



The Place of Education in Spirituality

Thus speaks:

Dear Sisters and Brothers,
[...] Sahaj Marg is essentially a process of becoming. Babuji Maharaj has said so often that knowledge is not necessary for spiritual evolution. That was from his position, his lofty position in the universe, sitting on the pinnacle of spiritual life, where nothing is necessary. [...] But as a Mission, we have come into a sort of invertendo in our evolutionary process too, as I observe. Babuji started with this spiritual evolution of mankind. He concentrated solely on spiritual practice. The few books that were available when I joined this Mission [...] were all from his heart. And they were, in a sense, the *summum bonum* of spiritual values, *summum bonum* of spiritual teaching, and all that was necessary to practice to try to become like Him.

tial for our spiritual progress.
[...] So you see, we are now swinging into one point of the pendulum where we are trying to tackle this educational phase of our spiritual life, because there are parts of this world where the spiritual system without any educational base, or knowledge base, is not considered a total system. It is linked with New



even now, before we commenced this seminar, that people who have been assigned subjects against which they rebelled, have delved deeper and deeper into their own roots, and have come up with surprising evaluations of what their pasts were, of the traditions from which they have arisen, of the cultures from which they have sprung, and the beauties of those pasts—relegated into the subconscious like the foundation of a house, not visible but supporting everything.

It would be a serious and dire mistake to relegate the past into a forgotten past. We must remember that the roots of the tree are what keep the tree in all its glory, its manifestation. [...]

So I hope these courses will develop a broadminded approach with love and respect to each one's own tradition and love, respect and forbearance for all other cultures and religions, because what this world needs today is not knowledge; it is patience, it is tolerance — two values which I believe can be developed only through spiritual practice.

With these words, I close my initial talk and pray for His blessings on all of you. [...] Thank you.

*Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari
Inaugural Address at CREST, 9th
August 2006, Bangalore, Karnataka,
India*

Then came the need for a physical expression of this, and so the Mission started putting up ashrams one by one, one by one. [...] Today there are many — many outside in the world, many in India too. So from the spiritual, we came down to the physical. Now in swinging back and forth, we have come down to the mid-point and we are going to try to offer education so that the mind knows what this is all about, the intelligence doesn't have to speculate. It absorbs what is given to it and makes use of it. [...] We are taught to learn what is essen-

Age in California and voodoo in Africa and humbug in India! So we have to set all these misconceptions straight, and our people in India have to lose this pride that the Hindu teaching is the best teaching, the Vedas are the ultimate teachings, and that the Indian God is God of all. There is no Indian God, there is no Christian God, there is no Muslim God; God is **One**, though He is known by many different names.

[...] What you get out of it will depend upon each one of you. There are no experts here, even in their individual traditions, but I have found

Lalaji

- *Cleanse your manas (mind) with practice of sadhana and then go through literature; otherwise Reality will be lost upon you.*

Babuji

- *As a matter of fact knowledge picked up from the books or scriptures is no knowledge at all in the real sense of the word. It is simply erudition based upon other's experiences, attainment of brain alone, and not the practical knowledge based on self experience and attainment of heart. Let this serve as a guiding light to the rue seekers of the real knowledge. With me it was so, because, instead of striving for the attainment of knowledge, I remained ever in pursuit of Him, my Divine Master, who was the storehouse of knowledge and perfection.*

Chariji

- *Knowledge takes us outside, love brings us inside. Yogic knowledge goes deeper than all these levels of knowledge. In fact, it goes to the ultimate level of loving God, which is only another way of saying that we know God. We really know only that which we love. So love would appear to be an absolute precondition to true knowledge, to enduring and deep knowledge of the object sought to be known.*

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African Beliefs Systems

In his inaugural address to CREST, in August 2006, large excerpts of which are shown on the first page of this issue, our Master alluded to our pasts, the traditions which we came from, the cultures from which they have sprung, and “the beauties of those pasts — relegated into the subconscious like the foundation of a house, not visible but supporting everything.” He thus sketched out the backdrop against which any look on others, on their behaviours should be cast, to effectively support the values of patience and tolerance. During the second session of CREST which was held in Bangalore from 17-29 December, 2006, the various topics recommended by Master were treated in this spirit. The one on Africa related to “African Beliefs Systems”. Before presenting it, I addressed to Master the prayer opposite.

