**Address given by Pirzade Vilayat Inayat Khan at the third Conference at Het Oude Loo, Apeldoorn, Netherlands, on the morning of Saturday 26th July 1952 at the invitation of Queen Juliana of Netherlands.**

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| *Transcript - made by Paula Balma in 1952 - checked and corrected by AL Wirgman, Nekbakht Foundation September and October 2022. The words highlighted in yellow are where the word has been mispronouced and the number in brackets relate to the point on the tape. These mispronounciations seem to indicate Pirzade Vilayat’s speech is being read by a non-native English speaker.*  *The mistake of ‘gaol’ for ‘goal’ is particularly relevant (page 6). The transcriber correctly transcribed the word as goal, as that it how it is pronounced on the recording. However in English at that time ‘jail’, was also written as ‘gaol’, and therefore that is also why I think it is not Pir Vilayat reading the speech as he would have known the story and known how to pronounce gaol.*  *AL Wirgman asked Pir Vilayat’s son Pir Zia for his opinion and got the following answer:“I listened to the De Oude Loo recording with special attention to the words you highlighted and I am inclined to agree with you that, even if the recording is the wrong speed, it most likely isn't my father's voice.”*  *There is no doubt that Pir Vilayat presented his lecture “Meditation and action” at the conference at Het Oude Loo. It is possible that the lecture we hear on the digitized wire recording is read by somebody else. He had already given a version of this lecture in Germany and France before the Het Oude Loo conference.*  *More information about the lecture and its context can be found in 20221023\_Report-WireRecordingVilayat\_OudeLoo\_final-version on this website.* |

Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, beloved ones of God,

When I first heard of this conference convened in the peaceful setting of the Oude Loo at the gracious invitation of her Majesty, I could not help recalling that the great Emperor Akbar, who was a Sufi, had convened the first Congress of Faiths at his palace. In so doing he was acting in keeping with an old tradition in the East, that the monarch should be at the centre of the spiritual life of his land. And it is a delightful experience today to see that history repeats itself in so free and informal a way, a way which is in keeping with the need and the trend of our time. Today people from all walks of life are endeavouring to answer a very great need which is felt in humanity today, the one of an exchange of thoughts and ideals and the one of a pooling of their resources in every sphere. They are meeting at the political level, at the technical level, the scientific level—but what seems to us all to be most important is that such a meeting should take place in the first place, between those who represent the spiritual forces of our time. It is a general and underlying law of the world that any action to be successful should start from the top.

To speak about things spiritual seems from the outset presumptuous, for it is a matter of experience, of living awareness. Spirituality is tangible by its result, its effect on the personality and upon man's relationship with his fellow-creatures and with the ambiant world. Either it is real experiencing in the process of perfecting which gradually transfigures the consciousness, confers upon the adept ineffable (3.21 on tape) joy and serenity and leaves an indelible mark upon his action; or it is mere verbose speculation of philosophical abstraction without connection with living reality. For me it is the former, therefore it is no encyclopedic knowledge which may be learned or taught. Words about the experiences unfolding in the secret inner recesses of our consciousness or about the intricate process of its perfecting have, by the fact of their delicacy, a sacred and confidential character and have throughout the tradition of the past been surrounded by a veil of mystery and symbolism, when preferred. Our times require unequivocal if straightforward speaking. But, whether spoken in manifold diverse but mutually corroborative (4.25 on tape) forms of expression by the great prophets, rishis, masters or teachers, or by the neophyte or adept along the loom of history, or today, their words would sound as ficticious as the description of colours to the blind by birth to anyone to whom the experience referred to is not a living reality. Plato touched upon the point with his masterly genius when describing the cave of chained prisoners who could only see the moving shadows of our rich three-dimensional world projected on the walls of the cave. The prisoner who had succeeded in breaking the chains and seeing the world beyond the shadows in all its splendour could not have done otherwise than to try and convince his fellowmen of what he was experiencing. But he could only have shared the experience with one who had also freed himself from the fetters of limitation.

