

Lesson 1

WHAT IS THEOSOPHY?

From Website of Theosophical Society in America

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED about the “big” questions of life?

Who am I really?

Why is the world the way it is?

Where did I come from?

What am I doing here?

What comes next?

When will I find out all these things?

If you have ever wondered about these or other such apparently unanswerable questions, congratulations. Your ability to wonder proves you are human. We human beings are curious about ourselves and the world around us. That curiosity appears especially in little children, who are continually asking “what?” and “why?” As we grow older, we may learn to live with our unknowing and stop asking such questions — at least overtly. But, being human, we have a passion for knowing the meaning of things, and that passion cannot be wholly suppressed.

The human passion for understanding ourselves and the world around us puts us on a quest for self-discovery. The human species has various names to identify itself. We are, in the technical language of biologists, *Homo sapiens* “the intelligent human.” But other names for our kind might be *Homo jocosus* “the playful human,” *Homo loquax* “the talkative human,” and *Homo faber* “the working human.” We might most appropriately be called *Homo quaeritans* “the questing human,” “the human who is on a search.”

Over the ages, humans have developed several approaches to answering their own questions — for pursuing their search. Three of the most important of such approaches are science, philosophy, and religion, each of which starts from its own assumptions and goes about forming its answers in its own way. Because of those differences, science, philosophy, and religion may occasionally seem to contradict one another. But because they are all trying to answer the “big” questions, their right answers cannot really be contradictory. Instead, we need to understand what causes the differences and how we can find the truth in common to these varied approaches. And that brings us to Theosophy and the Theosophical Society.

THEOSOPHY AND THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Theosophy and the Theosophical Society are obviously related, but they are also two different things.

Theosophy is a way of answering the “big” questions of life by trying to reconcile the varied approaches of science, philosophy, and religion, without limiting itself to any of their particular assumptions or ways. It relies on its own assumptions and ways, while embracing all that is true and valuable in other approaches.

Theosophy is both very new and very old. It is new because it can be applied to our curiosity about our own identity and the meaning of

everything in the world around us today. It does that, not with a list of simple, pat answers, but by giving us a new way to look at ourselves and the universe, a way that provides a basis for developing our own answers.

Theosophy is old because it embodies principles that have been known and taught by the sages of the past all over the world. It has been called by many names. In India it is called

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Brahmavidya “The Wisdom of Ultimate Reality” or Sanâtana Dharma “The Eternal Teaching.” In Judaism it is called Kabbalah “That Which Has Been Received.” In China it is called Tao Hsueh “The Teaching of the Way.” In Islam it is called Sufism “The Way of Those Who Wear Wool” (the “pure” or the “wise”). In Christianity it has been called Prisca Theologia “The Ancient Thought about Divine Matters.” It has also been called the Wisdom Tradition, the Perennial Philosophy, the Secret Doctrine, and the Ancient Wisdom.

The term Theosophy is derived from two Greek words, *theos* “divine” and *sophia* “wisdom.” However, Theosophy is not some system of thought prescribed by a deity ruling from on high, but the “Divine Wisdom” that dwells potentially and universally in the human spirit, unfolding gradually through the process of evolution. It is this “Divine Wisdom” within us that stirs our desire to discover who we are and to answer the other big questions.

The term Theosophy was first used in English in 1650 for the teachings of some ancient sages, and was latter applied to the thought of Ammonius Saccas and Plotinus, who founded

the Alexandrian school of Neoplatonism in Egypt in the early third century after Christ. For them Theosophy was the divine knowledge that explained the experiences initiates had in the Greek Mysteries. The term was later used by the Protestant mystic Jakob Böhme, the early Swedenborgians in England, and other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers on spiritual subjects. And it has been applied to such schools of thought as Pythagoreanism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Alchemy, Advaita Vedanta, and Mahayana Buddhism, as well as to such philosophers as Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64), Paracelsus (ca. 1490-1541), and Giordano Bruno (1548-1600).

In recent times, the term has come into more general use, beginning in the year 1875, with the founding of the Theosophical Society. The Society declares three objects:

- To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color.
- To encourage the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science.
- To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity.

To help carry out those objects, the Society presents for consideration a contemporary statement of the Ancient Wisdom called Theosophy. The Theosophical Society does not require its members, or Fellows (as they have traditionally been called), to accept all or indeed any of the Theosophical teachings. The motto of the Society is “There is no religion higher than Truth.” The term “religion” in that motto refers not only to churches, but to any system of belief or ideas — including the Society’s statement of Theosophy.

Most Theosophical Fellows agree generally on the basic ideas and ideals of Theosophy, but they are free to reject any of them and to interpret all of them according to their own lights. To be a member of the Society, one must only

subscribe to its objects. Yet the Society does offer a view of life that is remarkable for its comprehensiveness, coherence, and timelessness, a contemporary formulation of an ancient Wisdom Tradition that is the basis for a satisfying, productive life that enables those who follow it to discover their own inner nature and to contribute to the welfare of the world.

Although this Wisdom has been offered throughout the ages under various names and in many languages, its essence is fundamentally the same, however much its outer aspects and manner of presentation may vary. It especially points to the reality of brotherhood and the imperative necessity of practicing it; but it also gives insight into the unexplained around us and helps the development of our latent powers; and it is the inner harmony of religion, philosophy, and science.

THEOSOPHY AS RELIGION

*God sends His teachers unto every age,
To every clime and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth
And shape of mind, nor gives the realm of
Truth*

*Into the selfish rule of one sole race.
— James Russell Lowell (1819–91)*

The world abounds with differing religions, each addressed to a different people and time. The word religion comes from a Latin term whose root meaning is “to link back.” So different religions link their followers back in different ways to the ultimate source of life, whatever we call it: the Absolute, God, divine Reality, or the like.

Theosophy has been called “the Wisdom Religion,” because it also points the way to that linkage. But Theosophy is not a religion. It does not claim to be a complete and final statement of wisdom and truth, nor does it offer a single interpretation of what Divine Wisdom includes. Theosophy holds that all things, including the human mind, are evolving. We are in the midst of an unfinished world and are ourselves unfinished. Therefore the accumulated knowledge of

The Three Fundamental Propositions

The Secret Doctrine establishes three fundamental propositions:—

(a) An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought — in the words of Mandukya, “unthinkable and unspeakable.”

(b.) The Eternity of the Universe *in toto* as a boundless plane; periodically “the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing,” called “the manifesting stars,” and the “sparks of Eternity.”

(c) The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul — a spark of the former — through the Cycle of Incarnation (or “Necessity”) in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term.

The Secret Doctrine, “Proem”

any subject at any time is necessarily incomplete and can be added to. We are only in the middle of our development, so we still have a great deal to discover.

Theosophy does not bind an individual to any particular belief or creed, but it is dedicated to furthering humanity’s eternal search for the meaning and wholeness of life in a nonsectarian and nondogmatic way. The religions of the world offer methods of this search and are therefore subjects for Theosophical study.



*Helena P. Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott,
co-founders of the Theosophical Society*

Theosophy respects the Divine Wisdom basic to the inner side of all religious teachings. It does not seek to convert any person from the religion they hold, but rather to explain and interpret on a rational basis the inner meanings of various creeds and ceremonies. Annie Besant, the second international President of the Society, has stated the Theosophical attitude succinctly: “Theosophy asks you to live your religion, not to leave it.”

THEOSOPHY AS SCIENCE

Another aspect of Theosophy is scientific, particularly its attitude toward observation and experiment, hypothesis and investigation. Of course, there are also differences between science and Theosophy. Science limits itself to what can be quantified and tested by repeated, controlled, and objective experiments. Theosophy also deals with direct experience, but often of a more subjective and qualitative nature. Nevertheless, many of the concepts outlined in Theosophical literature parallel the emerging knowledge of modern science in striking ways.

The scientific method is basic to the discovery of how the physical world works, and its principal characteristic is an impersonal search for

truth. But all thoughtful scientists today would probably agree with the statement of one of the great Eastern sages: “Every great discovery of science was at first a grand intuition.” Theosophy reaches into the area of these “grand intuitions,” many of which deal with factors beyond the scope of objective proof. But if they are truth, they can be confirmed by all of us who are willing to use our lives as a laboratory.

Science, as such, is not concerned with ethical purposes, though responsible scientists are. All knowledge is power, which can be used for either good or ill, as evidenced by the cures that science has developed to control diseases on the one hand and the instruments of destruction that it has devised for warfare on the other. Theosophy, while pointing out new roads to inner knowledge, also teaches that such knowledge can be safely gained only by those who prepare themselves in action, desire, and thought to hold the welfare of humanity above their personal benefit. Self-development and self-control must go hand in hand with study and adventure in expanding knowledge if both we and the world are to be safe.

THEOSOPHY AS PHILOSOPHY

In still another aspect, Theosophy is philosophy because it postulates a logical explanation for the universe and its laws, as well as for humanity’s origin, evolution, and destiny. In a message she sent to the American convention of 1888, Blavatsky wrote, “Theosophy [is] the philosophy of the rational explanation of things and not the tenets.” That is, Theosophy is not a body of beliefs, but a way of explaining things — a philosophy. Theosophy offers reasons for life left untouched by either religion or science. It holds that the universe is unified, orderly, and purposeful, that matter is the instrument for the evolution of life, that thought is a creative power which we can learn to use effectively, and that experience of both joy and suffering is the means by which we grow in

character and ability and thus attain wisdom, compassion, and power.

We say that Theosophy includes aspects of religion, science, and philosophy, but those three approaches to truth, when rightly followed, are not contradictory. In fact they blend into one another. They are three ways of viewing the truth of the universe, and what at one time is religion or philosophy will be science at another time. As a British scientist, John D. Barrow, has written (*Theories of Everything*, 4):

Today, physicists accept the atomistic viewpoint that material bodies are at root composed of identical elementary particles, as [that view is] well supported by evidence. It is taught in every university in the world. Yet, this theory of physics began amongst the early Greeks as a philosophical, or even mystical, religion without any supporting observational evidence whatsoever. . . . Atomism began life as a philosophical idea that would fail virtually every contemporary test of what should be regarded as “scientific”; yet, eventually, it became the cornerstone of physical science. One suspects that there are ideas of a similar groundless status by today’s standards that will in the future take their place within the accepted “scientific” picture of reality.

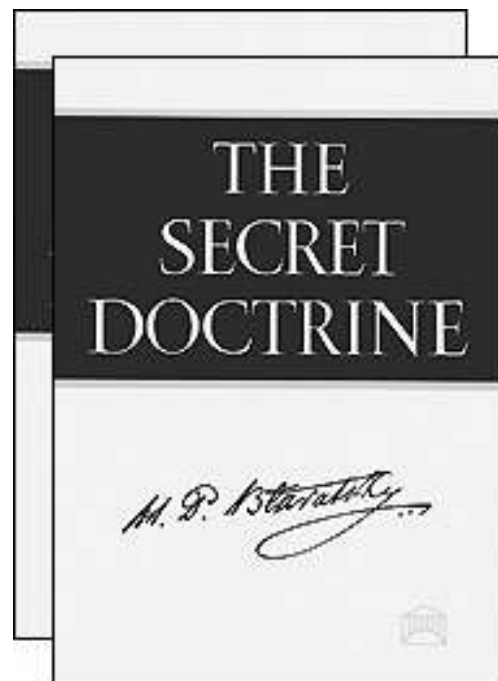
SOME FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEOSOPHY

Theosophy — in its religious, scientific, and philosophical aspects — offers such concepts as the following for consideration:

- Ultimate reality is a unified whole — absolute, impersonal, unknowable, and indescribable.
- The universe in which we live is manifold, diverse, constantly changing, relative (which means that each part has meaning and value only in relation to others), and illusory or “mayavic” (that is, its reality differs from its appearance).
- The ultimate reality is the source of all consciousness, matter, and energy, which are

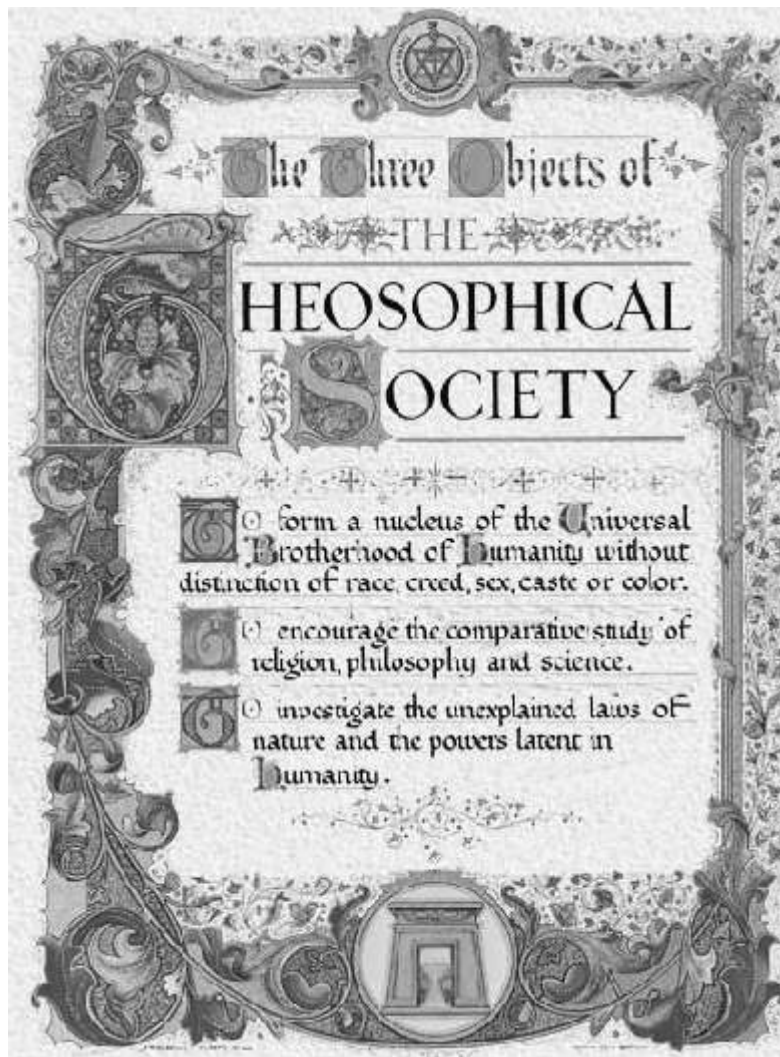
its three mutually necessary aspects in the manifest universe and are present in every being and every particle. There is no dead or unconscious matter.

- The universe and everything in it are emanations or expressions of the ultimate reality, not creations out of nothing by a personal creator.
- The universe is eternal, but with innumerable worlds periodically manifesting within it.
- The universe is pervaded by a collective intelligence, a cosmic mind, which is consciously expressed in varying degrees by all the beings in the universe.
- The physical universe of which we are normally aware is only one aspect of the total universe, which consists of multiple planes, fields, or dimensions of being — coexisting, interpenetrating, and interacting aspects of the whole. Of the seven planes of our solar system, human beings function primarily on the lower three: physical, emotional, and mental.



The Secret Doctrine, the 2-volume magnum opus of Helena P. Blavatsky

- The universe and everything in it are orderly, following patterns of regular cycles, including alternating phases of activity and rest, governed by a universal principle of cause and effect or karma. In human life, this principle of cycles is expressed, among other ways, by repeated rebirths or reincarnation.
- Evolution, which is the result of an inner and intelligent guidance expressed through personal effort, is good, has purpose, and follows a plan.
- Our material forms are evolving, but so are our conscious knowledge of the universe and our spiritual awareness of our basic unity with all life.
- We are composite beings; we have a number of independently evolved principles or faculties whose development is a purpose of evolution. In both the universe and us, there are seven such principles.
- We are threefold beings: (1) a temporary, single-lifetime personality, (2) an abiding, evolving individuality that reincarnates, and (3) a spark or direct emanation of the ultimate reality. The integration of these three aspects is the driving force of our evolution.
- The process of evolution, which begins by unconscious impulse, must eventually become a conscious process directed by the free will and ever increasing self-awareness of the evolving entities. The conscious participation by human beings in evolutionary change is symbolized as walking a path.
- The evolving entities of the universe include intelligences both less and more advanced than human beings, of whom some of the more advanced (the Masters or Adepts) may serve as helpers and guides to the less advanced.



- The key to the advancement of human evolution is a dedication by the individual to the service of others, that is, altruism — an awareness of brotherly unity and a forgetfulness of personal separateness.
- The pain, cruelty, and frustration we experience in life are the result of ignorance, unbalanced actions, relative dislocations, or change; they are not independently existing evils.
- It is possible, as a result of individual effort in this life, for human beings to come by intuitive knowledge or mystical experience to a full awareness of their nonseparateness from the ultimate reality.
- Correspondences, analogies, meaningful connections, and patterned repetitions exist

among all things in the universe. By using those correspondences, we can use what we know to discover the unknown.

- Behind the exoteric or public forms of all religions and religious philosophies there exists an esoteric or inner teaching that holds such concepts as those listed here.



*The Seal of the
Theosophical
Society*

A contemporary effort to express the basis of such fundamental concepts is the Theosophical World View:

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, while reserving for each member full freedom to interpret those teachings known as Theosophy, is dedicated to preserving and realizing the ageless wisdom, which embodies both a worldview and a vision of human self-transformation.

This tradition is founded upon certain fundamental propositions:

1. The universe and all that exists within it are one interrelated and interdependent whole.
2. Every existent being — from atom to galaxy — is rooted in the same universal, life-creating Reality. This Reality is all pervasive, but it can never be summed up in its parts, since it transcends all its expressions. It reveals itself in the purposeful, ordered, and meaningful processes of nature as well as in the deepest recesses of the mind and spirit.
3. Recognition of the unique value of every living being expresses itself in reverence for life,

compassion for all, sympathy with the need of all individuals to find truth for themselves, and respect for all religious traditions. The ways in which these ideals become realities in individual life are both the privileged choice and the responsible act of every human being.

Central to the concerns of Theosophy is the desire to promote understanding and brotherhood among people of all races, nationalities, philosophies, and religions. Therefore, all people, whatever their race, creed, sex, caste, or color, are invited to participate equally in the life and work of the Society. The Theosophical Society imposes no dogmas, but points toward the source of unity beyond all differences. Devotion to truth, love for all living beings, and commitment to a life of active altruism are the marks of the true Theosophist.

These teachings have also been set forth in a poetical way, in a form known as the Three Truths of the White Lotus because they originally appeared in a late nineteenth-century symbolic story called *The Idyll of the White Lotus* by Mabel Collins:

There are three great truths which are absolute and which cannot be lost, but which may remain silent for lack of speech.

The human soul is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no limit.

The principle that gives life dwells in us and around us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not seen or heard or smelt, but is perceived by the one who desires perception.

We are each our own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to ourselves, the decreer of our life, our reward, our punishment.

These truths, which are as great as life itself, are as simple as the simplest human mind. Feed the hungry with them.

Questions for Review:

1. Define theosophy.
2. Why is theosophy considered old?
3. Is theosophy a religion? Why or why not?
4. What is the difference between theosophy as a science as compared to modern science?
5. In what sense is theosophy a philosophy?
6. What are some of the important tenets of theosophy?

Lesson 2

THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

Theosophy, in common with practically all the major religious traditions, considers human beings to be composed of layers of consciousness and bodies. In theosophy, the different layers of consciousness are also referred to as “principles,” as distinguished from the “bodies” through which the principles express themselves. The enumeration of these principles have slight variations among different theosophical writers, but are in agreement in the most essential elements.

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H.P. Blavatsky, the principal source of modern theosophical teachings, stated that human beings consist of seven principles:

1. Ātma: the Spirit, or spark of the Divine
2. Buddhi: the Spiritual Soul, or vehicle of Ātma; Spiritual Soul
3. Manas: the mind, or Human Soul, which consists of two levels, the higher and the lower
4. Kama: desire, the Animal Soul, which is usually linked with the lower mind, forming *kama-manas*

5. Liṅga Śarīra: the astral double which is the model of the physical body

6. Prāṇa: the life energy

7. Sthūla Śarīra: Physical body

These seven principles can be divided into two major parts: the immortal higher triad (or Ātma-Buddhi-Manas) and the lower quaternary composed of the rest, which is discarded upon the death of the person. Knowledge of these principles enable us to better understand the processes involved in such things as the death and after-death states, reincarnation, meditation, healing, mesmerism, and many other non-physical phenomena. Such knowledge constitutes one of the most important foundations of theosophy and esotericism.

Of the seven principles, Ātma has a basic quality different from the others. It is not an individual entity. It is a universal principle that manifests itself through the six vehicles or principles, from Buddhi down to the physical body. It only becomes an individual entity or Monad when it links with Buddhi. For this reason, Blavatsky defines the Monad as Ātma-Buddhi.



The etheric double of a healthy person (From Man Visible and Invisible)

In her Esoteric Instructions to her students, Blavatsky included the Ātmic Aura or Auric Egg (also called Auric Envelope) as one of the principles, in place of Ātma. Similarly, she removed prāṇa as a principle, it being a universal rather than an individual principle.

Body, Astral, Kāma, Lower Manas, Higher Manas, Buddhi, and Ātmic Aura or Auric Egg, are given as the principles. Life is a Universal Kosmic Principle, and no more than Ātman does it belong to individuals. Prāṇa and the Auric Envelope are essentially the same, and again as Jīva it is the same as the Universal Deity. (CW 12:672)

The Auric Envelope was not given out in Blavatsky's public writings because she said it was very sacred. This film or aura is the one that differentiates the human being from pure Aka and boundless Jīva. It is also the preserver of the individual's karmic record, and the source of one's astral form. (CW 12:607-8)

These nuances led to the eventual adoption of a widely popular classification given by Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater which is as follows:

<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Ātma	Spirit	
Buddhi	Intuitional	<i>Spiritual Soul</i>
Arūpa Manas	Causal	<i>Abstract mind</i>
Rūpa Manas	Lower Mental	<i>Concrete mental</i>
Kāma	Emotional; (Astral)	<i>The term "astral" was now used as equivalent to kama rather than Liṅga Śarīra</i>
Liṅga Śarīra	Etheric	<i>The Liṅga Śarīra was called "etheric body" rather than "astral body" and was considered as part of the physical body</i>
Sthūla Śarīra	Physical	

In a later classification, Besant and Leadbeater identified the Monad no longer as Ātma-Buddhi but on a higher level above the Ātmic called the Anupadaka (or Anupapādaka) Plane.

Equivalents in Religious Traditions. The principles of the human being have equivalent concepts in the different traditions.

In the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, they are generally divided into three components:

	<i>Old Testament</i>	<i>New Testament</i>	<i>Qur'an</i>
Spirit	Ruah (Ruach)	Pneuma	Ruh
Soul	Nephesh	Psyche	Nafs
Body	Gewiyah	Soma	Jism

In the theological and mystical literature of these three religions, however, we find that there are further subdivisions that have equivalences in the seven principles of human beings in theosophy.