May you speak through me! May these remarks convey your blessings for the suffering humanity, and particularly Africa!

Common features to African beliefs

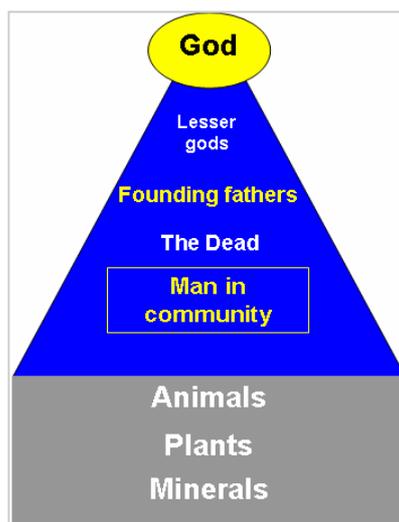
The vastness of the African continent and its diversities, racial, social, historical, religious and cultural, compromise a priori any attempt of generalization of the beliefs of the peoples who live on it. However, a thorough analysis of the diversities of religions in terms of relations to higher forces as well as cosmogonic convictions makes it possible to identify some common features cutting across the entire sub-Saharan Africa: central belief in a vital force, beliefs related to death, the role of the true leader of a group, and the processes of personal development.

The vital force: core value of African beliefs

For any people, groups or clan, African beliefs form a system of values, behaviours and actions governed by the energy of the vital force. Any being, every existing thing, whatever its kingdom or plane of existence, has the vital force. It pervades everything, filters through everything, and partakes in all relationships between beings. Interactions between beings proceed from the exchanges and circulation of the vital force between them. As all is connected, all beings can be regarded as forming a coherent and continuous network of dynamic forces. Any element of the whole can consequently, unconsciously or according to its knowledge and its mastering of the laws of the vital force, as well as according to its degree of primogeniture (in the clan, the group, the kingdom or the plane of existence), influ-

ence the vital force of the other elements of the whole. Each one knows that its force can be reinforced or weakened, that its action on a particular point of the network affects the entire network and that in its turn it is subjected to the effect of the forces of the other beings.

As far as influence relationships are con-



cerned, this network can be illustrated as an eight-level pyramid. (see figure)

The dead belong to the group

African traditional vision of life is holistic and does not discriminate between the dead and the living as far as their interactions are concerned. The interactions of a being with the group do not end with their death; they only change in nature, frequency and modalities. Moreover, the dead can reincarnate into their group of origin or elsewhere, or, according to certain beliefs, they can come back in the forms of animals, plants or minerals. Funerary rituals provide for the belief in reincarnation as well as the influence the dead can exercise over the living – individuals or communities. The principal methods of contacts with the dead are dreams or visions and channelling.

The role of the true leader

The leader of the group is the custodian of order and harmony on the visible planes. He is granted the relevant powers by God, in compliance with established hierarchy of forces. The true leader is regarded as the father, the king. The life of the group is said to arise from him, by divine will. The leader is identified and designated through an initiatory process. The leader is not elected, he is recognized as such on the basis of his level of vital force and the expansion of his wisdom, as well as signs revealed in his favour through mediums. Stages leading a being to this position do not proceed from human will, even though they are opportunities for specific ceremonies organized by the group. These are specific

stages of his personal development.

Beliefs and knowledge: attributes of personal development

African traditional societies postulate that the knowledge of the truth is acquired, gradually, through personal development, and the principal means thereof are: experience, subtle intercommunications and upliftment, reincarnation and incorporations. Each means includes several types of experiences leading to increased knowledge, wisdom or vital force.