It is a commonplace to say that man in the West is bent on action and that on the whole in the East, man is concentrated on meditation. But our problem today is to find out whether it is not possible to bridge the gap between the East and West. Whether it is not possible that meditation should open new perspectives to action and whether it is not possible too that action should give a *raison d'être* to meditation. It seems that in meditation there are two movements, as it were, there is first of all the denial of what is not and then the affirmation of what is. In fact that is the real significance of the symbol of the cross, the horizontal line expressing the negation of the unreal and then there is the affirmation of the real.

Action is sought in order to improve circumstances and conditions, but what if this action is built on an illusion, the phantom world of shadows, rather than the multi-dimensional and richer reality? The whole course of action would be warped from the base! For action is built up and rests upon our ideas, our ideals, what we seek. Therefore it is illusory to try to dissociate action from consciousness. If our action is built on limited consciousness, therefore on biased consciousness, it cannot fulfil man's real purpose, it will only miss its objective with painful inadequacy. We think we are, but we are not and fail to realize what we really are. Can we really say that we have not been influenced by the circumstances in which we move and have been brought up, the impressions received during the accumulation of earlier experience which we have filed in pre-prepared pigeon holes? And what do we know of the impressions registered in the pre-natal life or during the unknown descent of our soul through the finer and denser spheres of manifestation before conception? How far are we really free in our action, or more correctly, how far do we freely dispose of our inherited freedom? How often can we say that our action is action and not reaction?

Have you not experienced in the unfathomable (8.45) sub-soil of your consciousness the pull between those two forces of the desire for freedom and the desire for experience? The quest for joy and the quest for peace? I shall personally never forget the feeling of freedom during my recent trip in the Himalayas when I realized how little one really needs in life and how the less baggage one has, the easier it was to climb; but also in counterpart there is a compelling desire deeply rooted in the human soul for the fullness of human experience for which one is prepared to pay of one's freedom. This idea is beautifully illustrated in a Surah of the Qu’ran, according to which God called upon the angels to knead the clay figure of man, the soul demurred from entering therein so much it treasured its freedom. When however God commanded the angels to play music, the soul entered the body under the effect of the intoxication of the experience of beauty through the senses. Indeed consciousness can only be acquired when there is an object to be conscious of, which is itself nothing other than the divine consciousness mirrored in manifestation.

Experience is only possible through the limiting and distorting prism of the senses. And by imposing their laws upon us, the senses rob us of our freedom. As soon as consciousness borrows a vehicle for its experience, it thereby limits the experience beforehand within the range and according to the shape of the mould of the vehicle. But what is more serious still is when it confuses itself with the instrument: this is what we do day after day without realizing it.

Should you wish to move in the realm of water, you cannot use the same methods as for locomotion on the surface of solid land; the limitations are different and so the degrees of freedom within the limits. To make way through the air, the laws of aerodynamics must be observed. To experience life on the earth plane, the laws appertaining to those vehicles, the heart and the mind, must be applied. Man may freely and consciously use these means without being conditioned by them if he understands their limiting property. To avoid confusing the observer with the observed, to gradually overcome the imperfection of our understanding of each other and the misadjustment of our relationship to the physical world, resulting from the circumscription of our vision to which we have succumbed, (12.14) the nature of the vehicles of our soul must be known and their mechanism studied. The mind, like a mirror, has the property and power of reflecting impressions, but the efficiency of the reflection depends upon the purity and steadiness of the surface of the mind. If the surface is rusty, the reflected image is dull; if the mind is restive like a stormy sea, the reflected image is disturbed and distorted. How then can action be built on a solid basis if the very fundamental process of the mind's mechanism is out of gear? Does this not show once more that action cannot be dissociated from mediation? For action to be adequate its purpose must be built on the crystal clear reflection of a lake when all the erratic agitation of human confusion has been stilled. Then only is there clear understanding and awareness, the sharp insight which permits the seer to penetrate into the heart of his fellow creatures. Such is the only reliable starting point for wholesome action.