In the Jewish Kabbalah, for example, higher than the Ruah is *Neshamah* or divine spirit. As such it may be more proper to equate *Neshamah* with Ātma, whereas Ruah would be either the Buddhi or Higher Manas. Furthermore, the Kabbalah constructs the "Tree of Life" which assumes ten principles or *sephiroth* within a human being. The three highest, the triad *Kether*, *Binah* and *Chocmah*, are equiva-

lent to Ātma-Buddhi-Manas, and the others are psychic or physical.

In Christianity, Thomas Aquinas distinguished between the rational soul, sensitive soul, vegetative soul (*Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 78, 1). The vegetative soul is that which is awake in plants, the sensitive soul is active in animals, while the rational soul is present in human beings. These would be equivalent to the Higher Manas, Lower Manas and Kama in theosophy.

In Islamic Sufism, between ruh and the body, there are further subdivisions that corresponds to the theosophical principles. *Qalb* or heart represents the intuitive consciousness or buddhi, while the soul or *nafs* is further divided into many kinds, just as in Thomistic philosophy. They are *nafs al-natiqah*, the rational soul; *nafs al-haywaniyah*, the animal soul; and the *nafs*

al-nabatiyah, the vegetative soul. The Qur'an also classifies the *nafs* into three, although these are more descriptive of the developmental stages of the soul rather than principles. They are the *nafs al-ammarah*, the soul that is prone to evil; *nafs al-lawwamah*, or self-accusing soul or conscience; and *nafs al-mutma'innah*, or soul at peace. (*Qur'an* 12:53; 75:2; 89:27)

The theosophical classification of principles are essentially identical with those of Hindu system, such as those of Vedanta and Yoga, as well as Buddhism. In Vedanta, these principles are identified under the different *kosas* or sheaths, while in Taraka Yoga, they are divided according to the *upadhis* or bases.

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Questions for Review:

1. What are the seven principles in a human being?
2. How are the seven divided or grouped?
3. What is Atma?
4. Name the equivalent terms of the Spirit in the Old Testament, New Testament, Qur'an, in Kabbalah.

Lesson 3

DEATH AND AFTER-DEATH STATES

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

Theosophy teaches that after a person dies, the Ego and its non-physical bodies undergo a process consisting of multiple stages before reincarnating. The process may be very brief (as in young children or cases of premature death) or it can be as long as 3,000 years. Theosophical literature, particularly the *Mahatma Letters*, has extensive teachings about the after-death states, some of which have received validation in parapsychological studies in the past century or so.

Life Span. Each person is born with a certain quantity of life-energy like the oil in a lamp. When the oil is exhausted the person dies even if apparently healthy. When however, the life-energy is not exhausted and the person meets a violent death, then the Ego continues to be conscious and alive, minus the physical body.

There is a distinction therefore between a natural death and a premature death. The latter is of three kinds: death by accident, murder, and suicide. Each of these will undergo a different after-death process depending upon the circumstances of the death. These shall be separately discussed below.

Physical Death. The last organ to die, according to the *Mahatma Letters*, is the brain. At the moment of death, a person recalls one's entire life in a span of a few seconds. "The dying brain dislodges memory with a strong supreme impulse. . . . That impression and thought which was the strongest naturally becomes the most vivid and survives so to say all the rest which now vanish and disappear for ever, to reappear

but in Devachan." (*ML* 93B) This recall has been affirmed by recent researches conducted on near-death experiences, such as those of Dr. Richard Moody. The last dominant thoughts of a person will determine the "life principle" of one's future existence, and the nature of these thoughts will depend upon the predominant character during the person's life. There is lucidity at the moment of death — even among madmen — as the process of life recall is undergone. The Mahatma Koot Hoomi therefore admonishes people to keep silence when a person is dying to avoid disturbing the thoughts and processes that will mold the Ego's future life.

There is a non-physical silver cord that connects the physical body and the *kāma-rūpa*. When this is broken, death becomes permanent. This cord has been observed by clairvoyants since the ancient times. The Bible refers to this in the book of Ecclesiastes 12:5-6: "Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken. . . ."

At the moment of death, an apparition of the person just died may be seen by people at a distance. This is the involuntary projection of the mental illusory body or *māyāvi rūpa*. The image is based on the perception of the dying person, hence the apparition is often seen in the clothes they wear at the moment of death. Blavatsky says if the dying person is drowning, the image will appear as if dripping with

The Death Experience

The experience of dying men — by drowning and other accidents — brought back to life, has corroborated our doctrine in almost every case. Such thoughts are involuntary and we have no more control over them than we would over the eye's retina to prevent it perceiving that color which affects it most. At the last moment, the whole life is reflected in our memory and emerges from all the forgotten nooks and corners picture after picture, one event after the other. The dying brain dislodges memory with a strong supreme impulse, and memory restores faithfully every impression entrusted to it during the period of the brain's activity. That impression and thought which was the strongest naturally becomes the most vivid and survives so to say all the rest which now vanish and disappear for ever, to reappear but in Devachan. No man dies insane or unconscious — as some

physiologists assert. Even a madman, or one in a fit of delirium tremens will have his instant of perfect lucidity at the moment of death, though unable to say so to those present. The man may often appear dead. Yet from the last pulsation, from and between the last throbbing of his heart and the moment when the last spark of animal heat leaves the body — the brain thinks and the Ego lives over in those few brief seconds his whole life over again. Speak in whispers, ye, who assist at a death-bed and find yourselves in the solemn presence of Death. Especially have you to keep quiet just after Death has laid her clammy hand upon the body. Speak in whispers, I say, lest you disturb the quiet ripple of thought, and hinder the busy work of the Past casting its reflection upon the Veil of the Future.

Mahatma Koot Hoomi, *ML-93B*

water. This is different from the apparitions of dead people due to the “reflections in the astral light” and not due to the projection of the illusory body (*ML* Appendix I).

The Separation of the Principles. To understand what follows after physical death, one must be familiar with the seven human principles: the physical body, the etheric double (*liṅga arīra*), life-energy (*prāṇa*), the desire-body (*kāma-rūpa*), the mind (*manas*), the spiritual soul (*buddhi*) and the spirit (*Ātma*).

In the case of a normal death, the lowest three principles are separated from the higher four. These three are the physical body, the etheric double (*liṅga arīra*), and *prāṇa*. There is a loss of consciousness and the entity will be in its *kāma rūpa* or desire body. The environment

where it enters into is called *kāma-loka* or the desire-world. The Ego goes into sleep and loses all recollection until it reawakens in Devachan. Those who know that they are physically dead, says the *Mahatma Letters*, are either Adepts or sorcerers. This stage in *kāma-loka* may last from a few hours to several years, depending upon the Ego, the nature of death, and other factors.

It then goes into a long period of “gestation” where it prepares for entry into devachan. The length of this period has been described by the Mahatma KH as dependent upon one's “spiritual stamina.”

Second death. At the end of the gestation period, the entity will now undergo a “second death” when the lower two principles will sep-

Near-Death Experiences

In recent years the testimony of hundreds of people who have experienced "clinical death" have been collected and published by medical researchers, the best known being Dr. Raymond Moody (author of *Life After Life*) and Dr. Kubler Ross (author of *On Death and Dying*).

The experiences of these people who were revived and lived to tell what happened to them when they were "dead", bear a striking similarity to those described in Theosophical literature. For most, the first experience is the passing through a dark enclosure, before their consciousness refocuses and they become aware of themselves, in a hard-to-define spiritual body, from which they watch, in a detached way, their physical body being revived on the operating table or

rescued from a wrecked car. Many then find themselves in a world of light and freedom in which they meet a "being of light" which epitomizes perfect understanding and perfect love. Often they experienced an incredibly vivid instant review or replay of their lives and understand that they must return to complete the unfinished business of this incarnation. Many were reluctant to do so and all testified (including the actor Peter Sellers and other well-known persons) that the experience completely changed their lives. They no longer had any fear of death and understood that, from this time on, their mission was to cultivate love for others and to go on learning, to the end of life.

From "Life After Death," Theosophical Society in New Zealand. [Http://www.theosophy.org.nz/Publications/Pamphlets/LifeAfterDeath.html](http://www.theosophy.org.nz/Publications/Pamphlets/LifeAfterDeath.html)

arate from the higher two, that is, *kāma-rūpa* together with the mental body will now detach from the *Ātma-Buddhi*. In this process of separation there is a struggle that will determine how much of the mental body will go with the *Ātma-Buddhi*, and how much with the *kāma-rūpa*. Upon separation, the *kāma-rūpa* and mental body becomes a "shell" that will gradually disintegrate in time. These shells are the "spirits" contacted by mediumistic seances.

In very rare cases where the person is extremely selfish, the entire mental body may be drawn towards the *kāma-rūpa*, thus depriving the *Ātma-Buddhi* with the necessary vehicle for future incarnations. This is what is called a "lost soul," an intelligent being in *kāma-loka* which is destined for annihilation because it is no longer linked to its immortal source, the *Ātma-Buddhi*. When the wickedness is of a "spiritual, refined" nature, such a soul goes to *Avichi*, the antithesis of *Devachan*, which is often said to be the earth itself. The lost soul may still retain a lot of

life-energy, however, and can even incarnate again and again until its vitality is exhausted. As a shell, it may also become a Dweller of the Threshold that gets attracted to a new personality that is formed by the former parent Ego (*Ātma-Buddhi*). There is still a possibility of re-linking between the soul and its parent Ego when there is the slightest spark of repentance in it. Lost souls that become non-entities, however, and which do not deserve *Avichi*, slid down to the Eighth Sphere, a globe denser than the earth and is spoken of as the "furnace of nature" where the materials of the soul are recast for future development.

Devachan. The purer part of the mental body that goes with the *Ātma-Buddhi* is the Ego that will reincarnate in a subsequent life. After the "second death" the Ego enters into the *Devachanic* state which is blissful, where no traces of sorrow can enter. It is oblivious of what is happening in the physical world. The Ego may stay in *Devachan* for ten to thirty cen-

turies, depending upon the wealth of experience of the preceding physical life. Devachan however is not the same as the heaven of Christians. It is a subjective state where the unfulfilled yearnings of the Ego are realized.

When the Ego enters Devachan, the shell which is left behind develops “a kind of hazy consciousness of its own from what remains in the shadow of personality.” (ML 93B)

*With premature deaths —
accident, murder, and
suicide the fates of the Egos
after death are different. Their
death-hour has not come, and their
reservoir of life-energy has not been
exhausted.*

When the devachanic rewards come to an end, the ego then forms another mental and emotional vehicle drawn from the life-atoms of the preceding life. These atoms, also called tanhic elementals, await the Ego as it leaves Devachan, and will determine the type of personality the Ego will have in the succeeding life. (ML 93b)

Premature deaths. With premature deaths — accident, murder, and suicide the fates of the Egos after death are different. Their death-hour has not come, and their reservoir of life-energy has not been exhausted. They are not actually “dead” but only have lost their physical bodies as a vehicle. They may retain consciousness and can hence communicate with the living. They are also called Elementaries, Earthbound souls, or “Earth-walker.”

The *Mahatma Letters* mention that the after-death states of those who died prematurely differ according to the circumstances of their death. Those who died of accidental death and which are “good and innocent Egos” will have no recollection of the accident and enter into a sleeping state (with happy dreams or without)

until the time of its natural death. When they do dream, they “move and live among their familiar friends and scenes.” Those who die due to fits of temporary insanity similarly go into a state of slumber.

Those which are sensual and selfish, on the other hand, “suffer all the tortures of a horrible nightmare,” and will wander about and drawn by mediums who open up opportunities for gratifying their desires. The extreme cases become Pi āchas or virtual demons that incite living human beings to crimes. “The majority — neither very good nor very bad, the victims of accident or *violence* (including murder) — some *sleep*, others become *Nature pi āchas*, while a small minority may fall *victims* to mediums and derive a new set of skandhas from the medium who attracts them.” (ML 76)

Suicides, who tried to escape their suffering, only find themselves still alive and conscious without a physical body, regretting their actions, and thus suffer with intensity.

The *Mahatma Letters* specifically mentions the case of Guiteau, the assassin who killed President Garfield, and who was later executed. “Guiteau is gone into a state during the period of which he will be *ever firing at his President*, thereby tossing into confusion and shuffling the destinies of millions of persons; where he will be *ever tried* and *ever hung*. Bathing in the reflections of his deeds and thoughts — especially those he indulged in on the scaffold.” (ML 70-C)

Communication with dead. As a general rule, communication with the dead is not possible due to the unconscious state of the Ego in kāma-loka. Later, when the Ego awakens in Devachan, the gap between Devachanic consciousness and normal consciousness prevents such contact. However, there are exceptions to this rule, such as the following:


A. When the person died prematurely, such as in accident, murder or suicide. Under these circumstances, while the after-death states are

not all uniform, contact is possible in some cases.

B. When the consciousness of a living person is drawn to the consciousness of the person just died prior to its entry into the “gestation” period.
C. When a purified living person is able to elevate his or her consciousness to the Devachanic level and communicate with the Ego in Devachan.

The claimed communications with the dead among spiritualist is actually communication with the kāma-rūpa or astral shells of the Egos that have gone on to Devachan. These shells may still retain memories and qualities of the deceased personality, and hence when contacted by mediums may appear to have intelligence. The real Ego, however, have already detached itself from the kāma-rūpa once it enters Devachan.

The *Mahatma Letters* strongly warns against the attempts of mediums to contact the


*As a general rule,
communication with
the dead is not possible due to
the unconscious state of the Ego in
kāma-loka.*

Elementaries. “Woe to those whose *T ishṇā* [thirst] will attract them to mediums, and woe to the latter, who tempt them with such an easy *Upadāna* [material cause for existence]. For in grasping them, and satisfying their thirst for life, the medium helps to develop in them — is in fact the cause of — a new set of *Skandhas* [attributes], a new body, with far worse tendencies and passions than was the one they lost.” (*ML* 68)

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Questions for Review:

1. What determines the life span of an human being?
2. What are the three circumstances that cause premature death? What happens to people who die of premature death?
3. What is the significance of the silver cord?
4. What is the explanation of the apparition of the recently dead persons who are seen by others even in a distant place?
5. In normal death, what principles of the body are separated or dropped off? What remains after these are dropped off?
6. What is the so-called “second death”?
7. What are “shells”?
8. What is a so-called “lost soul”?
9. What is Devachan and what is the principle that enters it?
10. What happens to suicides?
11. Can we communicate with the dead? Under what circumstances?
12. What are Elementaries?

Lesson 4

REINCARNATION

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

Reincarnation means “to be born again in the flesh,” from the Latin *re-* “again,” *in* “in,” and *carn*, “flesh.” It is the theory or belief that human beings are born into the physical body, not just once, but multiple times. In many religions and teachings, it includes being born into animal bodies, but in others, such as in theosophy, only in human forms.

Belief in reincarnation is an ancient one. In the East, it is an integral part of Hindu philosophy and religion, and may be found in the *Laws of Manu*, *Bhagavad Gita*, the Upaniads, the Purāṇas and even in the earliest of the Vedas, the *Rig Veda*. It is also called *Samsāra* or the cycle of birth and rebirth from which every aspirant seeks release to attain liberation or Mokṣa. The cause of such return is *trishna* (tṛṣṇā) or thirst — due to attachment to people and things. The *Laws of Manu* teaches rebirth into animal form. It is invariably linked to the doctrine of Karma, or the law of cause and effect.

Reincarnation is also part of Buddhist belief, despite the fact that Buddhism denies the existence of a enduring Self or Ātman. The reincarnating entity is composed of Skandhas or aggregates which are manifested from life to life.

Among African traditional beliefs, we also find reincarnation, such as in the Yoruba and Edo-speaking tribes. The indigenous peoples of Australia and the Pacific Islands similarly hold such beliefs, such as among the Maoris, Tasmanians, Tahitians, Fijians, etc. (*The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, p. 192)

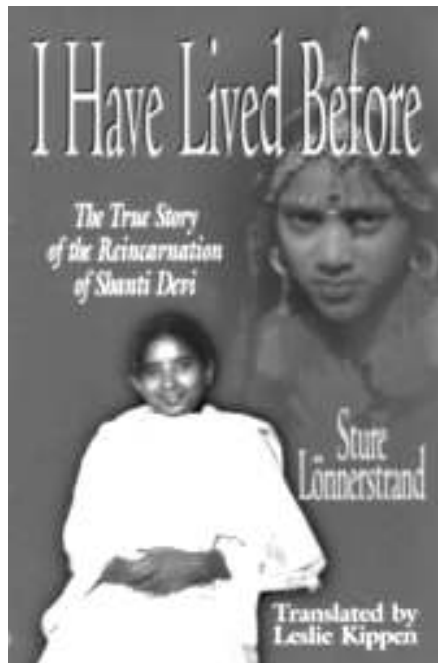
In the West, belief in reincarnation is more universal than is usually thought, especially in the ancient pre-Christian periods. The earliest Greeks embraced belief in reincarnation. It can even be found in the Orphic myths. In the 6th century BCE, Pythagoras included it among his teachings. Herodotus (c. 484-425 BCE) speaks of it as part of the Egyptian religion. Socrates and Plato (427-347 BCE) taught reincarnation, such as in his *Republic* (Book 10) and in the dialogue *Meno*:

The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all.

The list is long, and it includes Cicero, Lucretius, Apollonius of Tyana, Plutarch, Plotinus and Neo-Platonists such as Iamblichus and Proclus.

Judaism. The Judeo-Christian tradition has had an ambivalent attitude towards reincarnation. The Jews during the time of Christ were composed of three main groups: the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes. The Pharisees, which is the most influential of the three, believe in reincarnation. The Sadducees did not even believe in immortality. The historian Josephus speak of the belief of the Pharisees as follows:

They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or



An account of the case of Shanti Devi, who remembered her past life with amazing detail.

viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again. (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk XVIII, Ch. 1, 3)

They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies, but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. (*The Wars of the Jews*, Bk II, Ch. 8, 14)

Philo Judaeus (20 BCE - 54 CE), the Jewish philosopher, wrote that “the air is

full of souls; those who are nearest to earth descending to be tied to mortal bodies return to other bodies, desiring to live in them” (*De Somniis*, quoted in *Reincarnation: An East-West Anthology*, 35).

The Talmud calls reincarnation *gilgul neshamot*, and distinguished it from *ibbur*, which is inhabiting not through birth but by possession.

The Old Testament (Apocrypha) contains verses that imply reincarnation. The following were part of the original King James 1611 translation of the Bible (Appendix). In the Wisdom of Solomon, it states:

19: For I was a witty child, and had a good spirit. 20: Yea rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled.

Then in Ecclesiasticus or Book of Sirach:

8: Woe be unto you, ungodly men, which have forsaken the law of the most high God! for if ye increase, it shall be to your

destruction:

9: And if ye be born, ye shall be born to a curse: and if ye die, a curse shall be your portion.

These portions are however somewhat differently translated in later versions such as in the New American Bible.

A well-known Rabbi, Manasseh Ben Israel, who wrote *Nishmath Hayyim*, wrote:

The belief or the doctrine of the transmigration of souls is a firm and infallible dogma accepted by the whole assemblage of our church with one accord, so that there is none to be found who would dare to deny it . . . Indeed, there are a great number of sages in Israel who hold firm to this doctrine so that they made it a dogma, a fundamental point of our religion. We are therefore duty bound to obey and to accept this dogma with acclamation . . . as the truth of it has been incontestably demonstrated by the Zohar, and all books of the Kabalists. (Quoted in *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, pp. 132-3)

Belief in reincarnation or *gilgul* in Judaic thought continues to this day in the Kabbalah, or the mysticism of the Jews. As Gershom Sholem, the foremost modern authority on the Kabbalah, states: “Transmigration is taken for granted in the Kabbalah from its first literary expression in the *Sefer ha-Behir*” (*Kabbalah*, p. 345). The same is true with another branch of Judaism called Hasidism which began in Poland in the 18th century (cf. *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*).

Christianity. During the time of Jesus, the doctrine of reincarnation was apparently a common belief. Thus, when Jesus asked who the people think he was, the disciples told him that “Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” (Mt 16:14) – an evident indication that reincarnation was commonly accepted. The response of Jesus to this report was even more revealing:

They Remembered Their Past Lives



Gustave Flaubert, author of Madame Bovary

I do not have, as you do, that feeling of a life that is but beginning, the stupefaction of an existence just commencing. It seems to me, on the contrary, that I have always existed! I see myself in the different ages of history, quite clearly, engaging in different trades and experiencing various fortunes. . . . Many things would be explained if we only knew our real genealogy.

LETTER TO GEORGE SAND

General George Patton, U.S. Army

So as through a glass and darkly, the age long strife I see, where I fought in many guises, many names, but always me.

GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON



Henry David Thoreau: American Transcendentalist and author of *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*.

I lived in Judea eighteen hundred years ago, but I never knew that there was such a one as Christ among my contemporaries.

And Hawthorne, too, I remember as one with whom I sauntered in old heroic times along the banks of the Scamander amid the ruins of chariots and heroes . . . As the stars looked to me when I was a shepherd in Assyria, they look to me now as a New-Englander. . . . As far back as I can remember I have unconsciously referred to the experiences of previous existences.

LETTERS AND JOURNALS



While memory is physical and evanescent and depends on the physiological conditions of the brain . . . we call reminiscence the memory of the soul. And it is this memory which gives the assurance to almost every human being, whether he understands it or not, of his having lived before and having to live again. Indeed, as Wordsworth has it:

*“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,
The soul that rises with us, our
life’s star,
Hath elsewhere had its setting, And
cometh from afar.”*

H. P. Blavatsky, *Key to Theosophy*

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist . . . And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. (Mt 11:11, 14)

At another time, Jesus was asked by his disciples about a man who was born blind: “Who did sin, this man, or his parents?” (Jn 9:1-3).

This question not only assumed that reincarnation was one of the possible reasons, but that the man was blind because of the law of cause and effect – karma, the twin doctrine of reincarnation.

The New Testament Apocryphal books also contains numerous references to reincarnation. The *Pistis Sophia*, a Gnostic gospel, states: “The discarnate soul which has not solved the mystery of the breaking of the bonds of the seals is brought before the virgin of light, who, after judging it, hands it over to her agents, who carry



The Epitaph of Benjamin Franklin
written by himself

*The body of
B. Franklin, Printer
(Like the Cover of an Old Book
Its Contents torn Out
And Stript of its Lettering and Gilding)
Lies Here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be Lost;
For it will (as he Believ'd) Appear once More
In a New and More Elegant Edition
Revised and Corrected
By the Author.*

it into a new body” (*Reincarnation: East-West Anthology*, p. 56)

In the century after the death of the apostles of Jesus, the doctrine of reincarnation continued to be embraced by the early Christian leaders. The most prominent among these were Justin Martyr (100-165), Clement of Alexandria (150-220), and Origen (185-254). Origen, who was called by St. Jerome as “the greatest teacher of the early Church after the Apostles,” wrote:

Is it not in conformity with reason, that every soul . . . is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and

former actions? It is probable, therefore, that the soul which conferred more benefit by its [former] residence in the flesh than that of many men . . . stood in need of a body not only superior to others, but invested with all excellent qualities. (*Contra Celsum*, I, 32; quoted in *Reincarnation: Phoenix Fire Mystery*, p. 147)

There were contrary views. Thus Tertullian ©. 160-225) and Ireneaus ©. 120-200) did not subscribe to transmigration of souls. Ireneaus' main reason was that we do not remember our previous lives (*Against Heresies*, II, 33, 1).