At each moment of the life of the group, due care is taken that knowledge is never used against collective interest. For this reason, superstition and pure idolatry are fought against in the majority of the groups, because of related deviationist risks likely to disrupt the harmony of the group.

My prayer is granted

My prayer was granted: while giving the lecture, I understood, forthwith, that African beliefs must be analyzed as a set of coherent systems whose lines of forces are common to all sub-Saharan Africa. A holistic system requires a holistic approach. This pre-empted yielding into the condescending and scolding temptation of stereotypes of fetishism, sorcery and superstition. I also understood that it is not actually proper to associate superstition with societies where knowledge is a collective resource, even if some of its aspects are possessed by initiates only. Indeed, if it is true that superstition feeds on ignorance, a group member whose beliefs are constrained by his ignorance is not superstitious insofar as he is a being in becoming in a group whose stock of knowledge belongs to him too.

In the aftermath of the waves of slavery, colonization and new political and economic currents, what remains of these consistent values, is only scattered scraps, with however, in certain areas, almost intact vestiges. This raises the issue of the foundations which today's African people could build on for their spiritual evolution.

Master said, a few hours after this talk that: “What he said relates to the past and the present of Africa as he understood them. But, as regards the future, the future is mine.” Then turning to me, He added:

“Whenever you will speak about Africa, please note well that the future is mine.”

A stay at CREST — Bangalore, December 15-30, 2006

More of a blessing than a surprise

It commences with the surprise invitation from Master to attend a CREST session from December 17-30. A surprise received as a blessing! All my being is henceforth focused on the practical arrangement of the trip. To go towards Master is to undertake an inward journey towards Him. For anyone attentive, a wealth of signs are there to lead them to shifting from the usual world towards inner silence, self-availability and openness and make them live this experience to the full! Having departed from Luxembourg on the 14th, I reach Bangalore on the 15th at 2:00 a.m. A brother is there with a SRCM sign; the welcome is simple, committed and hearty. We enter the CREST at the beginning of afternoon; the setting is superb - red brick buildings, fruit trees, and flowers - nature benefits from the particular vibration pervading the place. We precede Master by a few hours only; He arrives at CREST around 5:00 p.m., and we are privileged to welcome Him together

Rejuvenating oneself

In this beautiful setting, peaceful and inspiring, the sound of the bell punctuates the various moments of practice and meals: 5 hours in the morning for the first meditation, 7 hours for the morning satsangh, 6 hours for cleaning, 9 hours... And one starts dreaming of ever being able as rigorous in one's practice. This is a rare opportunity to rejuvenate oneself, to set out again with increased strength and determination to the outside world...

It's a place of permanent adjustment and learning...

Adjusting to the new living conditions, the others, the purposely changing schedules! Learning tolerance in this community life, where one learns how to disregard differences to retain only love which binds us owing to, by and through Him. It is a fantastic opportunity to work on oneself. It is amazing to see oneself doing together with others things they initially thought they

among which: a song in Berber, and another in Kikongo language. A small group of brothers and sisters made a move towards true brotherhood by forming a choir and performing songs some of which required learning lyrics with unfamiliar sonorities.

26th December – A talk on “African Beliefs Systems”. The amazement of brothers and sisters who “discover” this system testifies to commonly spread ignorance and stereotypes about Africa. Some sisters (4 or 5 of them expressed their feelings), indicated that they were heartily “touched”, another sister was more explicit saying that she was deeply touched and felt the suffering of that continent, as well as Master's cleaning of it.

Returning...

Master closes the training course on December 28 with an inspiring message - as is his wont - and a superb satsangh. Then things started moving faster in view of his departure from CREST in the next morn-



with brothers and sisters present.

A learning process

Master sets the tone as from the first lecture: “You must teach without appearing to teach”. He illustrates it brilliantly. He is indeed the first teacher, at both the objective and inner levels. He sets an example, inspires, teaches through what He says and what He does – this ranges from his frequent visits to the restaurant to his walks throughout the alleys of CREST, including his many talks with abhyasis gathered by his cottage and who are happily granted a satsangh.

would never be able to do.