A yet further property of thoughts is that they have a birth, an effect, a life, a death and also a reproductive capacity. Each thought has the power to engender other thoughts, linked by the associative principle, each calling the next one into play in the intricate network of the universe.

And what about the outcome of reaction? Just imagine what effect our reactions have on the ambient world! We may pass by the road and whimsically sow seeds that may one day become trees and themselves bear progeny and we have gone our way, oblivious of our responsibility! And just think by creating harm to a fraction of the universe however infinitesimal, one causes pain to the whole; not only does the finger suffer the cut but the whole body.

How can we overcome the conditioning of our reactions and act prompted by the real motives of our being? The mind is so designed as to receive, assimilate and reproduce anything which it has an accomodation for. In other words, like the *viola di amore*, it can only call into resonance those sounds for which it has suitable sympathetic chords. In fact the mind automatically registers and reflects what it is attracted to. But the human being is gifted with the power of operating a choice, in the elements partaken by consciousness. If not so, one would be like a telephone exchange ringing continually without respite or a radio set with all stations jumbled in together. Man is basically free to receive or refuse admission to impressions but inasmuch as he allows himself to be drawn into the impressions and identifies himself with the picture they give him, he alienates this freedom.

The secret of this selective power of assimilating or rejecting impressions, so similar to the functions of the human digestive system rests in the play of interest and indifference, just like the permeability of the intestine varies with the degrees of chemical affinity. Without an evolution in interest and indifference there can be no human progress, but as the child grows, he disinterests himself from his once absorbing toys and concerns himself with his increasing responsibilities. Similarly the traveller on the hazardous spiritual path, as in fact more generally all of us as we advance, grow out of the past infatuation into the present preoccupation. Prior to the step forward, there is the relinquishing of the former hold. Thus our interest in the impressions we are naturally attracted to brings us quite naturally to discard the irrelevant ones. The unassuming indifference which is the sign of the emancipated and liberated few, often conceals a profound concern for the innermost pangs and joys of our fellowmen.

But this indifference is not attained by book knowledge. It is not exactly the outcome of control, but rather of an inner evolution bringing greater spirituality and maturity. Actually all is interconnected in the spiritual path. This evolution is the counterpart of an unfolding of the self towards selflessness, so that we inevitably reach the conclusion that to become the masters of our mind, we must have become selfless. In spirituality method depends upon moral development. The secret of the mastery of thoughts and impressions consists in being able to deny these, not to struggle against them. The ultimate achievement is not in rejecting the undesirable ones but just in finding an accomodation for them in the wider picture of consciousness in which they have a right of place and as a matter of fact contribute towards the beauty of the whole. This can best be achieved by the broadening of consciousness until it encompasses (19.53) the whole cosmos. The great poet Asif said: *If the heart of man were expanded, it would accommodate the whole universe.* Take a country farm and the surrounding landscape. From observation it seems that the little insects on the grass are only aware of the surface of the blades or the anthills on the earth or the succulent characteristics of their preys. The dog seems to be conscious of more. He moves in a world of smells and habits, sympathies and antipathies. The peasant seems to understand more and covers a wider range, he thinks in terms of harvests and the weather and instruments and gain and petty daily trouble and gossip. The poet looking upon the landscape from the hilltop sees the lovely panorama and is fascinated by the beauty and vitality of the scene. He notices what escaped the farmer's notice. The mystic would see the life process working here and the reasons for the impulses which move each element and individual in the picture towards its destiny and the overall trend and evolution throughout.

Getting larger means getting free from the misleading limitations. It is not the impression which is limiting, but what we make of it in the field of our consciousness. So much so that one ultimately reaches the stage where, in accomodating what we are accustomed to call a bad impression, we actually adopt the mould of our consciousness towards assimilating it and thereby sublimate it or rather its effect upon us. It was in illustration of this idea that according to an apocryphal (22.08) gospel the Christ said to the disciple who bade him not to look at the corpse of a dead dog along the way, *oh, but its teeth are so beautiful*. It is in the quest of this activity that the early Hindu temples and Christian cathedrals incorporated devils and gargoyles amongst their architectural symbolism, and that modern artists strive towards bringing out the innate and hidden beauty of what, to the less sensitive or trained eyes, appears as ugly.