By the third century, however, the Christian world had become sharply divided in its views not only on the matter of reincarnation but on many other crucial issues, such as whether there were secret teachings of Jesus, or whether Jesus was God or man. When matters came to a crisis, councils were convened and resolved by votation. In the year 543, at the Council of Constantinople convened by the Emperor Justinian (and with the protestation of the reigning Pope Vigilius), Origen's view of the pre-existence of the soul was declared anathema. The validity of this council has been questioned. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

Were Origen and Origenism anathemized? Many learned writers believe so; an equal number deny that they were condemned; most modern authorities are either undecided or reply with reservations. ("Origen and Origenism")

Beginning this period, however, reincarnation became a heretical doctrine, despite its acceptance among Jews and the great Church leaders of the first several centuries, including the Gospels themselves. The Western Church, particularly after the schism of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, solidified its monopoly over dogmas of Christianity with the backing of temporal political power. Reincarnation as a doctrine faded away from mainstream Christian literature and discussion.

The Wisdom Tradition holds that life and death, being born and dying, are only temporary events in our vast cycle of existence. We go on repeating them on earth until we have learned all this world has to teach us. Then we move on to other forms of activity and rest, in an endless pilgrimage through all the worlds of the cosmos. What we think of as death is only a temporary pause, a minor turning point in an adventure that is grounded in Divine Reality and therefore has no beginning and no end.

From "Death and Life Beyond." Theosophical Society in America. [Http://www.theosophical.org/theosophy/views/deathandlife/](http://www.theosophical.org/theosophy/views/deathandlife/)

It re-emerged powerfully in certain Christian sects in the 10th century, namely, the Cathars, Albigenses, Waldenses and Bomogils. These were violently suppressed by the inquisition and many adherents were burned at stake. They were finally obliterated in the 14th century.

Despite the suppressive atmosphere, one still finds the teaching on reincarnation among prominent Christian writers, such as Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), William Alger (1822-1905), Henry More (1614-1687). More wrote of this in his poem "A Platonick Song of the Soul":

*I would sing the Prae-existency
Of human souls, and live once o'er again
By recollection and quick memory*

*All that is past since first we all began.
(Quoted in Oderberg, 1973)*

The Reformation of the 16th century and the scientific revolution that started in the 17th century led to the weakening of the Church's monopoly on "truth." Add to this was the rapid growth of comparative religious study that led to much wider religious tolerance. By the 19th century, the doctrine of reincarnation slowly mushroomed again in Christian countries, such as in the writings Henry David Thoreau and the Transcendentalists in the U.S., the growth of Spiritualism, and the establishment of the Theosophical Society. By the 20th century, we find Christian churches that officially accept reincarnation, such as the Liberal Catholic Church and the Unity Church of Christianity, in addition to the reemergence of Gnostic groups that reawakened interests in the teachings of the early Gnostics. This has resulted in the open and liberal inquiry into the role of reincarnation in Christian dogma, such as Hans Kung's *Eternal Life?* Open acceptance of reincarnation as part of Christianity can be found in such books as *Reincarnation in Christianity* by Dr. Geddes McGregor, an Anglican theologian and priest, and *The Case for Reincarnation* by the Rev. Leslie D. Weatherhead. But overall, Christianity generally remains opposed to the doctrine as contradictory to the teaching on resurrection and judgment after death. Surveys of populations of Christian countries, however, appear to indicate a significant percentage of Christians who believe in reincarnation. Gallup polls in 1981 in the United States, for example, showed 25% of Catholics and 21% of Protestants believe in reincarnation.

Islam. Orthodox Islam does not endorse reincarnation as a doctrine, but Sufis, the mystics of Islam, do. It is called *tanasukh* in Arabic. The most famous statement of the evolutionary role of reincarnation was made by the Sufi mystic Rumi:

*I died as mineral and became a plant,
I died as plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and I was Man.*



During the time of Jesus, the doctrine of reincarnation was apparently a common belief. Thus, when Jesus asked who the people think he was, the disciples told him that "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets" (Mt 16:14) – an evident indication that reincarnation was commonly accepted.

*Why should I fear? When was I less by
dying?
Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar
With angels blest; but even from
angelhood
I must pass on.*

Modern Research. In the latter half of the twentieth century, studies in reincarnation took a new turn when researchers began to actually verify the claims of people (particularly children) who said that they remembered their previous lives. One of the events that triggered this direction was a book entitled *The Search*

for *Bridey Murphy* written by Morris Bernstein, about a woman who, under hypnosis, spoke about her past life. The case became controversial after some investigators claimed that it was a hoax, but it was sufficient to arouse the interest of independent researchers to do their own verifications.

The most famous, as well as the most extensive, research done on reincarnation was made by Dr. Ian Stevenson, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry in the University of Virginia. He investigated more than 2,000 cases of documented claimed memories of previous lives from more than ten countries and built up a remarkable body of evidences that strongly demonstrated not only survival after death but also reincarnation. His essay on his initial researches, *The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of Former Incarnations*, won the William James Award of the American Society of Psychological Research. The strength of his research lies in the fact that many of his subjects were children whose claims were authenticated by later verification. He has published detailed accounts of these cases in many books, particularly *20 Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, and a multi-volume work on the details of different cases in different countries.

Stevenson further found additional sources of evidences of reincarnation through xenoglossy (or the knowledge of a language not learned in this life but which was known to the person in a previous remembered life) and birth marks (where the present life exhibit physical evidences of the manner of death of the previous life, such as absence of specific fingers at birth which corresponds to the amputated fingers in the remembered life). He published one case of unlearned language in detail under the title *Xenoglossy*, and wrote two other books on birthmarks, entitled: *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*.

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What Eminent People Say of Reincarnation

I am certain that I have been here as I am now a thousand times before, and I hope to return a thousand times.

THOMAS H. HUXLEY

I know I am deathless. No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before. I laugh at what you call dissolution, and I know the amplitude of time. . . .

And as to you, Life, I reckon you are the leaving of many deaths, (No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

WALT WHITMAN

The soul comes from without into the human body, as into a temporary abode, and it goes out of it anew it passes into other habitations, for the soul is immortal.

It is the secret of the world that all things subsist and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again. Nothing is dead; men feign themselves dead, and endure mock funerals... and there they stand looking out of the window, sound and well, in some strange new disguise.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Reincarnation contains a most comforting explanation of reality by means of which Indian thought surmounts difficulties which baffle the thinkers of Europe.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

My life often seemed to me like a story that has no beginning and no end. I had the feeling that I was an historical fragment, an excerpt for which the preceding and succeeding text was missing. I could well imagine that I might have lived in former centuries and there encountered questions I was not yet able to answer; that I had been born again because I had not fulfilled the task given to me.

CARL JUNG

Questions for Review:

1. In theosophy, does reincarnation mean being reborn into animal bodies?
2. What is the basis for saying that reincarnation is part of Jewish religion as well as early Christianity?
3. What is the view of Islam and Sufism on reincarnation?
4. What are scientific researches made on reincarnation?
5. What are your personal views about reincarnation?

Lesson 5

KARMA

Annie Besant

Condensed from *The Ancient Wisdom*

Having traced the evolution of the soul by the way of reincarnation, we are now in a position to study the great law of causation under which rebirths are carried on, the law which is named Karma.

Karma is a Sanskrit word, literally meaning “action”; as all actions are effects flowing from preceding causes, and as each effect becomes a cause of future effects, this idea of cause and effect is an essential part of the idea of action, and the word action, or karma, is therefore used for causation, or for the unbroken linked series of causes and effects that make up all human activity. Hence the phrase is sometimes used of an event, “This is my karma,” *i.e.*, “This event is the effect of a cause set going by me in the past.” No one life is isolated! It is the child of all the lives before it, the parent of all the lives that follow it, in the total aggregate of the lives that make up the continuing existence of the individual. There is no such thing as “chance” or as “accident”; every event is linked to a preceding cause, to a following effect; all thoughts, deeds, circumstances are causally related to the past and will causally influence the future; as our ignorance shrouds from our vision alike the past and the future, events often appear to us to come suddenly from the void, to be “accidental,” but this appearance is illusory and is due entirely to our lack of knowledge. Just as the savage, ignorant of the laws of the physical universe, regards physical events as uncaused, and the results of unknown physical laws as “miracles”; so do many, igno-

rant of moral and mental laws, regard moral and mental events as uncaused, and the results of unknown moral and mental laws as good and bad “luck.”

THE MASTERY OF DESTINY

When at first this idea of inviolable, immutable law in a realm hitherto vaguely ascribed to chance dawns upon the mind, it is apt to result in a sense of helplessness, almost of moral and mental paralysis. Man seems to be held in the grip of an iron destiny, and the resigned “kismet” of the Moslem appears to be the only philosophical utterance. Just so might the savage feel when the idea of physical law first dawns on his startled intelligence, and he learns that every movement of his body, every movement in external Nature, is carried on under immutable laws. Gradually he learns that natural laws only lay down conditions under which all workings must be carried on, but do not prescribe the workings; so that man remains ever free at the center, while limited in his external activities by the conditions of the plane on which those activities are carried on. He learns further that while the conditions master him, constantly frustrating his strenuous efforts, so long as he is ignorant of them, or, knowing them, fights against them, he masters them and they become his servants and helpers when he understands them, knows their directions, and calculates their forces.

Hence the saying that “knowledge is power,”

for exactly in proportion to his knowledge can he utilize these forces; by selecting those with which he will work, by balancing one against another, by neutralizing opposing energies that would interfere with his object, he can calculate beforehand the result, and bring about what he predetermines. Understanding and manipulating causes, he can predict effects, and thus the very rigidity of Nature which seemed at first to paralyze human action can be used to produce and infinite variety of results. Perfect rigidity in each separate force makes possible perfect flexibility in their combinations. For the forces being of every kind, moving in every direction, and each being calculable, a selection can be made and the selected forces so combined as to yield any desired result. The object to be gained being determined, it can be infallibly obtained by a careful balancing of forces in the combination put together as a cause. But, be it remembered, knowledge is requisite thus to guide events, to bring about desired results. The ignorant man stumbles helplessly along, striking himself against the immutable laws and seeing his efforts fail, while the man of knowledge walks steadily forward, foreseeing, causing, preventing, adjusting, and bringing about that at which he aims, not because he is lucky but because he understands. The one is the toy, the slave of Nature, whirled along by her forces: the other is her master, using her energies to carry him onwards in the direction chosen by his will.

That which is true of the physical realm of law is true of the moral and mental worlds, equally realms of law. Here also the ignorant is a slave, the sage is a monarch; here also the inviolability, the immutability, that were regarded as paralyzing, are found to be the necessary conditions of sure progress and of clear-sighted direction of the future. Man can become the master of his destiny only because that destiny lies in a realm of law, where knowledge can build up the science of the soul and place in the hands of man the power of controlling his future — of choos-

The Three Types of Karma

Eastern philosophy classifies Karma into three important categories:

Unripe Karma: the karma that will not yet be activated in this particular life

Ripe Karma: those which will manifest during this lifetime

Present Karma: the karma forces that are constantly being generated by the individual at the present time.

ing alike his future character and his future circumstances. The knowledge of karma that threatened to paralyze, becomes an inspiring, a supporting, an uplifting force.

THE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

Karma is, then, the law of causation, the law of cause and effect. It was put pointedly by the Christian Initiate, S. Paul: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.”¹ Man is continually sending out forces on all the planes on which he functions; these forces — themselves in quantity and quality the effects of his past activities — are causes which he sets going in each world he inhabits; they bring about certain definite effects both on himself and on others, and as these causes radiate forth from himself as center over the whole field of his activity, he is responsible for the results they bring about. As a magnet has its “magnetic field,” an area within which all its forces play, larger or smaller according to its strength, so has every man a field of influence within which play the forces he emits, and these forces work in curves that return to their forth-sender, that re-enter the center whence they emerged.

As the subject is a very complicated one, we will subdivide it, and then study the subdivisions one by one.

1 *Galatians*, vi, 7

Group Karma

Nations have group or collective karma. As they sow they also reap. Individuals are sent to incarnate in nations whose karma harmonizes with their own, generated by them in former lives.

Belgium offers an example of national karma. Why did she suffer so heavily in the two World Wars? Can we find in her history aggressive conduct and wanton infliction of cruelty upon weaker people of such a nature and on such a scale as would seem to justify, according to the principle of cause and effect, her subsequent military disasters and the sufferings they brought to her people? Yes, I think we can. With every respect to the noble people of Belgium, I would draw at-

tention to what have come to be known by historians as “the Belgian Congo atrocities.” I shall not describe here in detail these products of the purely colonial administration of the Belgian government at that time, but would refer those who are interested . . . to the official records and photographs illustrating the barbarous treatment meted out to the indigenous population of the Belgian Congo colonies. From these it may be deduced that the Congo atrocities constituted a sowing from which the later national disasters were a not inappropriate reaping, to use the analogy of St. Paul.

– Geoffrey Hodson, *Basic Theosophy*,
199-200

THREE CLASSES OF ENERGIES

Three classes of energies are sent forth by man in his ordinary life, belonging respectively to the three worlds that he inhabits; mental energies on the mental plane, giving rise to the causes we call thoughts; desire energies on the astral plane, giving rise to those we call desires; physical energies aroused by these, and working on the physical plane, giving rise to the causes we call action. We have to study each of these in its workings, and to understand the class of effects to which each gives rise, if we wish to trace intelligently the part that each plays in the perplexed and complicated combinations we set up, called in their totality “our Karma.” When a man, advancing more swiftly than his fellows, gains the ability to function on higher planes, he then becomes the center of higher forces, but for the present we may leave these out of account and confine ourselves to ordinary humanity, treading the cycle of reincarnation in the three worlds.

In studying these three classes of energies we shall have to distinguish between their effect on

the man who generates them and their effect on others who come within the field of his influence; for a lack of understanding on this point often leaves the student in a slough of hopeless bewilderment.

Then we must remember that every force works on its own plane and reacts on the planes below it in proportion to its intensity, the plane on which it is generated gives it its special characteristics, and in its reaction on lower planes it sets up vibrations in their finer or coarser materials according to its own original nature. The motive which generates the activity determines the plane to which the force belongs.

Next it will be necessary to distinguish between ripe karma, ready to show itself as inevitable events in the present life; the karma of character, showing itself in tendencies that are the outcome of accumulated experiences, and that are capable of being modified in the present life by the same power (the Ego) that created them in the past; the karma that is now

making, and will give rise to future events and future character.²

Further, we have to realize that while a man makes his own individual karma he also connects himself thereby with others, thus becoming a member of various groups — family, national, racial — and as a member he shares in the collective karma of each of these groups.

It will be seen that the study of karma is one of much complexity; however, by grasping the main principles of its working as set out above, a coherent idea of its general bearing may be obtained without much difficulty, and its details can be studied at leisure as opportunity offers. Above all, let it never be forgotten, whether details are understood or not, that each man makes his own karma, creating alike his own capacities and his own limitations; and that working at any time with these self-created capacities, and within these self-created limitations, he is still himself, the living soul, and can strengthen or weaken his capacities, enlarge or contract his limitations.

The chains that bind him are of his own forging, and he can file them away or rivet them more strongly; the house he lives in is of his own building, and he can improve it, let it deteriorate, or rebuild it, as he will. We are ever working in plastic clay and can shape it to our fancy, but the clay hardens and becomes as iron, retaining the shape we gave it. A proverb from the *Hitopadesha* runs, as translated by Sir Edwin Arnold:

“Look! The clay dries into iron, but the potter moulds the clay;
Destiny today is the master — Man was master yesterday.”

Thus we are all masters of our tomorrows, however much we are hampered today by the results of our yesterdays.

Let us now take in order the divisions already set out under which karma may be studied.

Three classes of causes, with their effects on

their creator and on those he influences. The first of these classes is composed of our thoughts. Thought is the most potent factor in the creation of human karma, for in thought the energies of the SELF are working in mental matter, the matter which, in its finer kinds, forms the individual vehicle, and even in its coarser kinds responds swiftly to every vibration of self-consciousness. The vibrations which we call thought, the immediate activity of the Thinker, give rise to forms of mind-stuff, or mental images, which shape and mould his mental body, as we have already seen; every thought modifies this mental body, and the mental faculties in each successive life are made by the thinkings of the previous lives. A man can have no thought-power, no mental ability, that he has not himself created by patiently repeated thinkings; on the other hand, no mental image that he has thus created is lost, but remains as material for faculty, and the aggregate of any group of mental images is built into a faculty which grows stronger with every additional thinking, or creation of a mental image, of the same kind. Knowing this law, the man can gradually make for himself the mental character he desires to possess and he can do it as definitely and as certainly as a bricklayer can build a wall. Death does not stop his work, but by setting him free from the encumbrance of the body facilitates the process of working up his mental images into a definite organ we call a faculty, and he brings this back with him to his next birth on the physical plane, part of the brain of the new body being molded so as to serve as the organ of this faculty, in a way to be explained presently. All these faculties together form the mental body for his opening life on earth, and his brain and nervous system are shaped to give his mental body expression on the physical plane. Thus the mental images created in one life appear as mental characteristics and tendencies in another, and for this reason it is

² These divisions are familiar to the student as Prārabdha (commenced, to be worked out in the life); Sanchita (accumulated), a part of which is seen in the tendencies, Kriyamāna, in course of making.

written in one of the Upanishads: “Man is a creature of reflection: that which he reflects on in this life he becomes the same hereafter.”³ Such is the law, and it places the building of our mental character entirely in our own hands; if we build well, ours the advantage and the credit; if we build badly, ours the loss and blame. Mental character, then, is a case of individual karma in its action on the individual who generates it.

This same man that we are considering, however, affects others by his thoughts. For these mental images that form his own mental body set up vibrations, thus reproducing themselves in secondary forms. These generally, being mingled with desire, take up some astral matter, and I have therefore elsewhere⁴ called these secondary thought-forms astro-mental images. Such forms leave their creator and lead a quasi-independent life — still keeping up a magnetic tie with their progenitor. They come into contact with and affect others, in this way setting up kârmic links between these others and himself; thus they largely influence his future environment. In such fashion are made the ties which draw people together for good or evil in later lives; which surround us with relatives, friends, and enemies; which bring across our path helpers and hinderers, people who benefit and who injure us, people who love us without our winning in this life, and who hate us though in this life we have done nothing to deserve their hatred. Studying the results, we grasp a great principle — that while our thoughts produce our mental and moral character in their action on ourselves, they help to determine our human associates in the future by their effects on others.

The second great class of energies is composed of our desires — our outgoing after objects that attract us in the external world; as a mental element always enters into these in man, we may extend the term “mental images” to include them, although they express themselves chiefly

in astral matter. These in their action on their progenitor mould and form his body of desire, or astral body, shape his fate when he passes into Kāmaloka after death, and determine the nature of his astral body in his next rebirth. When the desires are bestial, drunken, cruel, unclean, they are the fruitful causes of congenital diseases, of weak and diseased brains, giving rise to epilepsy, catalepsy, and nervous diseases of all kinds, of physical malformations and deformities, and, in extreme cases, of monstrosities. Bestial appetites of an abnormal kind or intensity may set up links in the astral

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world which for a time chain the Egos, clothed in astral bodies shaped by these appetites, to the astral bodies of animals to which these appetites properly belong, thus delaying their re-incarnation; where this fate is escaped, the bestially shaped astral body will sometimes impress its characteristics on the forming physical body of the babe during antenatal life, and produce the semi-human horrors that are occasionally born.

Desires — because they are outgoing energies that attach themselves to objects — always attract the man towards an environment in which they may be gratified. Desires for earthly things, linking the soul to the outer world, draw him towards the place where the objects of desire are most readily obtainable, and therefore it is said that a man is born according to his desires.⁵ They are one of the

3 *Chhândogyopanishad* IV, xiv, 1.

4 See *Karma*, by Annie Besant (1979) p. 25—Theosophical Manual No. IV

5 See *Brihadâranjakopanishad*, IV, iv, 5,7, and context

causes that determine the place of rebirth.

The astro-mental images caused by desires affect others as do those generated by thoughts. They, therefore, also link us with other souls, and often by the strongest ties of love and hatred, for at the present stage of human evolution an ordinary man's desires are generally stronger and more sustained than his thoughts. They thus play a great part in determining his human surroundings in future lives, and may bring into those lives persons and influences of whose connection with himself he is totally unconscious. Suppose a man by sending out a thought of bitter hatred and revenge has helped to form in another the impulse which results in a murder; the creator of that thought is linked by his karma to the committer of the crime, although they have never met on the physical plane, and the wrong he has done to him, by helping to impel him to a crime, will come back as an injury in the infliction of which the whilom criminal will play his part. Many a "bolt from the blue" that is felt is utterly undeserved is the effect of such a cause, and the soul thereby learns and registers a lesson while the lower consciousness is writhing under a sense of injustice. Nothing can strike a man that he has not deserved, but his absence of memory does not cause a failure in the working of the law. We thus learn that our desires in their action on ourselves produce our desire-nature, and through it largely affect our physical bodies in our next birth; that they play a great part in determining the place of rebirth; and by their effect on others they help to draw around us our human associates in future lives.

The third great class of energies, appearing on the physical plane as actions, generate much karma by their effects on others, but only slightly affect directly the Inner Man. Broadly speaking, the favorable or unfavorable nature of the physical surroundings into which we are born depends on the effect of our previous actions in spreading happiness or unhappiness among other people. The physical results on others of actions on the physical plane work out karmically in repaying

to the actor physical good or bad surroundings in a future life. If he has made people physically happy by sacrificing wealth or time or trouble, this action kârmically brings him favorable physical circumstances conducive to physical happiness. If he has caused people wide-spread physical misery, he will reap kârmically from his action wretched physical circumstances conducive to physical suffering. And this is so, whatever may have been his motive in either case — a fact which leads us to consider the law that:

EVERY FORCE WORKS ON ITS OWN PLANE

If a man sows happiness for others on the physical plane, he will reap conditions favorable to happiness for himself on that plane, and his motive in sowing it does not affect the result. A man might sow wheat with the object of speculating with it to ruin his neighbor, but his bad motive would not make the wheat grains grow up as dandelions. Motive is a mental or astral force, according as it arises from will or desire, and it reacts on moral and mental character or on the desire-nature severally. The causing of physical happiness by an action is a physical force and works on the physical plane. "By his actions man affects his neighbors on the physical plane; he spreads happiness around him or he causes distress, increasing or diminishing the sum of human welfare. This increase or diminution of happiness may be due to very different motives — good, bad, or mixed. A man may do an act that gives widespread enjoyment from sheer benevolence, from a longing to give happiness to his fellow creatures. Let us say that from such a motive he presents a park to a town for the free use of its inhabitants; another may do a similar act from mere ostentation, from desire to attract attention from those who can bestow social honors (say, he might give it as purchase-money for a title); a third may give a park from mixed motives, partly unselfish, partly selfish. The motives will severally affect

these three men's characters in their future incarnations, for improvement, for degradation, for small results. But the effect of the action is causing happiness to large numbers of people does not depend on the motive of the giver; the people enjoy the park equally, no matter what may have prompted its gift, and this enjoyment, due to the action of the giver, establishes for him a kârmic claim on Nature, a debt due to him that will be scrupulously paid. He will receive a physically comfortable or luxurious environment, as he has given widespread physical enjoyment, and his sacrifice of physical wealth will bring him his due reward, the kârmic fruit of his action. This is his right. But the use he makes of his position, the happiness he derives from his wealth and his surroundings, will depend chiefly on his character, and here again the just reward accrues to him, *each* seed bearing its appropriate harvest.⁶ Truly, the ways of karma are equal. It does not withhold from the bad man the result which justly follows from an action which spreads happiness, and it also deals out to him the deteriorated character earned by his bad motive, so that in the midst of wealth he will remain discontented and unhappy. Nor can the good man escape physical suffering if he cause physical misery by mistaken actions done from good motive; the misery he caused will bring him misery in his physical surroundings, but his good motive, improving his character, will give him a source of perennial happiness within himself, and he will be patient and contented amid his troubles. Many a puzzle maybe answered by applying these principles to the facts we see around us.