To discover, open one's mind...

Topics addressed - Education and Spirituality; Role of Women in Spirituality; Science and Spirituality; Christianity; Islam; African Beliefs Systems (a summary of which is given on page 2) - to just quote a few of them, underlined man's search of the divine in all latitudes.

Two special moments – December 24 and 26

December 24 was a moment of sharing and true brotherhood. During the special event dedicated to Master, songs were performed,

ing, December 29. Those who will accompany him start making their preparations. I leave CREST only later in the night of the 29th; thus having the opportunity to enjoy the atmosphere that prevails after Master's physical departure. He is there; though real, His presence is felt differently. This is conducive to a properly preparing oneself for returning to the outside world, with the impression that one returns from a long inner journey, recharged, reinvigorated and full of gratitude for this grace!

Daily Reflections

Education

Education really means to draw out of you your best in terms of your potentials, best in the physical way, i.e., to prepare you to be fit citizens who can serve society, serve your brothers and sisters, to draw out of you your mental and intellectual potential. According to the Vedas, all knowledge is already in us. The only thing, it is covered by what they call ignorance, and they use the famous example of a mirror which is overlaid with dust. You clean away the dust and everything is clear. So, education is

really the process of removing the ignorance that is covering our inner knowledge, which is absolute, which is perfect, which is eternal, which is supreme.

Taken from "Principles of Sahaj Marg Vol.12", chapter "Meditation and Education", pg 200 -Rev. Chariji

Giving

"What you give shall come back to you multiplied many fold." So one who cannot give love can never receive love. There is no use in looking for it like a blind man searching in a jungle for a black cat. It will never happen. One who looks for love, to be loved, is doomed to

despair, to frustration, to disappointment and ultimately to destruction. Because he is, or she is, working against the law of Nature, the fundamental law of existence, the divine law that: "Thou shalt give." So, the spiritual life is not a life of getting and having, it is a life of giving and not having. My Master paraphrased it beautifully, when saying that a saint is not born to enjoy his life, but he is to be enjoyed by others. He gives.

Taken from "Principles of Sahaj Marg Vol.12", chapter "Love", pg 198-199 -Rev. Chariji

Echos of the Centres

Douala, Cameroon

"On 12th December, 2006, the Douala Centre organized its first ever seminar outside the city. [...] The purpose of the Cameroon Mission was to get off to a fresh start after all sorts of turbulences it underwent since its establishing in 1981. Today [...], the majority has decided to forge ahead. In view of this fresh start, we organized a seminar in Limbé, a balneal city located 80 km off Douala. Having departed at 7:30 a.m., we reached the place at 9:00 a.m. and held the first satsangh at 10:00 a.m. The topic of the day was our spiritual assess-

ment, which Brother Theodore addressed in his talk. The various issues raised in the talk prompted reactions from each participant who expressed themselves on their understanding of the notion of personal assessment and experience throughout an abhyasi's life. It's worth underlining that extensive reference was made to the Mission literature to shed light on our remarks.

This group excursion fostered our questioning of the reason for our spiritual process and our involvement in Sahaj Marg, and the hindrances which hitherto prevented us from clearing the first step and moving

forward with the others. [...] This first initiative was very much appreciated. [...] It has contributed to bringing abhyasis closer to one another and allowed to express our common will to forge ahead and consider obstacles as evolutionary opportunities. A final meditation concluded this beautiful day and we were on our way back to Douala around 4:00 p.m. ..."

MBM.

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

"Our membership has increased with new brothers and sisters whose attendance record is high. At least 32 abhyasis flock to the centre every week for sittings and satsanghs. For some time, satsanghs are held on Saturdays also, hence frequency is three weekly: Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Abhyasis are delighted about this. [...] We are very pleased with the books we received. Every time we turn a page, the reading encourages us to work more. We will see to it that they are put to good use. Our official recognition in Côte d'Ivoire will give us increased impetus. I don't know what should be done in view of the recognition..."

M.C.



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