infinitely loving and tolerant; in other words, a parental figure. And the disciple, in such cases, will adopt an attitude of infantile dependence. I must say that I've personally encountered numerous examples of this sort of thing. In India, gurus are usually very popular, but there is one thing demanded of them, one thing they must be or do, regardless of anything else; they don't mind whether you teach this or teach that - that's quite irrelevant - they don't care whether you wear a yellow robe, or a white one, or a red one, or a black one; that, again, doesn't matter. There is one thing that the guru has always been, so far as popular belief is concerned, he must always be very very kind and affectionate and soft-spoken, and gentle, and so on. In other words, a sort of parental figure. This above all.

Now, in the West, we traditionally go, or at least, have gone for many centuries now, to the opposite extreme. Here, far from overvaluing the guru, we've hardly any concept of the guru at all. This is largely due, I think, to the influence, for so many centuries, of Christianity. On the one hand you've got God with his various attributes; you believe in God if you're a Christian. And on the other, you've got the head of the particular religious group to which you belong. You've got an ecclesiastical superior. So there seems to be no room for the guru in the true sense. Even gurus if they appear, any saints, if they appear, are subject to the rule, usually, of the ecclesiastical authorities. So that if one reads, for example, the history of medieval Christianity, you sometimes find that even a great saint had sometimes to submit to a bad Pope, and this might not have done the saint any particular harm, not very much, anyway - but it was certainly very bad for the Pope, and bad, maybe, for the Church as a whole. But though this episode, this tradition, has been quite a long one, we mustn't think that the West has never known what a guru is, even in the Eastern sense. We may say that there were quite a number of gurus in the Eastern sense, in ancient Greece and Rome. There was Plato who maintained a sort of school or academy; there was Pythagoras who founded spiritual communities; there was Apollonius of Tyana, and above all, perhaps, there was Plotinus. He's a very good example of this sort of thing. If we read Porphyry's Life of Plotinus, especially those paragraphs which deal with Plotinus's later life in Rome, where

he used to speak to his disciples, speak to little groups, where he had his disciples living with him, where he helped them, where he advised them. One gets the impression of a sort of ashram type, a spiritual community type set-up, which usually one regards as being more characteristic of the East than of the West, especially in the days of the Roman Empire. But, all these, we may say, all these great figures of the classical path, Greek and Roman, were gurus in the Eastern, the true sense of the term. In modern times, in contemporary times, we find that there are signs that the West is again beginning to appreciate the importance of the guru, even despite our democratic and egalitarian prejudices. Usually, we like to think that everybody's the same; no-one's better than anybody else, nobody more highly evolved than anybody else. This sort of conception is foreign to all our ways of thinking for so many centuries. But, even so, there are signs, in the West today, that people are beginning to appreciate the importance and the significance in the general economy of things, of beings more highly evolved, more highly developed than average, even though they sometimes speak of them not so much in terms spiritual, but perhaps as geniuses, and so on, even heroes if you like, as Carlyle did. I remember that when I was over in the United States at the beginning of the year, I was rather struck by a phenomenon which I hadn't noticed before, and that was by the fact that there seemed to be, in the United States, quite a number of sort of guru figures. They were usually attached to universities, and they usually sort of circulated. They went around from one university campus to another, and crowds of students flocked to them. It was quite clear that the students were looking for a sort of guru figure, someone wiser than themselves, someone who would speak to them, someone who would tell them which way to go, And there seemed to be quite a number, as I've said, of these sort of guru figures, or, at least, semi-guru figures. And I remember among the more popular, there were, for instance, Buckminster Fuller. I saw people really hanging on his words. And then there was Allen Ginsberg, quite a lot of people regard him in this way, and more recently, Baba Ram Dass, formerly Richard Alpert, associate of Timothy Leary.

Now, one might say that some of these at least are not so much even semi-gurus as *guru figures* rather than the real thing, even to some extent - in some ways - father figures, but they do, nevertheless, represent a very interesting development. The fact that so many young people in the United States - I don't think so much here by any means - but certainly in the United States, feel or even think quite consciously that there's not much to be gained from books as such, that the more conventional voices, voices of religion, politics, even the Arts, don't really say very much to them, and who are, therefore, looking for someone whom they can regard in this way, someone to whom they can look up, who they can feel is more developed than themselves, more evolved than themselves, and who can guide them truly, give them real advice, and shed real light on the path that they have to tread today. And I think that this is a very interesting and a very significant development.

But, be that as it may, whether it's in the East, or whether it's in the West, we have to follow a Middle Way. We have to recognise above all the great fact of evolution, lower evolution and Higher Evolution, and recognise that Man, too, we too, are involved, included in this process. We have to recognise, we have to understand, that Man evolves through the development of his consciousness, that he develops from simple consciousness, which he shares with the animals, to self-consciousness, which in most human beings, at present only exists in a very rudimentary form, from self-consciousness to transcendental consciousness, and from transcendental consciousness to what, without really being able to understand it, we can only call absolute consciousness. We have also to recognise that different people, different human beings, stand at different levels, different stages of this great course of development and evolution, have to recognise that some stand lower down than ourselves, and others stand higher up than ourselves, even much higher up than ourselves, have to recognise, have to understand, that those who are higher up in the scale of the Higher Evolution are in a position to help us; that we evolve, that we develop, through contact, through communication - vertical communication - with them, and it is they who are our gurus. We should recognise them as being, in relation to ourselves, superior beings. At the same time, we do not overvalue, in a negative psychological way; we do not project, we do not expect from them what we can only get, ultimately, from ourselves. And this is indeed the Buddha's own attitude. The Buddha did not ask anybody to regard him as a God or God. On one occasion he said he was not even a human being, not to speak of being a god, but that's a different track altogether. The Buddha never asked anybody to have faith in him, much less to have absolute faith, and it's very important to remember this.

The Buddha never said, 'You must come, if you want to come, and have faith. You must believe me, believe what I say if you want to be saved, if you want to develop.' What did the Buddha say? Time and again in the scriptures he says, and it's almost a sort of stereotyped phrase, 'Let any reasonable man come to me.' All the Buddha asks for is that we should be reasonable. So he says 'Let any reasonable man come to me, one who is willing to learn.' 'Willing' - this is all that is required. In other words, we may say that all the Buddha requires is contact, reasonable contact, rational contact, and receptivity. The Buddha personally seems to have been quite convinced that he could convince people about the Higher Evolution, by quite even purely, rational, empirical means, without making any appeal for absolute faith and devotion. So this is all that he demands, all that he asks for, all that he expects. He wants simply a reasonable human being who is willing to learn, willing to evolve, willing to develop - that's all.

Now, we've come to the end, not only of tonight's lecture, but of the present series, and in the course of the series, we've covered some of the most important aspects of the Higher Evolution of the Individual. We've tried to throw some light on some of the problems that confront us in the course of our own individual development, because the more clearly we see the problem - 'problem' here more in the sense of 'difficulty' - the more likely it is to be solved, or, better, to be resolved. I think we've all seen, if we hadn't seen it before, we've all seen how very difficult it is for the individual to evolve at all, how it requires a great effort, an effort which many people are not perhaps prepared to make. But we've also seen that difficult as evolution is, as the Higher Evolution is, it's also very much worth while. In fact, we may say that this Higher Evolution, this Higher Evolution of the Individual, is the most worthwhile thing to which any human being worthy of the name can possibly devote himself.

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