These respective effects of motive and of the results (or fruits) of actions are due to the fact that each force has the characteristics of the plane on which it was generated, and the higher the plane the more potent and the more persistent the force. Hence motive is far more important than action, and a mistaken action done with a good motive is productive of more good to the

doer than a well-chosen action done with a bad motive. The motive, reacting on the character, gives rise to a long series of effects, for the future actions guided by that character will all be influenced by its improvement or its deterioration; whereas the action, bringing on its doer physical happiness or unhappiness, according to its results on others, has in it no generating force, but is exhausted in its results. If bewil-

If a man sows happiness for others on the physical plane, he will reap conditions favorable to happiness for himself on that plane, and his motive in sowing it does not affect the result.

dered as to the path of right action by a conflict of apparent duties, the knower of karma diligently tries to choose the best path, using his reason and judgment to the utmost; he is scrupulously careful about his motive, eliminating selfish considerations and purifying his heart; then he acts fearlessly, and if his action turn out to be a blunder he willingly accepts the suffering which results from his mistake as a lesson which will be useful in the future. Meanwhile, his high motive has ennobled his character for all time to come.

This general principle that the force belongs to the plane on which it is generated is one of far-reaching import. If it be liberated with the motive of gaining physical objects, it works on the physical plane and attaches the actor to that plane. If it aims at devachanic objects, it works on the devachanic plane and attaches the actor thereto. If it has no motive save the divine service, it is set free on the spiritual plane, and therefore cannot attach the individual, since the *individual* is asking for nothing.

6 See *Karma*, pp. 50, 51.

THE THREE KINDS OF KARMA

Ripe Karma. Ripe Karma is that which is ready for reaping and which is therefore inevitable. Out of all the karma of the past there is a certain amount which can be exhausted within the limits of a single life; there are some kinds of karma that are so incongruous that they could not be worked out in a single physical body, but would require very different types of body for their expression; there are liabilities contracted towards other souls, and all these souls will not be in incarnation at the same time; there is karma that must be worked out in some particular nation or particular social position, while the same man has other karma that needs an entirely different environment. Part only, therefore, of his total karma can be worked out in a given life, and this part is selected by the Great Lords of Karma — of whom something will presently be said — and the soul is guided to incarnate in a family, a nation, a place, a body, suitable for the exhaustion of that aggregate of causes which can be worked out together. This aggregate of causes fixes the length of that particular life; gives to the body its characteristics, its powers, and its limitations; brings into contact with the man the souls incarnated within that life-period to whom he has contracted obligations, surrounding him with relatives, friends, and enemies; marks out the social conditions into which he is born, with their accompanying advantages and disadvantages; selects the mental energies he can show forth by molding the organization of the brain and nervous system with which he has to work; puts together the causes that result in troubles and joys in his outer career and that can be brought into a single life. All this is the “ripe karma,” and this can be sketched out in a horoscope cast by a competent astrologer. In all this the man has no power of choice; all is fixed by the choices he has made in the past, and he must discharge to the uttermost farthing the liabilities he has contracted.

The physical, astral and mental bodies which the soul takes on for a new life-period are, as we

have seen, the direct result of his past, and they form a most important part of this ripe karma. They limit the soul on every side, and his past rises up in judgment against him, marking out the limitations which he has made for himself. Cheerfully to accept these, and diligently to work at their improvement, is the part of the wise man, for he cannot escape from them.

Inevitable actions. There is another kind of ripe karma that is of very serious importance — that of inevitable actions. Every action is the final expression of a series of thoughts; to borrow an illustration from chemistry, we obtain a saturated solution of thought by adding thought after thought of the same kind, until another thought — or even an impulse, a vibration, from without — will produce the solidification of the whole; the action which expresses the thoughts. If we persistently reiterate thoughts of the same kind, say of revenge, we at last reach the point of saturation, and any impulse will solidify these into action and a crime results. Or we may have persistently reiterated thoughts of help to another to the point of saturation, and when the stimulus of opportunity touches us they crystallize out as an act of heroism. A man may bring over with him some ripe karma of this kind, and the first vibration that touches such a mass of thoughts ready to solidify into action will hurry him without his renewed volition, unconsciously, unto the commission of the act. He cannot stop to think; he is in the condition in which the first vibration of the mind causes action; poised on the very point of balancing, the slightest impulse sends him over. Under these circumstances a man will marvel at his own commission of some crime, or at his own performance of some sublime act of self-devotion. He says: “I did it without thinking,” unknowing that he had thought so often that he had made that action inevitable. When a man has willed to do an act many times, he at last fixes his will irrevocably, and it is only a question of opportunity when he will act. So long as he can think, his freedom of choice re-

mains, for he can set the new thought against the old and gradually wear it out by the reiteration of opposing thoughts; but when the next thrill of the soul in response to a stimulus means action, the power of choice is exhausted.

Necessity and Freewill. Herein lies the solution of the old problem of necessity and free will; man by the exercise of free will gradually creates necessities for himself, and between the two extremes lie all the combinations of free will and necessity which make the struggles within ourselves of which we are conscious. We are continually making habits by the repetitions of purposive actions guided by the will; then the habit becomes a limitation, and we perform the action automatically. Perhaps we are then driven to the conclusion that the habit is a bad one, and we begin laboriously to unmake it by thoughts of the opposite kind, and, after many an inevitable lapse into it, the new thought-current turns the stream, and we regain our full freedom, often again gradually to make another fetter. So old thought-forms persist and limit our thinking capacity, showing as individual and as national prejudices. The majority do not know that they are thus limited, and go on serenely in their chains, ignorant of their bondage; those who learn the truth about their own nature become free. The constitution of our brain and nervous system is one of the most marked necessities in life; these we have made inevitable by our past thinkings, and they now limit us and we often chafe against them. They can be improved slowly and gradually; the limits can be expanded, but they cannot be suddenly transcended.

Sudden "conversions." Another form of this ripe karma is where some past evil-thinking has made a crust of evil habits around a man which imprisons him and makes an evil life. Meanwhile the soul has been growing and has been developing noble qualities. In one life this crust of past evil is thrown out by opportunity, and because of this the soul cannot show his later development; like a chicken ready to be hatched,

he is hidden within the imprisoning shell, and only the shell is visible to the external eye. After a time that karma is exhausted, and some apparently fortuitous event — a word from a great Teacher, a book, a lecture — breaks the shell and the soul comes forth free. These are the rare, sudden, but permanent "conversions," the "miracles of divine grace," of which we

An Ego is drawn by his individual karma into a family, having set up in previous lives ties which closely connect him with some of the other Egos composing it.

hear; all perfectly intelligible to the knower of karma, and falling within the realm of the law.

Accumulated Karma. The accumulated karma that shows itself as character is, unlike the ripe, always subject to modifications. It may be said to consist of tendencies, strong or weak, according to the thought-force that has gone to their making, and these can be further strengthened or weakened by fresh streams of thought-force sent to work with or against them. If we find in ourselves tendencies of which we disapprove, we can set ourselves to work to eliminate them; often we fail to withstand a temptation, overborne by the strong outrushing stream of desire, but the longer we can hold out against it, even though we fail in the end, the nearer are we to overcoming it. Every such failure is a step towards success, for the resistance wears away part of the energy, and there is less of it available for the future.

Present Karma. The karma which is in the course of making has been already studied.

Collective karma. When a group of people is

considered kârmically, the play of kârmic forces upon each as a member of the group introduces a new factor into the karma of the individual. We know that when a number of forces play on a point, the motion of the point is not in the direction of any one of these forces, but in the direction which is the result of their combination. So the karma of a group is the resultant of the interacting forces of the individuals composing it, and all the individuals are carried along in the direction of that resultant. An Ego is drawn by his individual karma into a family, having set up in previous lives ties which closely connect him with some of the other Egos composing it; the family has inherited property from a grandfather who is wealthy; an heir turns up, descended from the grandfather's elder brother, who had been supposed to have died childless, and the wealth passes to him and leaves the father of the family heavily indebted; it is quite possible that our Ego has had no connection in the past with this heir, to whom in past lives the father had contracted some obligation which has resulted in this catastrophe, and yet he is threatened with suffering by his action, being involved with family karma. If, in his own individual past, there was a wrong-doing which can be exhausted by suffering caused by the family karma, he is left involved in it; if not, he is by some "unforeseen circumstances" lifted out of it, perchance by some benevolent stranger who feels an impulse to adopt and educate him, the stranger being one who in the past was his debtor.

Yet more clearly does this come out, in the working of such things as railway accidents, shipwrecks, floods, cyclones, etc. A train is wrecked, the catastrophe being immediately due to the action of the drivers, the guards, the railway directors, the makers or employees of that line, who thinking themselves wronged, send clustering thoughts of discontent and anger against it as a whole. Those who have in their accumulated karma — but not necessarily in their ripe karma — the debt of a life suddenly cut short, may be al-

lowed to drift into this accident and pay their debt; another, intending to go by the train, but with no such debt in his past, is "providentially" saved by being late for it.

Collective karma may throw a man into the troubles consequent on his nation going to war, and here again he may discharge debts of his past not necessarily within the ripe karma of his then life. In no case can a man suffer that which he has not deserved, but, if an unforeseen opportunity should arise to discharge a past obligation, it is well to pay it and be rid of it for evermore.

LORDS OF KARMA

The "Lords of Karma" are the great spiritual Intelligences who keep the kârmic records and adjust the complicated workings of kârmic law. They are described by H. P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* as the Lipika, the Records of Karma, and the Mahārājas⁷ — and Their hosts, who are "the agents of Karma upon earth." The Lipika are They who know the kârmic record of every man, and who with omniscient wisdom select and combine portions of that record to form the plan of a single life; They give the "idea" of the physical body which is to be the garment of the reincarnating soul, expressing his capacities and his limitations; this is taken by the Mahārājas and worked into a detailed model, which is committed to one of Their inferior agents to be copied; this copy is the etheric double, the matrix of the dense body, the materials for these being drawn from the mother and subject to physical heredity. The race, the country, the parents, are chosen for their capacity to provide suitable materials for the physical body of the incoming Ego, and suitable surroundings for his early life. The physical heredity of the family affords certain types and has evolved certain peculiarities of material combinations; hereditary diseases, hereditary finenesses of nervous organization, imply definite combina-

7 The Mahādevas, or Chaturdevas of the Hindus

tions of physical matter, capable of transmission. An Ego who has evolved peculiarities in his mental and astral bodies, needing special physical peculiarities for their expression, is guided to parents whose physical heredity enables them to meet these requirements. Thus an Ego with high artistic faculties devoted to music would be guided to take his physical body in a musical family, in which the materials supplied for building the etheric double and the dense body would have been made ready to adapt themselves to his needs, and the hereditary type of nervous system would furnish the delicate apparatus necessary for the expression of his faculties. An Ego of very evil type would be guided to a coarse and vicious family, whose bodies were built of the coarsest combinations, such as would make a body able to respond to the impulses from his mental and astral bodies. An Ego who had allowed his astral body and lower mind to lead him into excesses, and had yielded to drunkenness, for instance, would be led to incarnate in a family whose nervous systems were weakened by excess, and would be born from drunken parents, who would supply diseased materials for his physical envelope. The guidance of the Lords of Karma thus adjusts means to ends, and insures the doing of justice; the Ego brings with him his kârmic possessions of faculties and desires, and he receives a physical body suited to be their vehicle.

LIBERATION FROM KARMA

As the soul must return to earth until he has discharged all his liabilities, thus exhausting all his individual karma, and as in each life thoughts and desires generate fresh karma, the question may arise in the mind: "How can this constantly renewing bond be put an end to? How can the soul attain his liberation?" Thus we come to the "ending of karma," and have to investigate how this may be. The binding element in karma is the first thing to be clearly grasped. The outward-going energy of the soul attaches itself to

some object, and the soul is drawn back by this tie to the place where that attachment may be realized by union with the object of desire, so long as the soul attaches himself to any object, he must be drawn to the place where that object can be enjoyed. Good karma binds the soul as much as does bad, for any desire, whether for objects here or in Devachan, must draw the soul to the place of gratification.

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Action is prompted by desire, an act is done not for the sake of doing the act, but for the sake of obtaining by the act something that is desired, of acquiring its results, or of enjoying its fruit. Desire for the fruit of action moves them to activity, and enjoyment of that fruit rewards their exertions.

Desire is, then, the binding element in karma, and when the soul no longer desires any object in earth or in heaven, his tie to the wheel of reincarnation that turns in the three worlds is broken. Action itself has no power to hold the soul, for with the completion of the action it slips into the past. But the ever-renewed desire for fruit constantly spurs the soul into fresh activities, and thus new chains are continually being forged.

Nor should we feel any regret when we see men constantly driven to action by the whip of desire, for desire overcomes sloth, laziness, inertia,⁸ and prompts men to the activity that yields them experience. Until man is approaching divinity he needs the urgings of de-

⁸ The student will remember that these show the dominance of the tāmasic guna, and while it is dominant men do not emerge from the lowest of the three stages of their evolution

sires, and the desires simply grow purer and less selfish as he climbs upwards. But none the less desires bind him to rebirth, and if he would be free he must destroy them.

When a man begins to long for liberation, he is taught to practice “renunciation of the fruits of action”; that is, he gradually eradicates in himself the wish to possess any object; he at first voluntarily and deliberately denies himself the object, and thus habituates himself to do contentedly without it; after a time he no longer misses it, and he finds the desire for it is disappearing from his mind. At this stage he is very careful not to neglect any work which is duty because he has become indifferent to the results it brings to him, and he trains himself in discharging every duty with earnest attention, while remaining entirely indifferent to the fruits it brings forth. When he attains perfection in this, and neither desires nor dislikes any object, he ceases to generate karma; ceasing to ask anything from the earth or from Devachan, he is not drawn to either; he wants nothing that either can give him, and all links between himself and them are broken off. This is the ceasing of individual karma, so far as the generation of new karma is concerned.

BREAKING OLD CHAINS OF KARMA

But the soul has to get rid of old chains as well as to cease from the forging of new, and these old chains must be either allowed to wear out gradually or must be broken deliberately. For this breaking, knowledge is necessary, a knowledge which can look back into the past, and see the causes there set going, causes which are working out their effects in the present. Let us suppose that a person, thus looking backward over his past lives, sees certain causes which will bring about an event which is still in the future; let us suppose further that these causes are thoughts of hatred for an injury inflicted on himself, and that they will cause suffering a year hence to the wrong doer; such a person can introduce a new cause to intermingle with the causes working from the past, and he may counteract

them with strong thoughts of love and goodwill that will exhaust them, and will thus prevent their bringing about the otherwise inevitable event, which would, in its turn, have generated new kârmic trouble. Thus he may neutralize forces coming out of the past by sending against them forces equal and opposite, and may in this way “burn up his karma by knowledge.” In similar fashion he may bring to an end karma generated in his present life that would normally work out in future lives.

Again, he may be hampered by liabilities contracted to other souls in the past, wrongs he has done to them, duties he owes them. By the use of his knowledge he can find those souls, whether in this world or in either of the other two, and seek opportunities of serving them. There may be a soul incarnated during his own life-period to whom he owes some kârmic debt; he may seek out that soul and pay his debt, thus setting himself free from a tie which, left to the course of events, would have necessitated his own reincarnation, or would have hampered him in a future life. Strange and puzzling lines of action adopted by occultists have sometimes this explanation — the man of knowledge enters into close relations with some person who is considered by the ignorant bystanders and critics to be quite outside the companionships that are fitting for him; but that occultist is quietly working out a kârmic obligation which would otherwise hamper and retard his progress.

Those who do not possess knowledge enough to review their past lives may yet exhaust many causes that they have set going in the present life; they can carefully go over all that they can remember, and note where they have wronged any or where any has wronged them, exhausting the first cases by pouring out thoughts of love and service, and performing acts of service to the injured person, where possible on the physical plane also; and in the second cases sending forth thoughts of pardon and good will. Thus they diminish their kârmic

liabilities and bring near the day of liberation.

Unconsciously, pious people who obey the precept of all great Teachers of religion to return good for evil are exhausting karma generated in the present that would otherwise work out in the future. No one can weave with them a bond of hatred if they refuse to contribute any strands of hatred to the weaving, and persistently neutralize every force of hatred with one of love. Let a soul radiate in every direction love and compassion, and thought of hatred can find nothing to which they can attach themselves. "The Prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." All great Teachers knew the law and based on it Their precepts, and those who through reverence and devotion to Them obey Their directions profit under the law, although they know nothing of the details of its working. An ignorant man who carries out faithfully the instructions given him by a scientist can obtain results by his working with the laws of Nature, despite his ignorance of them, and the same principle holds good in worlds beyond the physical. Many who have not time to study, and perforce accept, on the authority of experts, rules which guide their daily conduct in life, may thus unconsciously be discharging their kârmic liabilities.

In countries where reincarnation and karma are taken for granted by every peasant and laborer, the belief spreads a certain quiet acceptance of inevitable troubles that conduces much to the calm and contentment of ordinary life. A man overwhelmed by misfortunes rails neither against God nor against his neighbors, but regards his troubles as the results of his own past mistakes and ill-doings. He accepts them resignedly and makes the best of them, and thus escapes much of the worry and anxiety with which those who know not the law aggravate troubles already sufficiently heavy. He realizes that his future lives depend on his own exertions, and that the law which brings him pain will bring

him joy just as inevitably if he sows the seed of good. Hence a certain large patience and a philosophic view of life, tending directly to social stability and to general contentment. The poor and ignorant do not study profound and detailed metaphysics, but they grasp thoroughly these simple principles — that every man is reborn on earth time after time, and that

Unconsciously, pious people who obey the precept of all great Teachers of religion to return good for evil are exhausting karma generated in the present that would otherwise work out in the future.

each successive life is molded by those that precede it. To them rebirth is as sure and as inevitable as the rising and setting of the sun; it is part of the course of Nature, against which it is idle to repine or to rebel. When Theosophy has restored these ancient truths to their rightful place in western thought, they will gradually work their way among all classes of society in Christendom, spreading understanding of the nature of life and acceptance of the result of the past. Then too will vanish the restless discontent which arises chiefly from the impatient and hopeless feeling that life is unintelligible, unjust, and unmanageable, and it will be replaced by the quiet strength and patience which come from an illumined intellect and a knowledge of the law, and which characterize the reasoned and balanced activity of those who feel that they are building for eternity.

Annie Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*. Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India, 1977.

Questions for Review:

1. What is the law of karma and what is its role in human life?
2. How do we mold our own destiny?
3. What are the three types of karma?
4. What are the three classes of causes that produce karma?
5. What is the role of motive in action? How does it compare to the action itself in terms of effects?

Lesson 6

THE EXISTENCE OF THE MASTERS

Charles W. Leadbeater
Condensed from *The Masters and the Path*

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

THE existence of Perfected Men is one of the most important of the many new facts which Theosophy puts before us. It follows logically from the other great Theosophical teachings of karma and evolution by reincarnation. As we look round us we see men obviously at all stages of their evolution — many far below ourselves in development, and others who in one way or another are distinctly in advance of us. Since that is so, there may well be others who are very much further advanced; indeed, if men are steadily growing better and better through a long series of successive lives, tending towards a definite goal, there should certainly be some who have already reached that goal. Some of us in the process of that development have already succeeded in unfolding some of those higher senses which are latent in every man, and will be the heritage of all in the future; and by means of those senses we are enabled to see the ladder of evolution extending far above us as well as far below us, and we can also see that there are men standing upon every rung of that ladder.

There is a considerable amount of direct testimony to the existence of these Perfected Men whom we call Masters, but I think that the first step which each one of us should take is to make certain that there *must* be such men; only as a later step will it follow that those with whom we have come into contact belong to that class.

The historical records of every nation are full of the doings of men of genius in all the different

departments of human activity, men who in their special lines of work and ability have stood far above the rest — indeed, so far that at times (and probably more often than we know) their ideals were utterly beyond the comprehension of the people, so that not only the work

The existence of Perfected Men at the end of this long line of ever-unfolding power and wisdom and love is the most natural thing in the world.

that they may have done has been lost to mankind, but their very names even have not been preserved. It has been said that the history of every nation could be written in the biography of a few individuals, and that it is always the few, towering above the rest, who initiate the great forward steps in art, music, literature, science, philosophy, philanthropy, statecraft, and religion. They stand high sometimes in love of God and their fellow-men, as great saints and philanthropists; sometimes in understanding of man and Nature, as great philosophers, sages and scientists; sometimes in work for humanity, as great liberators and reformers. Looking at these men, and realizing how high they stand among humanity, how far they have gone in human evolution, is it not

Mr. Sinnett

*Just
 cleaned out a
 bunch of "bad" material
 returned to - I don't know
 smashed a "bad" specimen
 examine your "bad" specimens
 for "specimens" - look at
 "specimens" - look at
 there be for me
 M.*

A facsimile of one of the letters of the Mahatma Morya to A. P. Sinnett.

logical to say that we cannot see the bounds of human attainment, and that there may well have been, and even now may be, men far further developed even than they, men great in spirituality as well as knowledge or artistic power, men complete as regards human perfections — men precisely such as the Adepts or Supermen whom some of us have had the inestimable privilege to encounter?

This galaxy of human genius that enriches and beautifies the pages of history is at the same time the glory and the hope of all mankind, for we

know that these Greater Ones are the forerunners of the rest, and that They flash out as beacons, as veritable light-bearers to show us the path which we must tread if we wish to reach the glory which shall presently be revealed. We have long accepted the doctrine of the evolution of the forms in which dwells the

The records of every great religion show the presence of such Supermen, so full of the Divine Life that again and again they have been taken as the very representatives of God Himself.

Divine Life; here is the complementary and far greater idea of the evolution of that Life itself, showing that the very reason for that wondrous development of higher and higher forms is that the ever-swelling Life needs them in order to express itself. Forms are born and die, forms grow, decay and break; but the Spirit grows on eternally, ensouling those forms, and developing by means of experience gained in and through them, and as each form has served its turn and is outgrown, it is cast aside that another and better form may take its place.

