

Unlearning

What does learning mean? Learning means fixing ideas and making them material. When an idea is fixed in mind, it becomes tangible, and that knowledge becomes a kind of veil for any other knowledge that can illuminate the path through life. Unlearning is a process by which one rises above what one has learned. What one learns in life is most useful after one has attained spiritual realization, in order to express it, but it can only be a hindrance in progress in the spiritual path unless one knows how to unlearn.

How does one unlearn? Does one forget things? It is not necessary to forget in order to unlearn. Unlearning is looking at things from an opposite point of view, seeing things from another angle as clearly as one is able to see from the angle from which one is used to looking at them. It is this experience that leads one to perfection. The knowledge that keeps man narrow is the knowledge which is not unlearned, but once one has unlearned, one sees everything in life from two opposite angles, and that gives one a great mastery. It is just like looking from both eyes, to make a thing complete.

It is most difficult to forget what one has once learned, but the process of spiritual attainment is through unlearning. People consider their belief to be their religion, but in reality belief is a steppingstone to religion. If I were to picture belief, I would say that it is just like a staircase that leads on to higher realization. But instead of going up the staircase, people stand on it. It is just like running water that does not flow anymore. People have made their belief rigid, and therefore instead of being benefited by it they are going backwards. If it were not so, all the believers in God, in truth, and in the hereafter would be better than the unbelievers, but what happens is that they are worse, because they have nailed their own feet to their belief.

Very often I am in a position where I can say very little, especially when a person comes to me with his preconceived ideas and wants to take my

guidance on the spiritual path, yet his first intention is to see if his thoughts fit in with mine and if my thoughts fit in with his. He cannot make himself empty for the direction given. He has not come to follow my thoughts, but to confirm to himself that his idea is right. Among a hundred persons who come for spiritual guidance, ninety come out of that tap. What does it show? That they do not want to give up their own ideas, they want to have them confirmed.

Spiritual attainment from beginning to end is unlearning what one has learned. What one has learned is in oneself. **How does one unlearn? One can do it by becoming wiser. The more wise one becomes, the more one is able to contradict one's own ideas;** the less wisdom one has, the more one holds onto one's ideas. In the wisest person there is willingness to submit to others, and the most foolish person is always ready to stand firm to support his own ideas. The reason is that the wise person can easily give up his thought, while the foolish one holds onto it. That is why he does not progress.

Mental purification therefore is the only method by which one can reach the spiritual goal. In order to accomplish this one has to **look at another person's point of view, for** in reality every point of view is one's own point of view. The vaster one becomes, the greater the realization that comes to one, the more one sees that every point of view is all right. If one is able to expand oneself to the consciousness of another person, one's consciousness becomes as large as two persons'. And so it can be as large as a thousand persons' when one accustoms oneself to try and see what others think.

The **next step in mental purification is to be able to see the right of the wrong and the wrong of the right, and the evil of the good and the good of the evil.** It is a difficult task, but once one has accomplished this, one rises above good and evil.

One must be able to **see the pain in pleasure and the pleasure in pain; the gain in loss and the loss in gain.** What generally happens is that one is blunted to one thing and one's eyes are open to another thing; that one does not see the loss or that one does not see the gain; that if one recognizes the right, one does not recognize the wrong.

Mental purification means that impressions such as good and bad, wrong and

right, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, these opposites which block the mind must be cleared out. Then one can see the enemy in the friend and the friend in the enemy. When one can recognize poison in nectar and nectar in poison, that is the time when death and life become one too. Opposites no more remain opposites before one. That is mental purification, and those who come to this stage are the living sages.

The third step in mental purification is to identify oneself with what one is not. By this one purifies one's mind from impressions of one's own false identity. I will give as an example the story of a sage in India. The youth asked his mother, who was a peasant woman living in a village, "What is the best occupation, Mother?" And the mother said, "I do not know, Son, except that those who searched after the highest in life went in search of God." "Then where must I go, Mother?" he asked. She answered, "I do not know whether it is practical or not, but they say in solitude, in the forest."

So he went there and for a long time lived a life of patience and solitude. And once or twice in between he came to see his mother. Sometimes his patience was exhausted, his heart broken. Sometimes he was disappointed in not finding God. And each time the mother sent him back with stronger advice. At the third visit he said, "Now I have been there a long time." "Yes," said his mother, "now I think you are ready to go to a teacher." So he went to see a teacher.

There were many pupils learning under that teacher. Every pupil had a little room to himself for meditation, and this pupil also was told to go into a certain room to meditate. The teacher asked, "Is there anything you love in the world?" This young man, having been away from home since childhood, having not seen anything of the world, could think of no one he knew except of the little cow that was in his house. He said, "I love the cow in our house." The teacher said, "Then think of the cow in your meditation."

All the other pupils came and went, and sat in their rooms for fifteen minutes for a little meditation. Then they got tired and went away. But the young man remained sitting there from the time the teacher told him. After some time the teacher asked, "Where is he?" The other pupils answered, "We don't know. He must be in his room." They went to look for him; the door was closed and there

was no answer.

The teacher went himself and opened the door, and there he saw the pupil sitting in meditation, fully absorbed in it. And when the teacher called him by name, he answered in the sound of the cow. The teacher said, "Come out." He answered, "My horns are too large to pass through the door."

Then the teacher said to his pupils, "Look, this is the living example of meditation. You are meditating on God and you do not know where God is, but he is meditating on the cow and he has become the cow. **He has lost his identity; he has identified himself with the object on which he meditates.**"

All the difficulty in our life is that we cannot come out of a false conception. I will give another example. Once I was trying to help a person who was ill, who had had rheumatism for twenty years. This woman was in bed; she could not move her joints. I came to her and told her, "Now do this, and I will come again in two weeks' time." When I came two weeks later, she had already begun to move her joints. And I said, "In six weeks I will come back." In six weeks she got up from bed and had still greater hope of being cured.

Nevertheless, her patience was not so great as it ought to have been. One day she was lying in bed and thought, "Can I ever be cured?" The moment she had that thought she went back to the same condition, because her soul had identified itself with a sick person. For her to see her own well-being was impossible; she could not imagine that she would ever be quite well. She could not believe her eyes that her joints were moving.

People can be well in their bodies but not in their minds. Very often they hold onto an illness which they could get rid of. And the same thing happens with misery. People who are conscious of misery attract miseries. They are their own misery. It is not that misfortune is interested in them, but that they are interested in misfortune. Misfortune does not choose people; people choose misfortune. **They hold the thought of it, and that thought becomes their own. When a person is convinced that he is going downward, he goes downward;** his thought is helping him to sink.

The Sufis have their own way of **teaching purification through identification with something else: very often one holds the idea of one's spiritual teacher,**

and with that idea one gains the knowledge, inspiration, and power that the teacher has. It is just like a heritage. The man who cannot concentrate so much as to forget himself and go deep into the subject on which he concentrates will not succeed in mastering concentration.

The fourth mental purification is to free oneself from a form and to have the sense of the abstract. Everything suggests to the eye a form, everything; even so much that if the name of a person whom one has never seen is mentioned, one makes a form of him. Even such things as fairies, spirits, and angels, as soon as they are mentioned are always pictured in a certain form. This is a hindrance to attaining the presence of the formless, and therefore this mental purification is of very great importance. Its purpose is to enable one to think of an idea without form. No doubt this is only attained by great concentration and meditation, but once it is attained it is most satisfactory.

Once the mind is purified, the next step is the cultivation of the heart quality, which culminates in spiritual attainment.