It is in the realm of relationship that action takes place, is it not? Does not our relationship with each other call for action on our part—the best that we can produce? Each relationship has idyosyncrasies of its own, entirely original and different from all others. It is because of our concern for a situation in which people's lives and feelings, and joys and pains, are involved or may be our own, that we act. Our action is in proportion to our awareness of the problems experienced by our fellowmen and ourselves; if we do not see the problem, we are not moved to action. There may be a drama being played in the heart of our nearest ones, if we do not see it, we are incapable of helping. Hence the importance of expanding our understanding. It is evident that action is dependent upon realization, which means active meditation, bringing about a certain emptiness of the self. If we are full of the concern of our interests there is no room for others and therefore action is circumscribed and the scope of responsibility limited.

*It is the realization of the mind which makes things right or wrong* says Hazrat Inayat Khan in In An Eastern Rose Garden. *One can only say I must not do this*, the Master goes on to say, *because one cannot judge the action of another unless one is selfless*. The commonplace morale is to resist evil by force, but the spiritual law since time immemorial has been unequivocal: *resist not evil*. It is one of the paradoxes of life that will is its strongest when one asks nothing for oneself; so is the power of assimilation of all impressions whether commonly purported to be good or evil, greatest when the understanding has transcended the duality of good and bad.

It is sometimes difficult to decide between fighting with righteous zest against what one believes is wrong or turning the other cheek, because it seems that by giving in, one strengthens evil and acts as its accomplice. But let us remember Aesop’s fable, *Phoebus and Borée* recounted by La Fontaine; if you remember the sun and the wind had a bet as to who would first bring a man to take off his coat. The wind blew stronger and stronger but to no avail, the more it blew the more the man clutched his coat. Then came the sun and with little ado he took it off!

Despite Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, many Christians have throughout the centuries fought for what they believed and against what they condemned. For some Christ's thrashing in the market place made of the Temple seems difficult to reconcile with the law *resist not evil*, some understand it. Perhaps it may be understood this way: you must act in accordance with your highest ideals, moved by the wholesome fire of the spirit but not through anger or hatred. In other words, act——do not react.

But what is action if it is not a transformation of conditions and environment? It implies of necessity therefore some form of coercion. What is commonly known as violence is an extreme form of coercion; but is not persuasion a less blatant form of coercion? Coercion surreptioiously administered to the minds of our fellowmen, perhaps by a stronger personality to a mind less well equipped for its defense? Condemning coercion is therefore tantamount to prohibiting action. But action together with realization is our *raison d'être*. It is in the determination of the level of the prompting of action that resides the key to right action. If action is reaction, conditioned by the limitations of our personal visions and centred around our erroneous conception of what we think we are—and what is worse, if we wish to impose this order upon others, then it can only engender conflict, strife, suffering and disappointment. But if action is to correspond to the purpose of our lives, to contribute to greater realization and real wellbeing whether spiritual or material, it must spring from a source in the deep stillness of our being. Action emanating from this source is selfless for at this level the false notion of the self—the ego—subsists no more. In all religions, although expressed differently, this is called acting the will of God. It is harmonizing one's will with the Divine Will. The conflict between the human and the Divine Will—in Sufi terms *qaza* and *qadar*—reveals some of the perspective of the expanse of the Divine Will.

*If I can hurt myself by cutting myself* writes Pir Murshid Inayat Khan, *why is it not possible that the human will should be out of harmony with the Divine Will and suffer thereby?* And again, *as each human mind can only see a reflection of reality, it is natural that each will can differ and differ from the Divine Will*. It is a sign of God’s generosity, the Christians would say grace, that he should sharpen the wills of the separate fractions of himself thereby conferring upon them a certain freedom; just as a father would test his son's will by welcoming and tolerating a certain measure of individuality, even if on some points it differs or even opposes his own as the son grows into a man. In the diversity of the reflections of the divine light projected from the myriad fractions of the divine mirror in manifestation, freedom in manifold dimensions and aspects is gained. It is remarkable that the greatest leaders of men do not impose an iron rule, but with full respect for the freedom of each individual, they gradually lure the richly diversified wills under their guidance into their way of thinking and wishing.