The existence of Perfected Men at the end of this long line of ever-unfolding power and wisdom and love is the most natural thing in the world. Even beyond Them — beyond our sight and our comprehension — stretches a vista of still greater glory; some hint of that we may endeavor to give later, but it is useless to speak of it now.

The logical consequence of all this is that there must be Perfected Men, and there are not wanting signs of the existence of such Men in all ages who, instead of leaving the world entirely, to pursue a life of their own in the divine or superhuman kingdoms, have remained in

touch with humanity, through love of it, to assist its evolution in beauty and love and truth, to help, as it were, to cultivate the Perfect Man — just as here and there we find a botanist who has special love for plants, and glories in the production of a perfect orange or a perfect rose.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE RELIGIONS

The records of every great religion show the presence of such Supermen, so full of the Divine Life that again and again they have been taken as the very representatives of God Himself. In every religion, especially at its founding, has such an One appeared, and in many cases more than one. The Hindus have their great Avatars or divine incarnations, such as Shri Krishna, Shri Shankaracharya, and the Lord Gautama Buddha, whose religion has spread over the Far East, and a great galaxy of Rishis, of Saints, of Teachers; and these Great Ones took interest not only in awakening men's spiritual natures, but also in all affairs that made for their well-being on earth. All who belong to the Christian world know, or ought to know, much about the great succession of prophets and teachers and saints in their own dispensation, and that in some way (perhaps not clearly understood) their Supreme Teacher, the Christ Himself, was and is Man as well as God. And all the earlier religions (decadent as some of them may be amid the decay of nations), down even to those of primitive tribes of men, show as outstanding features the existence of Supermen, helpers in every way of the childlike people among whom They dwelt. An enumeration of these, interesting and valuable as it is, would take us too far aside from our present purpose, so I will refer the reader for it to Mr. W. Williamson's excellent book *The Great Law*.

RECENT EVIDENCE

There is much direct and recent evidence for the existence of these Great Ones. In my earlier days I never needed any such evidence, because I was fully persuaded as a result of my studies that there *must* be such people. To believe that there were such glorified Men seemed per-

fectly natural, and my only desire was to meet Them face to face. Yet there are many among the newer members of the Society who, reasonably enough, want to know what evidence there is. There is a considerable amount of personal testimony. Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, the co-founders of The Theosophical Society, Dr. Annie Besant, our present President, and I myself — all of us have seen some of

There are a few cases in which both the Adept and the person who saw Him were in the physical body. It happened with Madame Blavatsky.

these Great Ones, and many other members of the Society have also been privileged to see one or two of Them, and there is ample testimony in what all these people have written.

It is sometimes objected that those who saw Them, or fancied that they did so, may have been dreaming or perhaps deluded. The chief reason, I think, for the possibility of such a suggestion is that we have very rarely seen the Adepts at a time when both They and we were in our physical bodies. In the early days of the Society, when only Madame Blavatsky had developed higher faculties, the Masters not infrequently materialized Themselves so that all could see Them, and showed Themselves thus physically on various occasions. You will find many records of such happenings in the earlier history of our Society, but of course the Great One so showing Himself was not in His physical body, but in a materialized form.

Many of us habitually and constantly see Them during our sleep. We go out in our astral

bodies (or in the mental body, according to our development) and we visit Them and see Them in Their physical bodies; but we are not at that time in ours, and that is why on the physical plane people tend to be sceptical about such experiences. Men object: "But in these cases either you who saw Them were out of the physical body, and may have been dreaming or deluded,

*A*s part of Their work, some of these great Brothers whom we call Masters of the Wisdom are willing to take pupil-apprentices and teach them; but They form only a small section of the mighty Body of Perfected Men.

or Those who appeared to you came phenomenally and then disappeared again; so how do you know that They were what you suppose Them to be?"

There are a few cases in which both the Adept and the person who saw Him were in the physical body. It happened with Madame Blavatsky; I have heard her testify that she lived for some time in a monastery in Nepal, where she saw three of our Masters constantly in Their physical vehicles. Some of Them have come down more than once from Their mountain retreats into India in Their physical bodies. Colonel Olcott spoke of having seen two of Them on those occasions; he had met the Master Morya and also the Master Kuthumi. Damodar K. Mavalankar, whom I knew in 1884, had encountered the Master Kuthumi in His physical body. There was the case of S. Ramaswami Iyer, a gentleman whom I knew well in those days, who had the experience of meeting the Master Morya physically, and has written an account of that meeting which I shall quote later; and there was the case of Mr. W. T. Brown of the London Lodge, who also was priv-

ileged to meet one of the Great Ones under similar conditions. There is also a vast amount of Indian testimony which has never been collected and sifted, mainly because those to whom these experiences came were so thoroughly persuaded of the existence of Supermen and of the possibility of meeting Them that they did not regard any individual case as worthy of record.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I myself can report two occasions on which I have met a Master, both of us being in the physical vehicle. One of Them was the Adept to whom the name of Jupiter was assigned in the book of *The Lives of Alcyone*, who greatly assisted in the writing of portions of Madame Blavatsky's famous work *Isis Unveiled*, when that was being done in Philadelphia and New York. When I was living at Adyar, He was so kind as to request my revered teacher, Swami T. Subba Row, to bring me to call upon Him. Obeying His summons we journeyed to His house, and were most graciously received by Him. After a long conversation of the deepest interest, we had the honor of dining with Him, Brahman though He be, and spent the night and part of the next day under His roof. In that case it will be admitted that there could be no question of illusion. The other Adept whom I had the privilege of encountering physically was the Master the Comte de St. Germain, called sometimes the Prince Rakoczy. I met Him under quite ordinary circumstances (without any previous appointment, and as though by chance) walking down the Corso in Rome, dressed just as any Italian gentleman might be. He took me up into the gardens on the Pincian hill, and we sat for more than an hour talking about the Society and its work; or perhaps I should rather say that He spoke and I listened, although when He asked questions I answered.

Other members of the Brotherhood I have seen under varying circumstances. My first encounter with one of them was in a hotel in

Cairo; I was on my way out to India with Madame Blavatsky and some others, and we stayed in that city for a time. We all used to gather in Madame Blavatsky's room for work, and I was sitting on the floor, cutting out and arranging for her a quantity of newspaper articles which she wanted. She sat at a table close by; indeed my left arm was actually touching her dress. The door of the room was in full sight, and it certainly did not open; but quite suddenly, without any preparation, there was a man standing al-

Master Morya came to us one day, looking exactly as though in a physical body; He walked through the room where I was in order to communicate with Madame Blavatsky, Who was in her bedroom inside.

most between me and Madame Blavatsky. Within touch of both of us. It gave me great start, and I jumped up in some confusion; Madame Blavatsky was much amused and said: "If you do not know enough not to be startled at such a trifle as that, you will not get far in this occult work." I was introduced to the visitor, who was not then an Adept, but an Arhat, which is one grade below that state; He has since become the Master Djwal Kul.

Some months after that the Master Morya came to us one day, looking exactly as though in a physical body; He walked through the room where I was in order to communicate with Madame Blavatsky, Who was in her bedroom inside. That was the first time I had seen him plainly and clearly, for I had not then developed my latent senses sufficiently to remember what I saw in the subtle body. I saw the Master Kuthumi under similar conditions on the roof of our Headquarters at Adyar; He was stepping

The Age of Adepts

In a conversation in 1887 with the author Charles Johnston (husband of H.P.B.'s niece, Vera), when Mr. Johnston asked H.P.B. something about her Master's age (the Mahatma Morya), she replied, "My dear, I cannot tell you exactly, for I do not know. But this I will tell you. I met him first when I was twenty. He was at the very prime of manhood then. I am an old woman now, but he has not aged a day. He is still in the prime of manhood. That is all I can say. You may draw your own conclusions." When Mr. Johnston persisted and asked whether the Mahatmas had discovered the elixir of life, she replied seriously: "That is no fable. It is only the veil hiding a real occult process, warding off age and dissolution for periods which would seem fabulous, so I will not mention them. The secret is this: for every man there is a climacteric, when he must draw near to death: if he has squandered his life-powers, there is no escape for him; but if he has lived according to the law, he may pass through and so continue in the same body almost indefinitely."

VIRGINIA HANSON

over a balustrade as though He had just materialized from the empty air on the other side of it. I have also many times seen the Master Djwal Kul on that roof in the same way.

This would, I suppose, be considered less certain evidence, since the Adepts came as apparitions do; but, as I have since learned to use my higher vehicles freely, and to visit these Great Ones in that way, I can testify that Those

An Encounter with the Mahatma Morya

Henry Steel Olcott

Our evening's work on Isis was finished, I had bade goodnight to HPB, retired to my own room, closed the door as usual, sat me down to read and smoke, and was soon absorbed in my book.

All at once, as I read with my shoulder a little turned from the door, there came a gleam of something white in the right-hand corner of my right eye; I turned my head, dropped my book in astonishment, and saw towering above me in his great stature an Oriental clad in white garments, and wearing a head cloth or turban of amber-striped fabric, hand-embroidered in yellow floss silk. Long raven hair hung from under his turban to the shoulders; his black beard, parted vertically on the chin in the Rajput fashion, was twisted up at the ends and carried over the ears; his eyes were alive with soul fire, eyes which were at once benignant and piercing in glance.

He was so grand a man, so imbued with the majesty of moral strength, so luminously spiritual, so evidently above average humanity, that I felt abashed in his presence, and bowed my head and bent my knee as one does before a god or a godlike personage. A hand was lightly laid on my head, a sweet though strong voice bade me be seated, and when I raised my eyes, the Presence was seated in the other chair beyond the table.

He told me he had come at the crisis when I needed him, that my actions had brought me to this point, that it lay with me alone whether he and I should meet often in this life as co-workers for the good of mankind, that a great work was to be done for human-

ity, and I had the right to share in it if I wished, that a mysterious tie, not now to be explained to me, had drawn my colleague [HPB] and myself together, a tie which could not be broken, however strained it might be at times. He told me things about HPB that I may not repeat, as well as things about myself, that do not concern third parties.

At last he rose, I wondering at his great height and observing the sort of splendor in his countenance — not an external shining, but the soft gleam, as it were, of an inner light — that of the spirit.

Suddenly the thought came into my mind: "What if this be but hallucination; what if HPB has cast a hypnotic glamour over me? I wish I had some tangible object to prove to me that he has really been here, something that I might handle after he is gone!"

The Master smiled kindly as if reading my thought, untwisted the fehta [turban] from his head, benignantly saluted me in farewell and was gone: his chair was empty; I was alone with my emotions! Not quite alone, though, for on the table lay the embroidered head cloth, a tangible and enduring proof that I had not been "overlooked," or psychically befooled, but had been face to face with one of the Elder Brothers of Humanity.

To run and beat at HPB's door and tell her my experience was the first natural impulse, and she was as glad to hear my story as I was to tell it. I returned to my room to think, and the gray morning found me still thinking and resolving. I have been blessed with meetings with this Master and others since then.

who in the early years of the Society came and materialized for us are the same Men whom I have often since seen living in Their own homes. People have suggested that I and others who have the same experience may be but dreaming, since these visits take place during the sleep of the body; I can only reply that it is a remarkably consistent dream, extending in my own case over forty years, and that it has been dreamt simultaneously by a large number of people.

Those who wish to collect evidence about these matters (and it is quite reasonable that they should wish to do so) should turn to the earlier literature of the Society. If they meet our President, they can hear from her how many of the Great Ones she has seen on different occasions; and there are many of our members who will bear witness without hesitation that they have seen a Master. It may be that in meditation they have seen His face, and later have had definite proof that He is a real being. Much evidence may be found in Colonel Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves*, and there is an interesting treatise called *Do the Brothers Exist?* written by Mr. A. O. Hume, a man who stood high in the Civil Service in India, and worked much with our late Vice-President, Mr. A. P. Sinnett. It was published in a book entitled *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*. Mr. Hume, who was a sceptical Anglo-Indian with a legal mind, went into the question of the existence of the Brothers (as the Masters are also called, because They belong to a great Brotherhood, and also because they are the Elder Brothers of humanity) and even at that early date decided that he had overwhelming testimony that They did exist; and very much more evidence has accumulated since that book was published.

The possession of extended vision and other faculties resulting from the unfolding of our latent powers has also brought within our constant experience the fact that there are other orders of beings than the human, some of whom rank alongside the Adepts in a grade of existence higher than our own. We meet with some whom we call Devas or Angels, and with others whom

we see to be far beyond ourselves in every respect.

Having finished with human life, the Perfected Man usually drops His various material bodies. but He retains the power to take up any of them if ever He should need them in course of His work. In the majority of cases, one who gains that level no longer needs a physical body. He no longer retains an astral, a mental or even a causal body, but lives permanently at His highest level. Whenever for any purpose He needs to

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together.*

deal with a lower plane, He must take a temporary vehicle belonging to that plane, because only through the medium of its matter can He come into contact with those who live therein. If He wishes to talk to men physically, He must take a physical body; He must have at least a partial materialization, or He cannot speak. In the same way, if He wishes to impress our minds, He must draw round himself a mental body. Whenever He needs in His work to take a lower vehicle, He has the power to do so; but He holds it only temporarily. There are seven lines of still further progress along which the Perfected Man can go, a list of which we shall give in a later chapter.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ADEPTS

The world is guided and directed to a large extent by a Brotherhood of Adepts to which

our Masters belong. Theosophical students make all sorts of mistakes about Them. They often regard Them as a great monastic community, all living together in some secret place. They suppose Them sometimes to be Angels, and many of our students have thought that They were all Indian, or that They all resided in the Himalayas. None of these hypotheses is true. There is a great Brotherhood, and its Members are in

I think that the outstanding characteristic of the Adept, as compared with ourselves, is that He looks upon everything from an absolutely different point of view.

constant communication with one another; but Their communication is on higher planes and They do not necessarily live together. As part of Their work, some of these great Brothers whom we call Masters of the Wisdom are willing to take pupil-apprentices and teach them; but They form only a small section of the mighty Body of Perfected Men.

There are seven types of men, for every one belongs to one of the seven Rays into which the great wave of evolving life is distinctly divided. It would seem that one Adept on each of the Rays is appointed to attend to the training of beginners, and all those who are coming along His particular Ray of evolution pass through His hands.

No one below the rank of Adept is permitted to assume full responsibility for a novice, though those who have been chelas for a number of years are often employed as deputies, and receive the privilege of helping and advising promising young aspirants. These older pupils are gradually being trained for their future work when they in turn shall become Adepts, and they

are learning to take more and more of the routine work off the hands of their Masters, so that the latter may be set free for higher labors which only They can undertake. The preliminary selection of candidates for discipleship is now left to a large extent in the hands of these older workers, and the candidates are temporarily linked with such representatives rather than directly with the great Adepts. But the pupils and the Master are so wonderfully one that perhaps this is almost "a distinction without a difference."

THE POWERS OF THE ADEPT

The powers of the Adept are indeed many and wonderful, but they all follow in natural sequence from faculties which we ourselves possess. It is only that They have these faculties in a very much greater degree. I think that the outstanding characteristic of the Adept, as compared with ourselves, is that He looks upon everything from an absolutely different point of view; for there is in Him nothing whatever of the thought of self which is so prominent in the majority of men. The Adept has eliminated the lower self, and is living not for self but for all, and yet, in a way that only He can really understand, that *all* is truly Himself also. He has reached that stage in which there is no flaw in His character, nothing of a thought or feeling for a personal, separated self, and His only motive is that of helping forward evolution, of working in harmony with the Logos who directs it.

Perhaps the next most prominent characteristic is His all-round development. We are all of us imperfect; none has attained the highest level in any line, and even the great scientist or the great saint has usually reached high excellence in one thing only, and there remain other sides of his nature not yet unfolded. All of us possess some germ of all the different characteristics, but always they are but partially awakened, and one much more than another.

An Adept, however, is an all-round Man, a Man whose devotion and love and sympathy and compassion are perfect, while at the same time His intellect is something far grander than we can as yet realize, and His spirituality is wonder-

ful and divine. He stands out above and beyond all men whom we know, because of the fact that He is fully developed.

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Questions for Review:

1. What are the reasons for the belief in the existence of perfected human beings or Adepts?
2. Describe the nature of Adepts or Masters. Do they have physical bodies? If yes, why? Are they immortal? Where do they live?
3. What is the Brotherhood of Adepts?
4. What is the difference between an Adept and a Master?
5. What are some of the qualities and powers of Adepts?
6. If there are Adepts, why is the significance of such a fact on your life?

Lesson 7

THE PATH

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

The “Path” is a term that refers to the time-tested pathway towards spiritual realization. In theosophical literature it includes the narrow sense of the path towards spiritual initiation under the guidance of Masters of the Wisdom. These two need to be distinguished from each other because the first one is a general path open to all, while the latter is a special case that endeavors to hasten the process by qualifying oneself for direct guidance by a genuine spiritual teacher. The first one is commonly referred to as the “mystical path,” which can be trodden by anyone who feels the inward call (the “divine discontent”). Its tenets are found in the mystical traditions of all major religions, and are included in what Aldous Huxley calls the “perennial philosophy.” The second one is what may be considered as the “esoteric path,” a more difficult one fitted to those who have adequately prepared themselves. While in many aspects, these two meanings of the Path overlap with one another, the present article shall outline their known features separately.

The Mystical Path. The path towards spirituality is well-known among all the religious traditions. It is known as mysticism. Thus there is mysticism among the Christians (Carmelite, Trappist, etc.), Muslims (Sufism), Jews (Kabbalah), Buddhists (Zen, Theravada, Mahayana), Hindu (Yoga, Vedanta, and others), etc. Examples of guidelines for such inward path would be the Sermon of the Mount of the Christian gospels, the Eightfold Path of Buddhism,

the Paramitas of Mahayana Buddhism, the eight stages of Raja Yoga, etc.

Entry to the Path is always preceded by an inward “call” and a discontent of worldly things. Such a call is followed by an earnest search for the truth accompanied by sincere doubt and

The path towards spirituality is well-known among all the religious traditions. It is known as mysticism.

skepticism of outer forms of worship and belief. In one’s search, one finds various portals to the Path, and the individual must decide which gateway seems most suitable to oneself. Eventually, one discovers that the elements of various mysticisms are essentially identical. In fact, the Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan, declares: “No one can be a mystic and call himself a Christian mystic, a Jewish mystic or a Mohammadan mystic. . . . Mysticism is something which erases from one’s mind all idea of separateness, and if a person claims to be this mystic or that mystic he is not a mystic; he is only playing with a name” (*The Inner Life*).

One of the most important elements of the mystic path is the *purification* of the self of its conditionings, desires, and attachments. This stage involves pain and suffering. It is what

Light on the Path

[One of the most significant guidebook for the spiritual life is *Light on the Path* dictated by an Adept to Mabel Collins. It starts with the following exhortations:]

Before the eyes can see, they must be incapable of tears. Before the ear can hear, it must have lost its sensitiveness. Before the voice can speak in the presence of the Masters it must have lost the power to wound. Before the soul can stand in the presence of the Masters its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart.

1. Kill out ambition.
2. Kill out desire of life.
3. Kill out desire of comfort.
4. Work as those work who are ambitious.

Respect life as those do who desire it. Be happy as those are who live for happiness.

John of the Cross calls the “dark night of the senses.” It necessitates what another mystical treatise calls a “cloud of forgetting” whereby the individual gradually becomes detached from the things of the outer world (*Cloud of Unknowing*).

But the true motivation for treading the Path is not the rejection of the worldly life, but the inward call which is now being felt in the heart of the aspirant. A spiritual discipline is then adopted, which normally includes meditation and certain modes of living. It is this which eventually leads one to *illumination* or *enlightenment*. This in itself has various levels or stages that are recognized in the different spiritual traditions of the world (*hal* or *awhal* of the Sufis, the *jhanas* of Buddhism, the mansions of the soul of Teresa of Avila, etc.). These stages have their own subtle impurities that must be further

cleansed, as in the Buddhist *jhanas* and the “dark night of the spirit” of John of the Cross.

This ultimately leads to union with the Divine, the Nirvana of the Buddhist, the *moksha* (liberation) of the Hindus, and the *fana* (annihilation) of the Muslim Sufis.

The Esoteric Path. Spiritual traditions in the East and the West also speak of the razor-edge path whereby the development of the aspirant is accelerated through certain stringent rules and disciplines, and done under the guidance of a qualified Teacher. This path is not recom-

Spiritual traditions in the East and the West also speak of the razor-edge path whereby the development of the aspirant is accelerated through certain stringent rules and disciplines, and done under the guidance of a qualified Teacher.

mended to every one as it requires certain qualities and preparedness not commonly attained by most aspirants. In the theosophical tradition it implies *chelaship* or discipleship to a Master of the Wisdom, which includes probation and trials.

The Greeks had openly distinguished between the exoteric and the esoteric path through the Lesser and Greater Mysteries that lasted for more than a thousand years. Christianity has such a tradition that began with Jesus himself when he said that he taught parables to the masses but gave the keys to mysteries only to the disciples. The Gnostics of the first few centuries of Christianity carried forward this tradition of a secret path. In the East it is known as Gupta Vidya (or secret knowledge). The *Sufis* have their *murshids* or

The Paramitas

“Yea, Lord; I see the PATH; its foot in mire, its summits lost in glorious light Nirvanic. And now I see the ever narrowing Portals on the hard and thorny way to *Jnana* [*Knowledge, Wisdom].”

Thou seest well, Lanoo. These Portals lead the aspirant across the waters on “to the other shore”⁷. Each Portal hath a golden key that openeth its gate; and these keys are: —

1. DANA, the key of charity and love immortal.
2. SHILA, the key of Harmony in word and act, the key that counterbalances the cause and the effect, and leaves no further room for Karmic action.
3. KSHANTI, patience sweet, that nought can ruffle.

4. VIRAGA, indifference to pleasure and to pain, illusion conquered, truth alone perceived.

5. VIRYA, the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal TRUTH, out of the mire of lies terrestrial.

6. DHYANA, whose golden gate once opened leads the Narjol [a saint, an adept.] toward the realm of Sat eternal and its ceaseless contemplation.

7. PRAJNA, the key to which makes of a man a god, creating him a Bodhisattva, son of the Dhyanis.

Such to the Portals are the golden keys.

VOICE OF THE SILENCE

teacher imparting the secret wisdom to the *mureed* (student).

In the theosophical tradition, the same distinction is made between the open mystical path and the esoteric path. There are people who are good and spiritual. They can pursue liberation at their own pace and without any special disciplines imposed upon them. But to those who feel the need to enter the steeper path, then there is a way.

During the lifetime of H.P. Blavatsky, the path of discipleship was directly available and many people formally applied for such chelaship. Many of them failed. Among those who were accepted (apart from Blavatsky), only one was known to have been accepted to join the Mahatmas in their ashram: Damodar Mavalankar.

