

CHUTES AND LADDERS

Chutes and Ladders is a game we used to play when we were very young. This is a game whose players start at the bottom of a board trying to reach the top with the throw of the dice, a few spaces at a time. The winner is the first one to reach the top. At some spaces there is a ladder on which the player climbs up, at other spaces there is a chute on which the player slides rapidly back down.

Images of chutes and ladders are interesting—to slide down is quick, it takes no effort, we land on a chute and before we know what happened we are at the bottom again. With a ladder it is one step at a time, we go up a ladder slowly to reach the next step. Our life is like that, our state can change so rapidly, the smallest thing will set us off. We hit a chute and down we go to a lower state in a matter of seconds. Getting out of it is different, we cannot get out in a matter of seconds, we cannot just take another step then slide up. It doesn't work that way, we can slide down to a lower step, but to get back up takes effort. We have to get back up that chute or find a ladder, then one step at a time we crawl out of the hole.

It does not take any effort to fall, to rise we must engage effort. As long as we are unaware we have dropped down we find no reason to climb out. The experience of falling down a chute happens so quickly, the change of state is so intense, so rapid we do not always recognize it immediately. Sometimes people can be in a hole a long time before they realize where they are, before they recognize they have fallen down and they need to climb out.

When we fall certain things accompany these lower states, we acquire a certain torpor which clouds our ability to function. Any lower state, all those which involve arrogance, anger, jealousy, resentment, separations, they all come with torpor—without that torpor we would not be inclined to stay there, we would know something is wrong. Torpor clouds our vision and often comes with a sense of self-righteousness, a self-protecting device to mask other unpleasant feelings; it comes for a reason, although not a good one.

When that torpor comes we find it acceptable to stay in a lower state because our vision is clouded, a fog has set in, we cannot see very far, we walk around blind. Walking around blind keeps us from recognizing the topography of our situation, things are hidden, we are quite ready to fall down another chute if we cannot see where we are going. In fact, our consciousness has dimmed, this torpor has limited our consciousness. The length of time it takes to realize we are in a bad state depends on the amount of work we have done on ourself, the sensitivity we have to ourself. We must have sensitivity to ourself before we can be sensitive to others, if we are not sensitive to ourself we cannot be sensitive to others. The time it takes between the fall and the recognition of our torpor depends on our sensitivity.

When this recognition comes our life hangs in the balance, we must decide to get away from the torpor, analyze ourself, find out what is wrong and intend to change. Now all this is difficult because things depend on our capacity for self-recognition, some of which can be unpleasant. We do not like to think about ourself in an unpleasant way, it stirs our conscience, it can be painful, hard to deal with.

When the recognition comes that something is wrong we see the things we have committed, actions which might be hard to look at, we feel guilty, and if we do not like the feeling of guilt we slip right back into torpor. Resentment can mask guilt, jealousy can mask guilt, arrogance can mask it, anger can mask it. There is a natural reaction of the lower self masking the promptings of conscience which want to take us from that lower situation, but once there is recognition effort must follow, the effort to crawl out of the hole which entails climbing, the slow restoration to a higher state.

This means we have to change the way we think for awhile, enter another state of consciousness. Everyone is capable of this, everyone knows what it is, yet how aware are we of the difference between a higher and lower state of consciousness? How aware are we of the inner peace, the magnanimity in higher states, how aware are we of the love we have in higher states?

How aware are we of such moments, how willing are we to overcome the lower self when there are parts of us enjoying those lower moments, parts of us enjoying the torpor? The lower self revels in feelings of animosity, the sense of I am better than you, feelings of self-importance, it actually revels in them, celebrates them because they make this lower self important. As long as we allow such feelings, another chute is at hand, close by, we descend more and more.

Such feelings come in different ways, sometimes in pairs of opposites. There are those who revel in their own superiority and others who thrive on their inferiority, but both are forms of torpor. Whether we sit in a pool of inferiority feeling sorry for ourselves, or sit in a pool of superiority celebrating ourselves, we are in a state of torpor, it does not matter which one, neither has anything to do with reality. This is only a celebration or a

sadness of the self, our focus is entirely on the self, a state of idol worship, completely egocentric behavior in which the whole world revolves around us, whether incredibly sad or incredibly happy.

When people who revel in themselves meet anyone more famous, more powerful, richer or better than they are in some worldly way, they plunge into a pool of self-pity. These are two sides of the same coin, both torpor, both requiring effort to climb out. Realize the effort we need here, realize that egocentric thought patterns mean we are going down a chute, this is a key to our understanding. If all we can think about is the place where we are, or what is going on in our life, our worldly drama, our worldly situation, we are going down a chute.

Our consciousness must move from that focus on ourself to a focus on our relationship to God. When we move into that praise of God we begin to climb, we climb the ladder, we move from the torpor of self-consciousness to the glory of God-consciousness. Self-consciousness leads to every worldly trap, self-consciousness means being conscious of the self for reasons of the self, not for reasons of knowing God. If the point of knowing the self is to make it function in the world instead of making it move towards God, we have lost the true reason to know ourself.

The two are close to each other, so close we have to be careful about how we move on this path, we have to realize the nature of our interaction with the self. We have to interact with ourself to know ourself, to do away with things which are not true, things attached to us which are not reality. We need to know the self to strip away the veils hiding us from the truth. On the other hand, if we come to know ourself just to be intimate with all the veils hiding us from reality, if we spend our time exploring the

subtleties of these veils, the nuances of self-consciousness, we are stuck in the world, we function in states of torpor as if we were drugged.

We drug ourself with specific mental patterns, with the way we think we are, caught in our relations to others, in relation to things, to women, to men, in relation to money, to age, to pain, to sickness, to health, in relation to all these things, thousands of things. As long as we are not thinking of ourself in relation to God we are stuck in torpor. As thinking about ourself in relation to God grows, we climb up that ladder, we climb from the holes we put ourself into; as thinking about ourself in relation to God increases, thinking about the self decreases, thinking about God increases.

This is the beginning of God-consciousness, the beginning of God-realization, thinking about God becomes part of our being. This is the thinking we need to move along the path; in reality, God exists and we do not. When we reach this understanding and stay there, we can be in that place where we breathe His perfection and our life changes. All the chutes and holes disappear, we seem to be walking on water, there are no more traps to fall into, we bypass them. Even if we should step over them they no longer affect us, our reality has changed, we are not subject to the world's laws, the laws we are subject to when we are not in this state, we pass above the holes without falling in.

This is the state we have to strive for. To strive for it means understanding the obstacles, realizing what stands in our way, realizing that dark forces keep trying to catch us, to trap us into wandering over a hole and falling in. We have to be vigilant, be conscious of the things happening to us so that when we fall into a dark place we acknowledge it will take effort to get out, and we must be ready to commit the effort, we

must be one-pointed in our understanding and ready for the effort. It requires this effort to stop the momentum taking us in the wrong direction.

We have to stop and climb, stop and climb. If we are going to reach the top we have to do a lot of this. Every time we climb one set of steps or one ladder, we should remember there is another ladder to climb; it is not as if we can stop climbing, we cannot. This is an effort which must continue daily, as long as we are in this body we are susceptible to chutes. May God help us be aware of our own state, may God help us love the consciousness that comes when we are with Him. May consciousness of Him be the consciousness we live in.