The paradox of freedom is that when one thinks oneself most free, one is most bound. Indeed, what freedom possesses the animal if its reflexes are all ruled by chemical affinity and instinct? What freedom possesses man in so far as he is conditioned by the impressions he receives? By a curious irony, the more the soul frees itself from the compulsion of the senses and the illusion of the ego, the more the will is in harmony with the Divine Will, but this does not rob him {*32.35 noise on tape, assumed missing words are*: of his individuality}, on the contrary, it reinforces it.

Freedom, the price paid by the soul for the privilege of experience, is in the nature of the soul and remains a propelling force behind action. It is this homesickness which prompts man to seek liberation on the spiritual path. But action can liberate and so can the turning within in meditation. A sensitive but inexperienced person may give vent to the innermost call of his soul by fleeing relationship and responsibility that binds. But he may discover persons who are in outer circumstances imprisoned, fettered or yoked by worldly responsiblity, enjoying a far greater inner freedom than the apparently free vagabond. The question is whether one is free from oneself. A beautiful example of what is real freedom was portrayed in *Monsieur Bardet* by Charles Morgan in one of his plays. If you remember, he was a gaol (34.10) keeper and was himself locked up for having released the prisoners. He had understood the problem of freedom: to take the cross of bondage in order to give freedom is the living ideal accomplished by the great masters of humanity. This is liberating action! This is the key to the symbolism of the cross: the hands and the feet tied to bring salvation to one's fellow creatures. If there is anything in spirituality, it is just this: to ask nothing and give all. In fact, the bondage of unselfish relationship is not enslaving; it is selfish dependence that is enslaving. Only the relationship in which one tries to obtain something from another person or use another person for one's own gain is enslaving. In fact the mastermind deliberately uses bondage to free those who enter into warm human relationship and assumes responsibility in order to transfigure the stale order of things into the new understanding, to release the hidden latency of the divine from the abysmal hell of materialistic egotism.

There is also a liberation to be achieved in meditation, in an inner evolution of our attitude to the conditioning of impressions by overcoming the illusion of being what we are not. Clearly, if there is anything that is reflected in our mind, we reflect it in our outer life and affect the outer sphere of our influence with it. But what is more, what one reflects, one becomes! Like a caterpillar or a chameleon the mind assumes the colour of its milieu; the outcome is a confusion between the observer and the observed. The mind being a tissue, a pattern of impressions collected by the current, the soul during the course of its passage through the spheres catches the soul in the maze of its reflections, to the extent that the latter loses track of its role as the observer, confusing itself with the observed. Thus we identify ourselves with the amalgamated impressions encountered, thinking we are what is a mere reflection on the mirror of our soul. This is the reason for our captivity. The great Persian poet Qudsi says: *It is thyself who falls into captivity and again thyself frees thyself from the captivity*. In this confusion lies the source of our enslavement: overcome the illusion, and the consciousness is freed. If a limitation there is, it is in ignorance as Socrates so often underlines. The whole spiritual endeavour consists in dispelling the illusion and bringing consciousness to the realization of its real self which, being beyond limitation, is nothing else but divine. The illusion of sacredness obstructs the awareness of transcendent unity.

The story goes that a fairy once tried to get into a doll's house which was too small for it, and found that it could only enter by putting the various parts of its body in separately. No sooner it discovered that each part was fighting with the others, competing for space, each trying to get the better of the other parts. The experience of separateness, the fractioning of conciousness in several entities had brought it to forget its pristine unity. Such is the experience of God through manifestation. Man forgets that he is only a fraction of God's consciousness distinguished from the remainder of the universal consciousness by the mere fact of its reflection on the myriad infinitesimal mirrors that are human minds, even as the light of the sun is only visible under the aspect of rays through its reflection on specks of dust in the beam of sunlight.