The rules for such a path were laid down in many books, such as *Light on the Path*, *Voice of the Silence*, *Instructions to the Esoteric School*,

and many articles and letters, particularly the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. In all of them, one point is repeatedly stressed:

One only inflexible rule has been ever binding upon the neophyte, as it is binding now — the *complete* subjugation of the lower nature by the higher. From the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* to the recently published *Light on the Path*, search as we may through the bibles of every race and cult, we find but one only way, — hard, painful, troublesome, by which man can gain the true spiritual insight. And how can it be otherwise since all religions and all philosophies are but the variants of the first teachings of the One Wisdom . . .? (CW 6:31)

The following are some excerpts on qualifications needed for treading the Path:

. . . the first conditions required to reach it are an absolute disinterestedness, a

One only inflexible rule has been
 ever binding upon the
 neophyte, as it is binding now
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boundless devotion to the welfare of others, and a complete indifference to the world and its opinions. In order to make the first step on that ideal path, the motive must be absolutely pure; not an unworthy thought must attract the eyes from the end in view, not a doubt or hesitation shackle the feet. (CW 11:135)

. . . the qualifications expected in a “regular *chela*” are “(1.) Perfect physical health. (2.) Absolute mental and physical purity. (3.) Unselfishness of purpose; universal charity; pity for all animate beings. (4.) Truthfulness and unswerving faith in the laws of Karma. (5.) A courage undaunted in the support of truth, even in the face of peril to life. (6.) An intuitive perception of one’s being the vehicle of the manifested divine *Atman* (spirit). (7.) Calm indifference for, but a just appreciation of, everything that constitutes the objective

and transitory world. (8.) Blessings of both parents and *their permission to become an Upasana* (chela); and (9.) Celibacy, and freedom from any obligatory duty. (CW 8: 294)

In H.P. Blavatsky’s *Voice of the Silence* she also wrote of the open path and the secret path. The open path, she says, is the “way to selfish bliss.” It earns liberation for oneself. The “secret path” is one of renunciation and compassion: “to forego eternal bliss for Self, to help on man’s salvation. To reach Nirvana’s bliss, but to renounce it, is the supreme, the final step — the highest on Renunciation’s Path. Know, O Disciple, this is the *Secret PATH*” (VS, 145). It is the “Doctrine of the Heart” as opposed to the “Doctrine of the Eye.”

An aspirant who applies for discipleship will be accepted on probation. Afterwards they may be admitted to the four initiations that leads to Arhatship. These are: *Srotapatti* (“one who has entered the stream”), *Sakridagamin* (“one who will return but once”), *Anagamin* (“one who will no longer return”), and the *Arhat*, one who has attained Nirvana.

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Questions for Review:

1. What is the so-called Path?
2. What is the true motivation for treading the Path?
3. What is the difference between the open mystical path and the esoteric path?
4. What is the most important rule in order to be successful in treading the Path? Why do you think this is so?
5. What is the “secret path” or the Doctrine of the Heart?
6. What are your own reflections about the existence of the Path and your own present life and circumstances?

Lesson 8

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR THE MAN OF THE WORLD

Geoffrey Hodson
Condensed from *Basic Theosophy*

Spirituality simply consists in discovering and becoming one's higher, nobler self, in accentuating the highest in motive, speech and the conduct of life. Indeed, the discovery and expression of one's highest Self is both the immediate and the main and true purpose of all spiritual exercises. Especially is it the message of the unhappiness and pain which have so large a part in human experience. Pain itself can be one of the chief agencies which cause men to seek and follow the spiritual life, even whilst fulfilling worldly duties.

The message of pain is at least threefold: to awaken compassion for the pain of others — to be compassionate is in itself to be spiritual; to teach man to live according to the law of love; and to serve as a spur to induce him to rise to those levels of human nature and consciousness where pain is not, which means the level of the permanent realities and of the Spiritual Self of man. Then man can release into his life the power, the light and the life of that Self. Then spirituality becomes natural to us. In such ways pain can be turned to very good purposes.

How is the spiritual life to be lived by men and women amidst the pressures of mundane, earthly life and duties? There are at least two essentials: spiritual awakening and ordered effort.

Spiritual Awakening. Spiritual awakening in man is as natural as is the appearance of bud and flower in the plant. At a certain stage of evolution there naturally occurs an awakening of the will to attainment. One possible meaning of the parable of the ten virgins,¹ five wise and five foolish, is that five were spiritually awakened and five were not.

Spiritual awakening in man is as natural as is the appearance of bud and flower in the plant.

When certain phases of evolution are entered upon, the ego becomes strong enough to send spiritualizing influences "down" to the personality. These strengthen conscience, and arouse the aspiration to make the most of life and to live in the highest possible purity and service. Such experiences are sometimes accompanied by visions of divine perfection and mystical events of various kinds. Difficulties can arise, such as habitual indulgences which demand continuance, the claims of everyday life, and the destructively critical attributes of the con-

¹ *Matt, XXV: 1-13*

crete mind. In spite of these, the Path is ultimately chosen because it is the only way of life. It is chosen for the sole reason that the individual cannot help himself, the choice being completely spontaneous. It is, in fact, the natural re-

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sult of hundreds of lives of growth, culminating in an inward resolve, an irrevocable will to attainment, to spiritual victory. For the awakened Soul, "There is no other path at all to go."²

Three interior experiences are then passed through. Firstly, mentally awakened man seeks the answers to the problems of life. He demands logic in religion and justice from God. His interest in philosophy and religion deepens. He begins the great search for knowledge, which is often hastened by such painful experiences as worldly failure, bereavement, frustration, and even disaster.

Second, the neophyte also experiences both an awakening of will and a divine discontent. The outer man becomes aware of the "inexpressible longing . . . of the inner man for the infinite." Dissatisfaction, self-shame, the sense of failure even amidst material success — all these act as spurs. He recognizes that selfishness and materialism have ruled his life, and sees how harmful they are and how hurtful to others he has been. He knows he has been drifting, and that purpose-

lessness was the cause of much suffering and failure in his life. He notes with pain that faculties have remained undeveloped, that indulgences have not been outgrown, and he sees in his former life a general smallness of aim. He thereupon determines to rise above these and other faults.

At this stage help becomes available. The aspirant meets a teacher, either interiorly, externally or both. Life itself also comes to his aid, in that opportunities for progress and service offer themselves. Looking back later, he discovers that indeed his whole life has been guided. When such spiritual aspirations awaken, it is important to respond outwardly, as by a desirable change of habit, an uttered prayer or an act of renunciation, restitution, or service.

The third experience which accompanies the true awakening of the soul is a diminution of the sense of separateness and an increase of those of kinship and responsibility. There is a change of nature from getting to giving, and a change of accent from the personal to the impersonal, from the smaller self to the larger Self. An expansion of mind, of outlook, is experienced, a greater kindness develops. A Cause is generally adopted and the spirit of dedication takes up its abode within the awakened man. All this is quite unforced, being perfectly natural and utterly sincere. In these ways the first of the two essentials is met — Awakening. Fortunate are those who recognize, acknowledge and ratify this interior change.

ORDERED EFFORT

The second essential was ordered effort. Here two ideas are met, both somewhat new to Western thought. The first of these is that the spiritual life can be lived whilst out in the world, even amidst business and domestic activities; for in them opportunity and guidance can be found for the pursuit of the new interest — the search for truth,

understanding, power, reason and beauty in life. One qualification must, however, be made; this is that the means of livelihood must be neither ignoble nor hurtful to others, whether animals or men. The second idea is that the practice of the spiritual life is a science, an ordered, carefully organized effort being essential to success. This concerns the daily life of the aspirant, which must include regular meditation or prayer, study and character building, and self-giving in service without thought of return.

Meditation. Meditation is based on the fact that all man is seeking is within him; is, indeed, part of his inner Self. That Self must be found. To accomplish this regularity of effort is necessary, in order both to overcome the resistance of bodily habit, and by meditation to discover that which has now awakened — the Divine Self, the essential man behind the bodily veil. Meditation implies the daily withdrawal of thought from the transient towards the eternal, and a deepening interest in those things which are unchanging, undying, everlasting. The mind is turned from mortality to immortality, from the many to the One, and so from ignorance to truth.³

As a result of regular meditation man gradually comes to know himself as a radiant, immortal, divine being. Flaming, he knows himself as a flame which is part of the Fire of God. He dwells upon this fact, for this realization of his own divinity is the immediate objective of meditation. The ultimate objective is to realize identity with the divinity in all. Success brings, even at the beginning, illumination, serenity, purity, power, growing inspiration, idealism, and a deepening sense of dedication. All these are greatly needed on the Path. Meditation is thus found to be important as a personal rule of life, a daily practice carried out with a strong will to achieve both illumination and a steady improvement of character. Such is the first factor in successfully following the spiritual way of life — regular daily meditation at the same time each day, preferably in the morning.

Knowledge and Character. The second factor consists of study for advancement in knowledge and of character-building. Without being morbidly introspective, the aspirant must intelligently and impartially study his own character and conduct. Bad faults must be eliminated, whilst malice, gossip, cruelty, selfishness, sensuality, hardness, hurtfulness, brutality, intolerance, self-righteousness,

The third experience which accompanies the true awakening of the soul is a diminution of the sense of separateness and an increase of those of kinship and responsibility. There is a change of nature from getting to giving, and a change of accent from the personal to the impersonal, from the smaller self to the larger Self.

untruthfulness, dishonesty and hypocrisy must, if they exist, speedily be outgrown; for they are the enemies of soul progress, obstacles to self-illumination.

Service. The third factor consists of service, implying that the aspirant is now outward-turned. He no longer lives for himself alone, but extends his help beyond his family to his neighbor, the community and the race. Such service may be regarded as active prayer which, moreover, is unfailingly answered. The doctor, for example, may regard himself as a channel for the healing life of God and of his Master. He stresses preventive medicine and — an ideal strange to the worldly mind — seeks to eliminate all need for the medical profession. The teacher is as dedicated as a priest,

3 q. v. *Light on the Path, The Light of Asia, The Voice of the Silence, At the Feet of the Master, The Song Celestial.*

servicing more especially the God within child and adolescent. The government official endeavors to establish the ideal administration, the lawyer to become a personal counselor, a wise family philosopher and friend, and those responsible for the home to make it a place of beauty, happiness and peace, a spiritual and cultural center for all who live and enter there. All work is indeed, performed as part of the One Work and on behalf of the One Worker, is God. Business is

The ultimate objective is to realize identity with the divinity in all. Success brings, even at the beginning, illumination, serenity, purity, power, growing inspiration, idealism, and a deepening sense of dedication. All these are greatly needed on the Path.

regarded as part of the great business of the Solar System, and Deity is recognized in part as a Great Organizer Whom the dishonest trader degrades. All work in whatever field thus becomes dedicated work, performed on behalf of the One Worker, in His Name and Presence, and for Him.

Thus the path is indeed open for the man of the world, a change of accent and motive rather than of activity being involved. Although this change may at first seem to be rather forced and artificial, it is not really so. After the awakening, spirituality becomes increasingly natural and spontaneous. Service, for example, is not only natural but is clearly seen as the only way to happiness. True religion need not make one gloomy, severe or sad. On the contrary, the spiritual life is essentially the happy life, if only because purposeful. In loving service and a life of kindness and helpfulness one may realize "joyfulness of the Divine Presence." Thus living, personal desire becomes submerged and service a rule of

life. Self-forgetfulness is found to be the basis of all spirituality, and if there is renunciation, it is of but a single rose to obtain a tree bearing unto seventy times seven.

Dr. Annie Besant wrote:

"The life of the disciple is one long series of petty renunciations; one long series of daily sacrifices, one continual dying in time in order that the higher may eternally live. It is not a single deed that strikes the world with wonder which makes true discipleship, else were the hero or the martyr greater than the disciple. The life of the disciple is lived in the home, is lived in the town, is lived in the office, is lived in the market place, yea, amid the common lives of men. The true life of sacrifice is that which utterly forgets itself, in which renunciation becomes so common that there is no effort, that it becomes a thing of course. If we lead that life of sacrifice, if we lead that life of renunciation, if daily, perseveringly, we pour out ourselves for others, we shall find ourselves one day on the summit of the mountain, and shall discover that we made the Great Renunciation, without ever dreaming that another act were possible."

The Prophet Isaiah wrote:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them [the redeemed]; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become as a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: . . . And an highway there shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. . . the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs

and everlasting joy . . . and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”⁴

TO SUM UP

The acceptance of idealism by an individual is an unforced, natural result of interior growth. It is spontaneous and unpremeditated, being the effect of entry into a new level of consciousness. The ideals which then become natural are to some extent reversals of those of the past. Hitherto he has lived, and quite naturally, in order to compete and to acquire; now he lives, just as naturally, in order to co-operate and to contribute. As the plant in the early stages of its growth acquires from the soil, from the air and from the sun, so also, before the birth of idealism in him, man lives to acquire. Eventually in the plant, an external change occurs; a new type of tissue appears — the bud. Within the bud is contained the promise of the fulfilment of plant life, the realization of the purpose of the plant existence. Quite naturally the bud is formed, develops and opens. Naturally, also, in due time the plant displays new attributes of flora, beauty, color and fragrance. Finally it achieves its immortality, the greatest miracle of its cycle of growth — the production of the seed through which the plant may perpetuate itself indefinitely.

The evolution of the soul of man follows the same pattern. At a certain stage of development man becomes spiritually awakened, and the bud — symbol and promise of spiritual beauty, fragrance and immortality — appears. In the fulness of time the bud is opened, and later the state is reached of the stature of the Perfect Man. The naturalness of this process is beautifully expressed in Tagore’s words: “He who can open the bud, does it so simply.” This awakening is the real conversion, such as that which came to St. Paul as a voice — that of his Higher Self. Ever after he was a changed man, changed from within.

All true idealists stand with St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Their response to idealism is as

When the disciple is ready, the Master appears.” Once the ideal of the spiritual life is embraced, once the awakened individual begins to lose himself in and give himself to a great Cause, then additional strength, outer guidance and inner illumination come to him.

natural as was his, and when this stage is reached, help is always offered. “When the disciple is ready, the Master appears.” Once the ideal of the spiritual life is embraced, once the awakened individual begins to lose himself

The Golden Stairs

*A clean life, an open mind,
A pure heart, an eager intellect,
An unveiled spiritual perception,
A brotherliness for all,
A readiness to give and receive advice
and instruction,
A loyal sense of duty to the Teacher,
A willing obedience to the behests of
TRUTH,
Once we have placed our confidence in,
and believe that Teacher to be in
possession of it;
A courageous endurance of personal
injustice,
A brave declaration of principles,
A valiant defense of those who are
unjustly attacked,
And a constant eye to the ideal of human
progression and perfection which the
Secret Science depicts-
These are the golden stairs up the steps
of which the learner may climb to the
Temple of Divine Wisdom*

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in and give himself to a great Cause, then additional strength, outer guidance and inner illumination come to him. Whether in a vision, as a great light, as a new inspiration, or as a newly discovered Counselor and Friend, the Master presents Himself. Thereafter He assists the aspirant to find and tread the steep and narrow way, helps him to pass through that portal of which the Lord Christ said: “. . . strait is the gate, and

narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

H. P. Blavatsky wrote:

“There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind — but yet a road; and it leads to the heart of the universe. I can tell you how to find Those who will show you the secret gateway that leads inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer. There is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through. There is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onwards, there is reward past all telling; the power to bless and save humanity. For those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.”

Geoffrey Hodson, *Basic Theosophy*. Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India.

Questions for Review:

1. What is your understanding of the spiritual life?
2. What the message of pain in human life?
3. What are three significant interior experiences that an awakening person goes through?
4. What are the three factors needed to successfully pursue the spiritual life?
5. How do you think should a person balance the demands of the worldly life and the requirements of the spiritual life?

Lesson 9

UNITY OF LIFE

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.
From *The Process of Self-Transformation*

The transcendent consciousness brings out another insight into the nature of things — the unity of life. This is the ultimate foundation of universal brotherhood.

Let us explore this more deeply.

Look at a single leaf of a tree. Its life appears to be separate from the other leaves. The apparent proof of such separateness is that if we cut that leaf, it will die, but the other leaves will not die or be injured.

Yet look again. What gives life to the leaf? It comes from the nourishing sap that passes through the twig, the same twig that supplies the same life to the other leaves. In other words, the leaf doesn't have a separate life. There is only one life that animates not only the leaves but also the twigs, branches, trunk and roots of the entire tree, which are but the outer garments of that life. The garment withers and dies during autumn and winter, and a new garment springs up in spring and summer. The garment changes, but the life doesn't. It's the same one life. The leaves look separate, but they're really but one life.

Look at our fingers. They're also separate. You wound the small finger and you feel the pain, but the other fingers aren't bleeding. They remain healthy and unaffected. And yet these fingers don't have separate lives. They are part of the one life that runs through the entire body of the human being. The separateness is superficial. If we look deeper into the nature of the fingers, we'll see that they are not really separate.

We see other human beings as separate from us. If you feel pain, I don't feel it. If you die, I don't die. Indeed, it seems true that we're separate. But that's because we're identifying ourselves with the outer garment that we call the body or personality. If we look deeper into our human nature, a different realization may dawn upon us. Among those who realize this inner unity of life are the mystics, whose consciousness of the higher self or higher triangle has awakened. In them, there is a natural emergence not only of compassion, but a realization of the unity of life.

Is it any wonder that Francis of Assisi wouldn't even step on ants when he walked? That he considered the sun and the moon as his brother and sister?

John Donne had a mystical insight when he wrote the immortal words:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

CORROBORATION

This concept of unity in organisms and in nature is now gaining wider acceptance in scientific circles. In biology, the theory of morphic fields and morphic resonance is one example;

the Gaia theory of the earth as one organism is another; Carl Jung's collective unconscious in psychology is another example. Arthur Koestler propounded the concept of holons, a view that has been adopted by transpersonal psychologists such as Ken Wilber. A holon is a whole unit or organism that is also a part of a larger whole. Everything is a holon, that is, it's composed of smaller parts, although it is itself a part of a larger whole. A holon is equivalent to a morphic unit of Rupert Sheldrake. The whole series of holons forms a hierarchy of holons, or a holarchy.

COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

One of the major contributions of Jung is his theory of the existence of the collective unconscious, a level of consciousness shared in common by all of humanity. Its manifestations are in the form of myths and archetypes.

He said, "The collective unconscious . . . is not individual but common to all men, and perhaps even to all animals, and is the true basis of the individual psyche."

MORPHIC RESONANCE

Sheldrake propounded the theory of morphic resonance in 1981 with the publication of his book *A New Science of Life*. Everything, that is, every *morphic unit*, whether atoms or crystals, organs, animals, social systems or the entire cosmos itself, has its own *morphic field*. These fields determine the form and behavior of the unit or organism, because the fields have *memories*, and the forms and behavior follow these memories. These fields can be behavioral, social, cultural or mental. They constitute the underlying unity of organisms as well as the interrelationship between different organisms, which may be part of a larger morphic unit.

Similar morphic units affect each other through a process that Sheldrake called "*morphic reso-*

nance." For example, ten rats in England may learn to solve a new maze in ten hours. This learning is said to have an effect on other rats that may be thousands of miles away, such that rats in the United States may solve the same maze in a shorter period. Experiments have been conducted that appear to validate this hypothesis.

Although Sheldrake is careful not to say that this implies a common consciousness, he does say that it is something similar to the concept of collective unconscious of Jung. In a television interview with Dr. Jeffrey Mishlove, Sheldrake was quite explicit about this:

MISHLOVE: When you talk about these fields containing a memory, they almost begin to sound like the mind itself, in some funny way.

SHELDRAKE: Well, if they're like the mind, they're much more like the unconscious mind than the conscious mind, because we have to remember that in our own minds, a large part of the mind, as Freud and Jung and others have told us, is unconscious. And what Jung and his followers have emphasized is that we all not only have our own personal unconscious, but we tune in to or access the collective unconscious, which is a collective memory of the species. What I'm saying is very like that idea, but it's not confined to human beings, it's right through nature.

The sharing of consciousness of animals of a particular species is equivalent to the concept of a group soul in theosophy. By extending this concept to human beings, it means that there is a larger shared field or consciousness among human beings. As Sheldrake said, "In the human realm this is similar to Jung's theory of the collective unconscious."

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Questions for Review:

1. What is the rational basis for universal brotherhood and the unity of life?
2. In what way does psychology corroborate the commonality of human consciousness?
3. What is morphic resonance and how does it support the idea of the unity of life?

Lesson 10

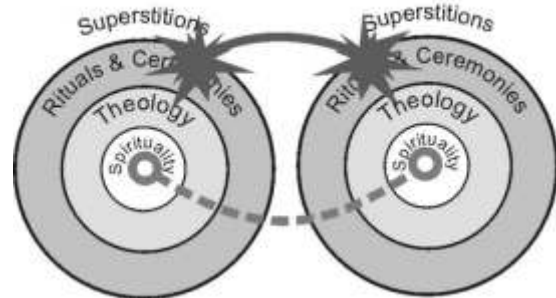
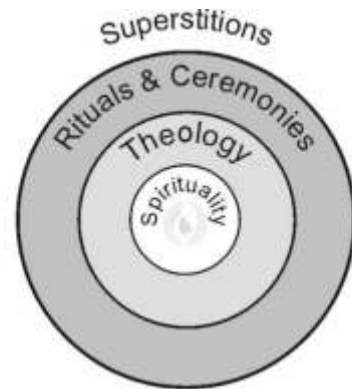
UNITY OF RELIGIONS

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.
from *The Process of Self-Transformation*

The study of spiritual consciousness and mysticism makes evident that there are several important layers in every religion:

- The outermost layer consists of the *rituals and ceremonies* of a religion. These are obviously superficial in nature and do not represent the heart of a religion. These rituals frequently change.
- The next layer is the theology of a religion, consisting of the set of *beliefs or doctrines* of each religion. These too are often subject to change. Catholicism, for example, has changed its dogmas in the course of centuries. It has modified its view about the belief that the earth is the center of the universe or that there is no salvation outside the church.
- The innermost layer is spirituality, or the *mystical or spiritual aspect* of a religion. In this layer, there has been hardly any change in the essence of spirituality in the past several thousand years. Spirituality is experiential, and each generation of spiritual seekers tends to validate what has been previously discovered or realized. Mysticism is the heart of every religion. It's the flame that keeps a religion alive and makes it survive disastrous mistakes that theologies and rituals may make.

This explanation can be represented by a series of concentric circles, as in the accompanying figure. The outermost circle are rituals and ceremonies. The next circle is the theology. The third circle is spirituality, or the mystical core of religions. This third circle consists of many



Levels of Religion

subcircles, such as gnosis or esotericism and the different degrees of mystical attainment.

Outside these three layers or circles, we find the superstitious beliefs that accrue around every religious tradition.

When religious adherents focus mainly on the rituals or the theology of their own religion or those of others, they have a tendency to regard each other with suspicion, with separateness and even with hostility. The religious

violence that we see in the world is the result of living the religious life on those two outer levels. In Ireland, we see the strange phenomenon of Catholics and Protestants, both Christians, bombing and killing each other. In the Islamic world, we see Shi'ites and Sunnis killing each other. How people of the same religion can be so divided that they turn and kill each other is indeed an astonishing phenomenon. What seems equally astonishing is that many people take this for granted as if it is nothing to feel strange about. A visitor from outer space studying humanity will surely find the human species a curious one.

When religious adherents focus mainly on the rituals or the theology of their own religion or those of others, they have a tendency to regard each other with suspicion, with separateness and even with hostility. The religious violence that we see in the world is the result of living the religious life on those two outer levels.

But among the mystics of the great religious traditions, we don't find such enmity, suspicion, separatism and hostility. The Vedantists, the yogis, the Sufis, the contemplative Buddhists, the Christian mystics, the Jewish Kabbalists — they see more things that unite them than things that separate them.

Thomas Merton, the well-known Trappist monk who has written best-selling books on the spiritual life, was one of those who delved into the essence of the spirituality of various religions and compared them. In a book entitled *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, he asked the question whether a Catholic can practice Zen and remain

a Catholic. He answered with a definite yes. Zen, to him, is an experience and not a dogma. It is not different from the spiritual experience of a Catholic or a Protestant.¹

A Catholic nun from Canada, Sister Elaine MacInnes, wrote a book entitled *Teaching Zen to Christians*.² She considers herself a disciple of the Zen *roshi* Yamada Koun while remaining a Catholic nun. She established the first Zen center in the Philippines and taught numerous nuns, priests and laypeople the practice of Zen meditation. How can a Catholic nun — a disciple of Christ — be at the same time be a disciple of a Zen Buddhist *roshi*? This is possible only if we see the essence of Zen spirituality as being no different from Christian spirituality.

Hazrat Inayat Khan, the Sufi teacher who popularized Islamic mysticism to the West, stresses the essential unity of the spiritual experience among the different traditions. He in fact declared, "No one can be a mystic and call himself a Christian mystic, a Jewish mystic or a Mohammedan mystic. For what is mysticism? Mysticism is something which erases from one's mind all idea of separateness, and if a person claims to be this mystic or that mystic he is not a mystic; he is only playing with a name."³

Mahatma Gandhi, when asked what his religion was, said that he was a Hindu, a Muslim, a Jew, a Christian and a Buddhist.

Abraham Maslow, in his book *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, wrote:

To the extent that all mystical or peak-experiences are the same in their essence and have always been the same, all religions are the same in their essence and always have been the same. They should, therefore, come to agree in principle on teaching that which is common to all of them, i.e., whatever it is that peak-experiences teach in common (whatever is *different* about these illuminations can fairly be taken to be

THE WISDOM RELIGION

By H. P. Blavatsky

The WISDOM-RELIGION was ever one, and being the last word of possible human knowledge, was, therefore, carefully preserved. It preceded by long ages the Alexandrian Theosophists, reached the modern, and will survive every other religion and philosophy.

ENQUIRER. Where and by whom was it so preserved?

THEOSOPHIST. Among Initiates of every country; among profound seekers after truth — their disciples; and in those parts of the world where such topics have always been most valued and pursued: in India, Central Asia, and Persia.

ENQUIRER. Can you give me some proofs of its esotericism?

THEOSOPHIST. The best proof you can have of the fact is that every ancient religious, or rather philosophical, cult consisted of an esoteric or secret teaching, and an exoteric (outward public) worship. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that the MYSTERIES of the ancients comprised with every nation the “greater” (secret) and “Lesser” (public) MYSTERIES — *e.g.* in the celebrated solemnities called the *Eleusinia*, in Greece. From the Hierophants of Samothrace, Egypt, and the initiated Brahmins of the India of old, down to the later Hebrew Rabbis, all preserved, for fear of profanation, their real *bona fide* beliefs secret. The Jewish Rabbis called their secular religious series the *Mercavah* (the exterior body), “the vehicle,” or, *the covering which contains the hidden soul*. — *i.e.*, their highest secret knowledge. Not one of the ancient nations ever imparted through its priests its real philosophical secrets to the masses, but allotted to the latter only the

husks. Northern Buddhism has its “greater” and its “lesser” vehicle, known as the *Mahayana*, the esoteric, and the *Hinayana*, the exoteric, Schools. Nor can you blame them for such secrecy; for surely you would not think of feeding your flock of sheep on learned dissertations on botany instead of on grass? Pythagoras called his *Gnosis* “the knowledge of things that are,” or *e gnosis ton onton*, and preserved that knowledge for his pledged disciples only: for those who could digest such mental food and feel satisfied; and he pledged them to silence and secrecy. Occult alphabets and secret ciphers are the development of the old Egyptian *hieratic* writings, the secret of which was, in the days of old, in the possession only of the Hierogrammatists, or initiated Egyptian priests. Ammonius Saccas, as his biographers tell us, bound his pupils by oath not to divulge *his higher doctrines* except to those who had already been instructed in preliminary knowledge, and who were also bound by a pledge. Finally, do we not find the same even in early Christianity, among the Gnostics, and even in the teachings of Christ? Did he not speak to the multitudes in parables which had a two-fold meaning, and explain his reasons only to his disciples? “To you,” he says, “it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables” (Mark iv. 11). “The Essenes of Judea and Carmel made similar distinctions, dividing their adherents into neophytes, brethren, and the *perfect*, or those initiated” (Eccl. Phil.). Examples might be brought from every country to this effect.

H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*. Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India.

Mahatma Gandhi, when asked what his religion was, said that he was a Hindu, a Muslim, a Jew, a Christian and a Buddhist.

localisms both in time and space, and are, therefore, peripheral, expendable, not essential). This something common, this something which is left over after we peel away all the localisms, all the accidents of particular languages or particular philosophies, all the ethnocentric phrasings, all those elements which are *not* common, we may call the “core-religious experience” or the “transcendent experience.”⁴

This realization about the essential unity of the world’s religions is the true and final solution to

the interreligious strife that the world has been witnessing for millennia. It is not just a wish or a hope. Interreligious harmony already exists among the mystics of all religions today. It’s only among those who see their religious life in terms of dogma and rituals and organizations that there is hostility and separation. To help in attaining religious unity, we must popularize the mystical and spiritual aspects of religions.

Notes:

- 1 Merton, Thomas, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968).
- 2 MacInnes, Elaine, *Teaching Zen to Christians* (Manila: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993).
- 3 Khan, Hazrat Inayat, *The Inner Life* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), p. 60.
- 4 Maslow, Abraham H., *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 20.

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Questions for Review:

1. What are three major layers of religions?
2. What are confirmations of the essential unity of the great religions?
3. What is the wisdom religion?
4. What is Maslow’s view of religious experience?

Lesson 11

PRACTICAL THEOSOPHY

Helena P. Blavatsky
Condensed from *The Key to Theosophy*

DUTY

Our philosophy teaches us that the object of doing our duties to all men and to ourselves the last, is not the attainment of personal happiness, but of the happiness of others; the fulfilment of right for the sake of right, not for what it may bring us. Happiness, or rather contentment, may indeed follow the performance of duty, but is not and must not be the motive for it.

Duty is that which *is due* to Humanity, to our fellow-men, neighbors, family, and especially that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves. This is a debt which, if left unpaid during life, leaves us spiritually insolvent and moral bankrupts in our next incarnation. Theosophy is the quintessence of *duty*.

I say — *action*, enforced action, instead of mere intention and talk. A man may be what he likes, the most worldly, selfish and hard-hearted of men, even a deep-dyed rascal, and it will not prevent him from calling himself a Christian, or others from so regarding him. But no Theosophist has the right to this name, unless he is thoroughly imbued with the correctness of Carlyle's truism: "The end of man is an *action* and not a *thought*, though it were the noblest" — and unless he sets and models his daily life upon this truth. The profession of a truth is not yet the enactment of it; and the more beautiful and grand it sounds, the more loudly virtue or duty is talked about instead of being acted upon, the more forc-

ibly it will always remind one of the Dead Sea fruit. *Cant* is the most loathsome of all vices.

ENQUIRER. What do you consider as due to humanity at large?

THEOSOPHIST. Full recognition of equal rights and privileges for all, and without distinction of race, color, social position, or birth.

ENQUIRER. When would you consider such due not given?

THEOSOPHIST. When there is the slightest invasion of another's right — be that other a man or a nation; when there is any failure to show him the same justice, kindness, consideration or mercy which we desire for ourselves. The whole present system of politics is built on the oblivion of such rights, and the most fierce assertion of national selfishness. The French say: "Like master, like man"; they ought to add, "Like national policy, like citizen."

POLITICS

ENQUIRER. Do you take any part in politics?

THEOSOPHIST. As a Society, we carefully avoid them, for the reasons given below. To seek to achieve political reforms before we have effected a reform in *human nature*, is like *putting new wine into old bottles*. Make men feel and recognize in their innermost hearts what is their real, true duty to all men, and every old abuse of power, every iniquitous law in the national policy, based on human, social or

political selfishness, will disappear of itself. Foolish is the gardener who seeks to weed his flower-bed of poisonous plants by cutting them off from the surface of the soil, instead of tearing them out by the roots. No lasting political reform can be ever achieved with the same selfish men at the head of affairs as of old.

THE RELATIONS OF THE T. S. TO POLITICAL REFORMS.

ENQUIRER. The Theosophical Society is not, then, a political organization?

THEOSOPHIST. Certainly not. It is international in the highest sense in that its members comprise men and women of all races, creeds, and forms of thought, who work together for one object, the improvement of humanity; but as a society it takes absolutely no part in any national or party politics.

As a society they can only act together in matters which are common to all — that is, in Theosophy itself; as individuals, each is left perfectly free to follow out his or her particular line of political thought and action, so long as this does not conflict with Theosophical principles or hurt the Theosophical Society.

FOUR LINKS OF THE GOLDEN CHAIN

ENQUIRER. How, then, should Theosophical principles be applied so that social co-operation may be promoted and true efforts for social amelioration be carried on?

THEOSOPHIST. Let me briefly remind you what these principles are — universal Unity and Causation; Human Solidarity; the Law of Karma; Re-incarnation. These are the four links of the golden chain which should bind humanity into one family, one universal Brotherhood.

ENQUIRER. How?

THEOSOPHIST. In the present state of society, especially in so-called civilized countries, we are continually brought face to face with the fact that large numbers of people are suffering from misery, poverty and disease. Their physical condition is wretched, and their mental and spir-

itual faculties are often almost dormant. On the other hand, many persons at the opposite end of the social scale are leading lives of careless indifference, material luxury, and selfish indulgence. Neither of these forms of existence is mere chance. Both are the effects of the conditions which surround those who are subject to them, and the neglect of social duty on the one side is most closely connected with the stunted and arrested development on the other. In sociology, as in all branches of true science, the law of universal causation holds good. But this causation necessarily implies, as its logical outcome, that human solidarity on which Theosophy so strongly insists. If the action of one reacts on the lives of all, and this is the true scientific idea, then it is only by all men becoming brothers and all women sisters, and by all practicing in their daily lives true brotherhood and true sisterhood, that the real human solidarity, which lies at the root of the elevation of the race, can ever be attained. It is this action and interaction, this true brotherhood and sisterhood, in which each shall live for all and all for each, which is one of the fundamental Theosophical principles that every Theosophist should be bound, not only to teach, but to carry out in his or her individual life.

ENQUIRER. All this is very well as a general principle, but how would you apply it in a concrete way?

THEOSOPHIST. All good and evil things in humanity have their roots in human character, and this character is, and has been, conditioned by the endless chain of cause and effect. Progress can be attained, and only attained, by the development of the nobler qualities. Now, true evolution teaches us that by altering the surroundings of the organism we can alter and improve the organism; and in the strictest sense this is true with regard to man. Every Theosophist, therefore, is bound to do his utmost to help on, by all the means in his power, every wise and well-considered social effort which has for its object the amelioration of the condi-

tion of the poor. Such efforts should be made with a view to their ultimate social emancipation, or the development of the sense of duty in those who now so often neglect it in nearly every relation of life.

THE TEST OF WISE ACTION

ENQUIRER. Agreed. But who is to decide whether social efforts are wise or unwise?

THEOSOPHIST. No one person and no society can lay down a hard-and-fast rule in this respect. Much must necessarily be left to the individual judgment. One general test may, however, be given. Will the proposed action tend to promote that true brotherhood which it is the aim of Theosophy to bring about? No real Theosophist will have much difficulty in applying such a test; once he is satisfied of this, his duty will lie in the direction of forming public opinion. And this can be attained only by inculcating those higher and nobler conceptions of public and private duties which lie at the root of all spiritual and material improvement. In every conceivable case he himself must be a center of spiritual action, and from him and his own daily individual life must radiate those higher spiritual forces which alone can regenerate his fellow-men.

ENQUIRER. But why should he do this? Are not he and all, as you teach, conditioned by their Karma, and must not Karma necessarily work itself out on certain lines?

THEOSOPHIST. It is this very law of Karma which gives strength to all that I have said. The individual cannot separate himself from the race, nor the race from the individual. The law of Karma applies equally to all, although all are not equally developed. In helping on the development of others, the Theosophist believes that he is not only helping them to fulfil their Karma, but that he is also, in the strictest sense, fulfilling his own. It is the development of humanity, of which both he and they are integral parts, that he has always in view, and he knows that any failure on his part to respond to the highest within him retards not only himself but all, in their progres-

sive march. By his actions, he can make it either more difficult or more easy for humanity to attain the next higher plane of being.

ENQUIRER. How does this bear on the fourth of the principles you mentioned, viz., Re-incarnation?

THEOSOPHIST. The connection is most intimate. If our present lives depend upon the de-

Progress can be attained, and only attained, by the development of the nobler qualities. Now, true evolution teaches us that by altering the surroundings of the organism we can alter and improve the organism; and in the strictest sense this is true with regard to man. Every Theosophist, therefore, is bound to do his utmost to help on, by all the means in his power, every wise and well-considered social effort which has for its object the amelioration of the condition of the poor.

— H.P. BLAVATSKY

velopment of certain principles which are a growth from the germs left by a previous existence, the law holds good as regards the future. Once grasp the idea that universal causation is not merely present, but past, present and future, and every action on our present plane falls naturally and easily into its true place, and is seen in its true relation to ourselves and to others. Every mean and selfish action sends us backward and not forward, while every noble thought and every unselfish deed are stepping stones to the higher and more glorious planes

of being. If this life were all, then in many respects it would indeed be poor and mean; but regarded as a preparation for the next sphere of existence, it may be used as the golden gate through which we may pass, not selfishly and alone, but in company with our fellows, to the palaces which lie beyond.

ON SELF-SACRIFICE

ENQUIRER. Is equal justice to all and love to every creature the highest standard of Theosophy?

THEOSOPHIST. No; there is an even far higher one.

ENQUIRER. What can it be?

THEOSOPHIST. The giving to others *more* than to oneself — *self-sacrifice*. Such was the standard and abounding measure which marked so pre-eminently the greatest Teachers and Masters of Humanity — *e. g.*, Gautama Buddha in History, and Jesus of Nazareth as in the Gospels. This trait alone was enough to secure to them the perpetual reverence and gratitude of the generations of men that come after them. We say, however, that self-sacrifice has to be performed with discrimination; and such a self-abandonment, if made without justice, or blindly, regardless of subsequent results, may often prove not only made in vain, but harmful. One of the fundamental rules of Theosophy is, justice to oneself — viewed as a unit of collective humanity, not as a personal self-justice, not more but not less than to others; unless, indeed, by the sacrifice of the *one* self we can benefit the many.

ENQUIRER. Could you make your idea clearer by giving an instance?

THEOSOPHIST. There are many instances to illustrate it in history. Self-sacrifice for practical good to save many, or several people, Theosophy holds as far higher than self-abnegation for a sectarian idea, such as that of “saving the heathen from *damnation*,” for instance. In our opinion, Father Damien, the young man of thirty who offered his whole life in sacrifice for the benefit and alleviation of the sufferings of the lepers at

Molokai, and who went to live for eighteen years alone with them, to finally catch the loathsome disease and die, *has not died in vain*. He has given relief and relative happiness to thousands of miserable wretches. He has brought to them consolation, mental and physical. He threw a streak of light into the black and dreary night of an existence, the hopelessness of which is unparalleled in the records of human suffering. He was a *true Theosophist*, and his memory will live for ever in our annals. In our sight this poor Belgian priest stands immeasurably higher than — for instance — all those sincere but vain-glorious fools, the Missionaries who have sacrificed their lives in the South Sea Islands or China. What good have they done? They went in one case to those who are not yet ripe for any truth; and in the other to a nation whose systems of religious philosophy are as grand as any, if only the men who have them would live up to the standard of Confucius and their other sages. And they died victims of irresponsible cannibals and savages, and of popular fanaticism and hatred. Whereas, by going to the slums of Whitechapel or some other such locality of those that stagnate right under the blazing sun of our civilization, full of Christian savages and mental leprosy, they might have done real good, and preserved their lives for a better and worthier cause.

ENQUIRER. But the Christians do not think so?

THEOSOPHIST. Of course not, because they act on an erroneous belief. They think that by baptizing the body of an irresponsible savage they save his soul from damnation. Had we the means to do so, we would raise a statue to Father Damien, the true, practical saint, and perpetuate his memory for ever as a living exemplar of Theosophical heroism and of Buddha- and Christ-like mercy and self-sacrifice.

ENQUIRER. Then you regard self-sacrifice as a duty?

THEOSOPHIST. We do; and explain it by showing that altruism is an integral part of self-development. But we have to discriminate. A man has no right to starve himself *to death* that another man may have food, unless the life of that man is obviously more useful to the many than is his own life. But it is his duty to sacrifice his own comfort, and to work for others if they are unable to work for themselves. It is his duty to give all that which is wholly his own and can benefit no one but himself if he selfishly keeps it from others. Theosophy teaches self-abnegation, but does not teach rash and useless self-sacrifice, nor does it justify fanaticism.

ENQUIRER. But how are we to reach such an elevated status?

THEOSOPHIST. By the enlightened application of our precepts to practice. By the use of our higher reason, spiritual intuition and moral sense, and by following the dictates of what we call “the still small voice” of our conscience, which is that of our EGO, and which speaks louder in us than the earthquakes and the thunders of Jehovah, wherein “the Lord is not.”

ENQUIRER. If such are our duties to humanity at large, what do you understand by our duties to our immediate surroundings?

THEOSOPHIST. Just the same, *plus* those that arise from special obligations with regard to family ties.

ENQUIRER. Then it is not true, as it is said, that no sooner does a man enter into the Theosophical Society than he begins to be gradually severed from his wife, children, and family duties?

THEOSOPHIST. It is a groundless calumny, like so many others. The first of the Theosophical duties is to do one’s duty by *all* men, and especially by those to whom one’s *specific* responsibilities are due, because one has either voluntarily undertaken them, such as marriage ties, or because one’s destiny has allied one to them; I mean those we owe to parents or next of kin.

DUTY TO ONESELF

ENQUIRER. And what may be the duty of a Theosophist to himself?

THEOSOPHIST. To control and conquer, *through the Higher, the lower self*. To purify himself inwardly and morally; to fear no one, and nought, save the tribunal of his own conscience. Never to do a thing by halves; *i.e.*, if

A *nd what may be the duty of a Theosophist to himself? To control and conquer, through the Higher, the lower self.*

he thinks it the right thing to do, let him do it openly and boldly, and if wrong, never touch it at all. It is the duty of a Theosophist to lighten his burden by thinking of the wise aphorism of Epictetus, who says: “Be not diverted from your duty *by any idle reflection the silly world may make upon you*, for their censures are not in your power, and consequently should not be any part of your concern.”

ENQUIRER. But suppose a member of your Society should plead inability to practice altruism by other people, on the ground that “charity begins at home”; urging that he is too busy, or too poor, to benefit mankind or even any of its units — what are your rules in such a case?

THEOSOPHIST. No man has a right to say that he can do nothing for others, on any pretext whatever. “By doing the proper duty in the proper place, a man may make the world his debtor,” says an English writer. A cup of cold water given in time to a thirsty wayfarer is a nobler duty and more worth, than a dozen of dinners given away, out of season, to men who can afford to pay for them. No man who has not got it in him will ever become a *Theosophist*; but he may remain a member of our So-

ciety all the same. We have no rules by which we could force any man to become a practical Theosophist, if he does not desire to be one.

ENQUIRER. Then why does he enter the Society at all?

THEOSOPHIST. That is best known to him who does so. For, here again, we have no right to pre-judge a person, not even if the voice of a whole community should be against him, and I may tell you why. In our day, *vox populi* (so far as regards the voice of the educated, at any rate) is no longer *vox dei*, but ever that of prejudice, of selfish motives, and often simply that of unpopularity. Our duty is to sow seeds broadcast for the future, and see they are good; not to stop to enquire *why* we should do so, and how and wherefore we are obliged to lose our time, since those who will reap the harvest in days to come will never be ourselves.

ON CHARITY

ENQUIRER. How do you Theosophists regard the Christian duty of charity?

THEOSOPHIST. Act individually and not collectively; follow the Northern Buddhist precepts: "Never put food into the mouth of the hungry by the hand of another"; "Never let the shadow of thy neighbor (*a third person*) come between thyself and the object of thy bounty"; "Never give to the Sun time to dry a tear before thou hast wiped it." Again "Never give money to the needy, or food to the priest, who begs at thy door, *through thy servants*, lest thy money should diminish gratitude, and thy food turn to gall."

ENQUIRER. But how can this be applied practically?

THEOSOPHIST. The Theosophical ideas of charity mean *personal* exertion for others; *personal* mercy and kindness; *personal* interest in the welfare of those who suffer; *personal* sympathy, forethought and assistance in their troubles or needs. We Theosophists do not believe in giving money (N. B., if we had it) through other people's hands or organizations. We believe in

giving to the money a thousandfold greater power and effectiveness by our personal contact and sympathy with those who need it. We believe in relieving the starvation of the soul, as much if not more than the emptiness of the stomach; for gratitude does more good to the man who feels it, than to him for whom it is felt.

THEOSOPHY FOR THE MASSES

ENQUIRER. And you think that Theosophy would, by stepping in, help to remove these evils, under the practical and adverse conditions of our modern life?

THEOSOPHIST. Had we more money, and had not most of the Theosophists to work for their daily bread, I firmly believe we could.

ENQUIRER. How? Do you expect that your doctrines could ever take hold of the uneducated masses, when they are so abstruse and difficult that well-educated people can hardly understand them?

THEOSOPHIST. You forget one thing, which is that your much-boasted modern education is precisely that which makes it difficult for you to understand Theosophy. Your mind is so full of intellectual subtleties and preconceptions that your natural intuition and perception of the truth cannot act. It does not require metaphysics or education to make a man understand the broad truths of Karma and Reincarnation. Look at the millions of poor and uneducated Buddhists and Hindoos, to whom Karma and re-incarnation are solid realities, simply because their minds have never been cramped and distorted by being forced into an unnatural groove. They have never had the innate human sense of justice perverted in them by being told to believe that their sins would be forgiven because another man had been put to death for their sakes. And the Buddhists, note well, live up to their beliefs without a murmur against Karma, or what they regard as a just punishment; whereas the Christian populace neither lives up to its moral ideal, nor accepts

its lot contentedly. Hence murmuring, and dissatisfaction, and the intensity of the struggle for existence in Western lands.

ENQUIRER. But this contentedness, which you praise so much, would do away with all motive for exertion and bring progress to a stand-still.