There comes a state of awareness when one no further sees the separateness of individuals but imminent and finally transcendental unity. Sufis concentrate on the manifold aspects of manifestation as expressions of one being working through all. Thereby the being and presence of God becomes revealed. It is difficult for the Western mind, formed by Aristotle, Bacon and Descartes to accept that one can at the same time be separated and united. In the age-old vedas there is a classical formula: *a part of me subsists, and a part of me is projected in manifestation*. One is liable to surmise that the part which is projected is not the same one as remains non-manifest. It is a matter which cannot be grasped by the mind but realized in the silence of meditation. The spiritual dilemma is not *to be or not to be* but *to be and not to be* at the same time. The French language makes a valuable difference between *être* and *exister*: *être* is to be beyond time, and *exister* is to be within the progression of time. In this light, the spiritual pursuit is to be, not to exist.

During his illumination after the great fast in the deer park of Patna, the Buddha who had climbed the ladder of cause and effect, from suffering to desire, from desire to selflessness, from selflessness to overcoming the illusion of the false self, from the false self to the real self, finally attained the beatific state of consciousness where there is cessation of pain and desire and ego in the serenity of the real. Surely you have all experienced sometime that extraordinary stillness where we seem to be at peace with ourselves and in harmony with the universe. When the toil and strife and motion of the world seems for a moment to have come to a standstill. It may happen to us in the quiet of our room after a busy day, or when at night one catches a whiff of fresh air and stops to gaze at the starry sky while the world lies somnolent about us. Or again in the stillness of dawn in the mountains, or after a storm, or in the breathtaking solitude of the desert, overcome by the immensity of space or the meaninglessness of time, or again in meditation. Yes, it then seems as though time was standing still, suspended by some occult decree. Remember the prophesy of the angel in the apocalypse, *and time will be no more*.

It is at these moments that one becomes conscious of the stillness of the soul in contrast with the movement of the world. Usually, as when in a stationary train one observes another train move, one's optic reflex deludes one into thinking that one is moving across space when in fact one is still. This is because consciousness is usually centered in the object reflected on the subject. But no sooner consciousness recovers its seat in the real self, it seems as though the world is moving erratically beyond the silence within. Here in the stillness of the heart, the voice of silence speaks its message beyond human utterance. Here there is no room for time or space or motion or change; but it is not the void that frightened Pascal but the fullness of realization and the still but potent battery from whence originates all action. It is the stronghold of the human powerhouse, as vital and radiant as the sun. Just imagine the power of action which would emanate from such a source. The power of one whose consciousness is centered in this stillness is something beyond description for he has surrendered his own power into the hands of Divine Power!

The whole scope of action can spring from and resolve itself into this silent stillness which is in you and me and in all men within our reach. It is a matter of dying to one's illusory self, to resurrect one's real self which is God. The Sufis call this *fana* and *baqa*—self-abnegation and God realization. It is for this reason that meditation has been taught from time immemorial to train the mind to still its restive random wandering and bring it to rest. The technique and apprenticeship for this can only be the object of personal training and remains a guarded secret as its divulgation if at all possible might place it in the hands of persons who may wish to use it for personal ends.

Now finally, what is the result of meditation upon one's daily life? It seems to the man in the West that if meditation is a source of life, a source of energy, a source of power, a source of inspiration, it might be brought to profit by transforming one's everyday life. And indeed by placing the consciousness at the level of its real self, by centering consciousness on God, meditation has the effect of reproducing itself throughout the day and as a matter of fact when we question what is the purpose of action, surely you will all agree that we wish to seek the highest possible expression of action. And what is this action—to transform conditions and circumstances into something beautiful. The path of the spiritual man is called in the East: the royal road. It is the highest possible achievement and it consists in transforming conditions and circumstances and relationship into something beautiful. In fact the ultimate objective of action is nothing less than to bring Heaven on Earth.

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