THEOSOPHIST. And we, Theosophists, say that your vaunted progress and civilization are no better than a host of will-o'-the-wisps, flickering over a marsh which exhales a poisonous and deadly miasma. This, because we see selfishness, crime, immorality, and all the evils imaginable, pouncing upon unfortunate mankind from this Pandora's box which you call an age of progress, and increasing *pari passu* with the growth of your material civilization. At such a price, better the inertia and inactivity of Buddhist countries, which have arisen only as a consequence of ages of political slavery.

ENQUIRER. Then is all this metaphysics and mysticism with which you occupy yourself so much, of no importance?

THEOSOPHIST. To the masses, who need only practical guidance and support, they are not of much consequence; but for the educated, the natural leaders of the masses, those whose modes of thought and action will sooner or later be adopted by those masses, they are of the greatest importance. It is only by means of the philosophy that an intelligent and educated man can avoid the intellectual suicide of believing on blind faith; and it is only by assimilating the strict continuity and logical coherence of the Eastern, if not esoteric, doctrines, that he can realize their truth. Conviction breeds enthusiasm, and "Enthusiasm," says Bulwer Lytton, "is the genius of sincerity, and truth accomplishes no victories without it"; while Emerson most truly remarks that "every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm." And what is more calculated to produce such a feeling than a philosophy so grand, so consistent, so logical, and so all-embracing as our Eastern Doctrines?

ENQUIRER. And yet its enemies are very numerous, and every day Theosophy acquires new opponents.

THEOSOPHIST. And this is precisely that which proves its intrinsic excellence and value. People hate only the things they fear,

In our opinion, Father Damien, the young man of thirty who offered his whole life in sacrifice for the benefit and alleviation of the sufferings of the lepers at Molokai, and who went to live for eighteen years alone with them, to finally catch the loathsome disease and die, has not died in vain. . . . He was a true Theosophist, and his memory will live for ever in our annals.

— H.P. BLAVATSKY

and no one goes out of his way to overthrow that which neither threatens nor rises beyond mediocrity.

ENQUIRER. Do you hope to impart this enthusiasm, one day, to the masses?

THEOSOPHIST. Why not? since history tells us that the masses adopted Buddhism with enthusiasm, while, as said before, the practical effect upon them of this philosophy of ethics is still shown by the smallness of the percentage of crime amongst Buddhist populations as compared with every other religion. The chief point is, to uproot that most fertile source of all crime and immorality — the belief that it is possible for them to escape the consequences of their own actions. Once teach them that greatest of all laws, *Karma* and *Re-incarnation*, and besides feeling in themselves the true dignity of human nature, they

will turn from evil and eschew it as they would a physical danger.

HOW MEMBERS CAN HELP THE SOCIETY

ENQUIRER. How do you expect the Fellows of your Society to help in the work?

THEOSOPHIST. First by studying and comprehending the theosophical doctrines, so that they may teach others, especially the young people. Secondly, by taking every opportunity of talking to others and explaining to them what Theosophy is, and what it is not; by removing misconceptions and spreading an interest in the subject. Thirdly, by assisting in circulating our literature, by buying books when they have the means, by lending and giving them and by inducing their friends to do so. Fourthly, by defending the Society from the unjust aspersions cast upon it, by every legitimate device in their power. Fifth, and most important of all, by the example of their own lives.

ENQUIRER. But all this literature, to the spread of which you attach so much importance, does not seem to me of much practical use in helping mankind. This is not practical charity.

THEOSOPHIST. We think otherwise. We hold that a good book which gives people food for thought, which strengthens and clears their minds, and enables them to grasp truths which they have dimly felt but could not formulate — we hold that such a book does a real, substantial good. As to what you call practical deeds of charity, to benefit the bodies of our fellow-men, we do what little we can; but, as I have already told you, most of us are poor, whilst the Society itself has not even the money to pay a staff of workers. All of us who toil for it, give our labor gratis, and in most cases money as well. The few who have the means of doing what are usually called charitable actions, follow the Buddhist precepts and do their work themselves, not by proxy or by subscribing publicly to charitable funds. What the Theosophist has to do above all is to forget his personality.

WHAT A THEOSOPHIST OUGHT NOT TO DO

ENQUIRER. Have you any prohibitory laws or clauses for Theosophists in your Society?

THEOSOPHIST. Many, but, alas! none of them are enforced. They express the ideal of our organization, — but the practical application of such things we are compelled to leave to the discretion of the Fellows themselves. Unfortunately, the state of men's minds in the present century is such that, unless we allow these clauses to remain, so to speak, obsolete, no man or woman would dare to risk joining the Theosophical Society. This is precisely why I feel forced to lay such a stress on the difference between true Theosophy and its hard-struggling and well-intentioned, but still unworthy vehicle, the Theosophical Society.

ENQUIRER. May I be told what are these perilous reefs in the open sea of Theosophy?

THEOSOPHIST. Well may you call them reefs, as more than one otherwise sincere and well-meaning F.T.S. has had his Theosophical canoe shattered into splinters on them! And yet to avoid certain things seems the easiest thing in the world to do. For instance, here is a series of such negatives, screening positive Theosophical duties: —

No Theosophist should be silent when he hears evil reports or slanders spread about the Society, or innocent persons, whether they be his colleagues or outsiders.

ENQUIRER. But suppose what one hears is the truth, or may be true without one knowing it?

THEOSOPHIST. Then you must demand good proofs of the assertion, and hear both sides impartially before you permit the accusation to go uncontradicted. You have no right to believe in evil, until you get undeniable proof of the correctness of the statement.

ENQUIRER. And what should you do then?

THEOSOPHIST. Pity and forbearance, charity and long-suffering, ought to be always

there to prompt us to excuse our sinning brethren, and to pass the gentlest sentence possible upon those who err. A Theosophist ought never to forget what is due to the shortcomings and infirmities of human nature.

ENQUIRER. Ought he to forgive entirely in such cases?

THEOSOPHIST. In every case, especially he who is sinned against.

ENQUIRER. But if by so doing, he risks to injure, or allow others to be injured? What ought he to do then?

THEOSOPHIST. His duty; that which his conscience and higher nature suggests to him; but only after mature deliberation. Justice consists in doing no injury to any living being; but justice commands us also never to allow injury to be done to the many, or even to one innocent person, by allowing the guilty one to go unchecked.

ENQUIRER. What are the other negative clauses?

THEOSOPHIST. No Theosophist ought to be contented with an idle or frivolous life, doing no real good to himself and still less to others. He should work for the benefit of the few who need his help if he is unable to toil for Humanity, and thus work for the advancement of the Theosophical cause.

ENQUIRER. This demands an exceptional nature, and would come rather hard upon some persons.

THEOSOPHIST. Then they had better remain outside the T. S. instead of sailing under false colors. No one is asked to give more than he can afford, whether in devotion, time, work or money.

ENQUIRER. What comes next?

THEOSOPHIST. No working member should set too great value on his personal progress or proficiency in Theosophic studies; but must be prepared rather to do as much altruistic work as lies in his power. He should not leave the whole of the heavy burden and responsibility of the

Theosophical movement on the shoulders of the few devoted workers. Each member ought to feel it his duty to take what share he can in the common work, and help it by every means in his power.

ENQUIRER. This is but just. What comes next?

No Theosophist ought to be contented with an idle or frivolous life, doing no real good to himself and still less to others.

THEOSOPHIST. No Theosophist should place his personal vanity, or feelings, above those of his Society as a body. He who sacrifices the latter, or other people's reputations on the altar of his personal vanity, worldly benefit, or pride, ought not to be allowed to remain a member. One cancerous limb diseases the whole body.

ENQUIRER. Is it the duty of every member to teach others and preach Theosophy?

THEOSOPHIST. It is indeed. No fellow has a right to remain idle, on the excuse that he knows too little to teach. For he may always be sure that he will find others who know still less than himself. And also it is not until a man begins to try to teach others, that he discovers his own ignorance and tries to remove it. But this is a minor clause.

ENQUIRER. What do you consider, then, to be the chief of these negative Theosophical duties?

THEOSOPHIST. To be ever prepared to recognize and confess one's faults. To rather sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one's neighbor's efforts. Never to backbite or slander another person.

Always to say openly and direct to his face anything you have against him. Never to make yourself the echo of anything you may hear against another, nor harbor revenge against those who happen to injure you.

ENQUIRER. But it is often dangerous to tell people the truth to their faces. Don't you think so? I know one of your members who was bitterly offended, left the Society, and became its greatest enemy, only because he was told some unpleasant truths to his face, and was blamed for them.

THEOSOPHIST. Of such we have had many. No member, whether prominent or insignificant, has ever left us without becoming our bitter enemy.

ENQUIRER. How do you account for it?

THEOSOPHIST. It is simply this. Having been, in most cases, intensely devoted to the Society at first, and having lavished upon it the most exaggerated praises, the only possible excuse such a backslider can make for his subsequent behavior and past short-sightedness, is *to pose as an innocent and deceived victim*, thus casting the blame from his own shoulders on to those of the Society in general, and its leaders especially. Such persons remind one of the old fable about the man with a distorted face, who broke his looking-glass on the ground that it reflected his countenance crookedly.

ENQUIRER. But what makes these people turn against the Society?

THEOSOPHIST. Wounded vanity in some form or other, almost in every case.

ENQUIRER. What would you do with such characters?

THEOSOPHIST. Leave them to their Karma. Because one person does evil that is no reason for others to do so.

ENQUIRER. But, to return to slander, where is the line of demarcation between backbiting and just criticism to be drawn? Is it not one's duty to

ON EDUCATION

If we had money, we would found schools which would turn out something else than reading and writing candidates for starvation.

Children should above all be taught self-reliance, love for all men, altruism, mutual charity, and more than anything else, to think and reason for themselves. We would reduce the purely mechanical work of the memory to an absolute minimum, and devote the time to the development and training of the inner senses, faculties and latent capacities. We would endeavor to deal with each child as a unit, and to educate it so as to produce the most harmonious and equal unfoldment of its powers, in order that its special aptitudes should find their full natural development.

We should aim at creating free men and women, free intellectually, free morally, unprejudiced in all respects, and above all things, unselfish. And we believe that much if not all of this could be obtained by proper and truly theosophical education.

— H.P. BLAVATSKY

warn one's friends and neighbors against those whom one knows to be dangerous associates?

THEOSOPHIST. If by allowing them to go on unchecked other persons may be thereby injured, it is certainly our duty to obviate the danger by warning them privately. But true or false, no accusation against another person should ever be spread abroad. If true, and the fault hurts no one but the sinner, then leave him to his Karma. If false, then you will have avoided adding to the injustice in the world. Therefore, keep silent about such things with every one not directly concerned. But if your discretion and silence are likely to hurt or endanger others, then I add: *Speak the truth at all costs*, and say, with Annesly, "Consult duty, not events." There are cases when one is forced to exclaim, "Perish discretion, rather than allow it to interfere with duty."

ENQUIRER. Methinks, if you carry out these maxims, you are likely to reap a nice crop of troubles!

THEOSOPHIST. And so we do. We have to admit that we are now open to the same taunt as the early Christians were. "See, how these Theosophists love one another!" may now be said of us without a shadow of injustice.

ENQUIRER. Admitting yourself that there is at least as much, if not more, backbiting, slandering, and quarreling in the T. S. as in the Christian Churches, let alone Scientific Societies —

At present, the main, fundamental object of the Society is to sow germs in the hearts of men, which may in time sprout, and under more propitious circumstances lead to a healthy reform, conducive of more happiness to the masses than they have hitherto enjoyed.

What kind of Brotherhood is this? I may ask.

THEOSOPHIST. A very poor specimen, indeed, as at present, and, until carefully sifted and reorganized, *no* better than all others. Remember, however, that human nature is the same *in* the Theosophical Society as *out* of it. Its members are no saints: they are at best sinners trying to do better, and liable to fall back owing to personal weakness.

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Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*. Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India.

Questions for Review:

1. What is the attitude of theosophists towards political reform?
2. What are four major teachings that need to be disseminated to promote social amelioration?
3. What is the primary duty of a theosophist to oneself?
4. How should theosophists engage in charitable activities?
5. What are the duties of a theosophist as a member?
6. What are the basic principles of theosophical education?

Lesson 12

MEDITATION

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.
from *The Process of Self-Transformation*

Meditation is the time-tested means toward inward exploration of our consciousness. It helps us discover the subtle prison walls of our mind that prevent us from seeing reality as it is. It is the gateway to the discovery of the true self.

The term *meditation* is used for a wide range of practices. We must be able to distinguish spiritual meditation — or classical meditation — from the rest.

For example, the Silva Method of José Silva is called meditation, but it's different from spiritual meditation. The Silva Method involves the reconditioning of the lower triangle. It enables a person to become relaxed easily or to attain the alpha state of brain activity.

Spiritual meditation, however, is concerned with the fuller realization of the higher triangle. To do this, the meditator tries to make the lower triangle become serene.

This observation can also be made of Transcendental Meditation and Relaxation Response as they're popularly practiced. These methods have proven their usefulness and effectiveness in bringing about changes in the personality. They can be used in conjunction with spiritual meditation, but they are different from spiritual meditation.

SPIRITUAL MEDITATION

Spiritual meditation assumes a background philosophy or outlook that questions the assumptions of life as lived by the average person.

It sees the mundane world as but an outer layer of a much vaster reality. This mundane world is often characterized by conflicts that lead to sorrow and pain. Spiritual meditation doesn't seek to escape from such a world but rather to transcend it.

What follows is a description of the practice of spiritual meditation.

Meditation seeks the awakening of the transcendent consciousness, preceded by a series of preparations that make it possible for us to go beyond the personality, that is, the physical, emotional and mental levels of our consciousness. Such a meditation is not primarily involved with images or visions or voices. Where there are images or shapes or recognizable objects or colors, then it is still in the realm of concrete thoughts. Meditation seeks to transcend these.

The object of preparation is to allow the lower triangle, or personality triangle, to be serene. After preliminary preparations are done (body, emotions, sensory perceptions, etc., discussed below), the higher steps toward inner tranquility involve the following:

Concentration. This stage systematically disciplines the mind by reconditioning its habits. The use of a mantra is one of the ways to discipline the mind. A chosen mantra or word is used as an anchor. By mentally repeating it over and over again, usually following the rhythm of the inhalation and the exhalation of

the breath, the mind is disciplined to ignore things other than the mantra, thus gradually developing an attitude of disinterest in extraneous things not chosen by the meditator.

Concentration is a necessary step in Raja Yoga as described in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. The counting of breath in Zen is another example of this disciplinary stage.

Meditation involves an unenforced awareness of the contents of our consciousness. In concentration, there is a struggle between the intention of the meditator and the conditioned habits of the mind. In meditation, this struggle ceases, and the consciousness uninterruptedly maintains an awareness of whatever is in the mind.

Awareness. This stage involves watching the movements of the mind, including feelings, reactions and ideas as well as the origin of these movements. Such awareness brings about a calmness of the personality triangle, thus freeing the consciousness to be aware of subtler realms. Examples of this approach would be the “choiceless awareness” of Krishnamurti, mindfulness in Buddhist meditation and *vichara* or the self-inquiry meditation of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Meditation involves an unenforced awareness of the contents of our consciousness. In concentration, there is a struggle between the intention of the meditator and the conditioned habits of the mind. In meditation, this struggle ceases, and the consciousness uninterruptedly maintains an awareness of whatever is in the mind.

The meditation process then enters into the realms of *samadhi* when the center of conscious-

ness, the observer, loses its separateness from the object of its attention. The wall that divides itself from the object melts away.

Both these approaches are used by meditators. Eventually, however, all meditation leads to the awareness stage. Concentration or other modes of disciplining the mind are but preparations for awareness meditation.

PREPARATIONS FOR MEDITATION

A classic approach to meditation is outlined in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, written about 2,500 years ago. Despite the terseness of its aphorisms, it contains perhaps the most comprehensive map of the transcendent consciousness. It remains the outstanding text to this day on the subject.

A valuable part of the *Yoga Sutras* pertains to the preparations needed for the attainment of *samadhi*. Patanjali outlines the seven stages of preparation, which culminate in the eighth, *samadhi*, characterized by the *cessation of the modifications of the mind-stuff*. Each of the seven stages is concerned with specific aspects of our nature that prevent us from attaining *samadhi* and awakening *prajñā*, or intuitive consciousness. An overview of these preparations is helpful here.

1. Restraints (*yama*). These are five behaviors that eventually contribute to integration and the absence of internal psychological conflicts: *nonlying, nonviolence, nonstealing, nonsensuality and nonacquisitiveness*. Their opposites are behaviors that are rooted in psychological needs and desires that automatically disturb our mind.

2. Observances (*niyama*). These are five attitudes or qualities of mind that eventually lead to self-transcendence: *purity, contentment, simplicity, self-study and self-surrender*.

3. Proper posture (*asanas*). In entering into the meditative silence, our body must be steady and comfortable so that it doesn't become a source of disturbance. The best posture for meditation is probably the full lotus posi-

tion. Other alternative postures are the half-lotus posture, sitting posture and the kneeling posture.

4. Control of vital energy (*pranayama*). This vital energy, called *prana* or *ch'i*, circulates to all parts of the body throughout the day. When unregulated, it can be a source of disturbance in the mind. The control of the energy is done through regulating our breathing. We'll notice that inhalation and exhalation have an effect on thoughts. Hence, the eventual diminution of the breathing activity during meditation results in minimal stimulation of thoughts from pranic activity.

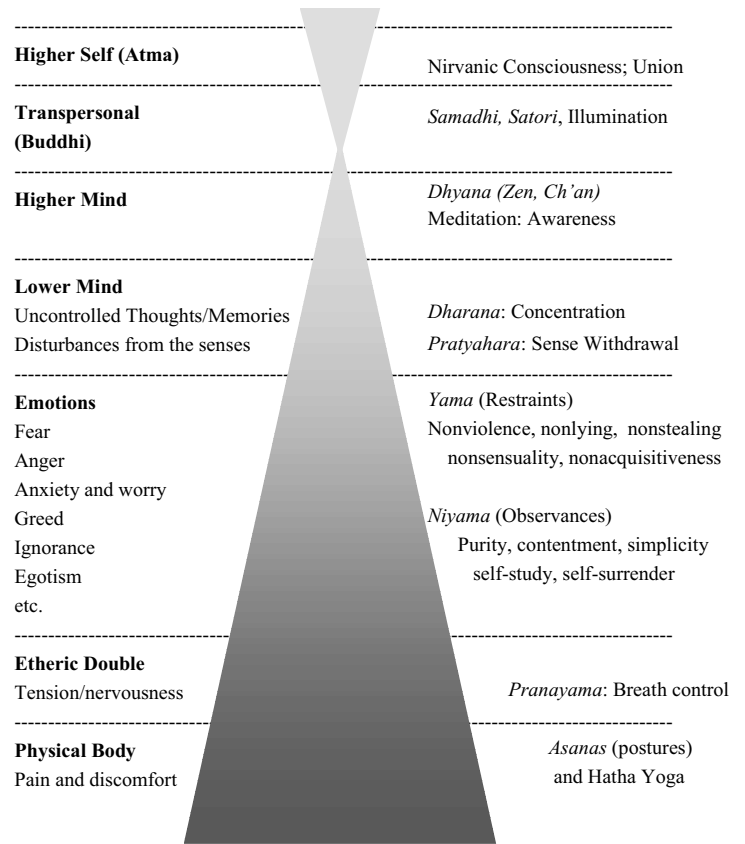
5. Sense withdrawal (*pratyahara*). The mind is then withdrawn from the reports of the senses. The reception of light, sounds and other sensory stimuli by our senses can't be avoided. It's automatic. But the perception of these sensory reports can be withdrawn by the mind. Thus, when we read an absorbing novel, we may not notice that a door just banged or that cars passed by. The ears continue to receive sensations, but the mind has not entertained them, that is, the mind was withdrawn from these sensations. Sense withdrawal refers to the act of the consciousness to withdraw from all sensory reports.

6. Concentration (*dharana*). This means focusing the mind on a chosen object. It trains the mind to be under the direction of the will of the meditator. The mind of the average person is a slave to external stimuli and psychological conditionings. It thinks according to these circumstances. Concentration is a practice that regulates this undisciplined tendency.

7. Meditation (*dhyana*). The uninterrupted dwelling of the consciousness on its object is meditation. Although concentration involves enforced discipline, meditation naturally dwells on the object without being distracted or disturbed.

8. *Samadhi*. This occurs when the distinction between the object and the meditator has ceased. Only the object now remains.

The above is but an outline of the eight stages. I recommend that you look into a deeper under-



Stages in Meditation

standing of the process by studying the *Yoga Sutras* themselves with the help of commentaries, such as those of Dr. I.K. Taimni in his book *The Science of Yoga*.¹

DEALING WITH THOUGHTS IN MEDITATION

Meditation seeks to attain a state of awareness that is not absorbed in thought processes. It's a state of being, rather than thinking, in which the malleable mental stuff (*citta*) ceases its almost endless modifications until even the ego center is dissolved. Yoga calls this state *samadhi*.

On the road to such a state, we encounter various mental conditions that effectively become obstacles to the cessation of *citta*. We need to be aware of these intermediate states and learn how to deal with them.

In the sections below, keep in mind that the end state that we seek is pure awareness with-

out content — pure subjectivity that is nondirected and effortless.

Initial Approaches. Each time we enter into meditation, it's essential that we take note of the state of our mind. Is it filled with the noise of the

Meditation seeks to attain a state of awareness that is not absorbed in thought processes. It's a state of being, rather than thinking, in which the malleable mental stuff (*citta*) ceases its almost endless modifications. Yoga calls this state *samadhi*.

day? Is it peaceful? Is it stressed? The meditational approach that will be helpful sometimes depends on these initial states.

For example, when the mind and body are tense and are still reeling from the problems of the day, a Mantra Yoga approach may be helpful just to calm the mind. This makes use of words or focus points that allow the mind to dwell on one thing rather than be carried away by jumpy thoughts. The word or words constitute the auditory focus, and the visual focus can be any spatial point or activity.

I recommend that you begin your meditation with the repetition of a two-syllable word such as *Soham* ("That am I"), *Hamsa* ("I am That") or their English equivalents. You can also say "One-two." Let it follow the pattern of your inbreath and outbreath. The first syllable is mentally uttered when you breath in, and the second syllable is uttered when you breath out. Breathing is normal. At the same time, focus your mind on a point somewhere in your head, such as the area between your eyebrows. Do this mechanically until your thoughts move away from events and concerns. An alternative spatial focus point is your inbreath and outbreath.

The repetition of a one-word syllable such as "Om" can also be used. Mentally recite the word during exhalation. Be aware of the thoughts in between the recitation of the word. Alternate words can be "*Mu*" (meaning "nothing") or "One."

Thoughts. In dealing with thoughts, it's helpful to recognize the various levels of thinking, which are

- Images and sounds
- Abstract thoughts
- Intentions

Images and sounds. The first group consists of gross thoughts. Observe them until they calm down naturally. Mental chatter belongs to this class.

Abstract thoughts. When the train of images and the chatter of the mind cease, then you need to be aware of formless thoughts. These are the abstract thoughts that are subtle but imperceptibly swift in their movements. Recognition of things or objects or concepts is a movement on this level. That is, the moment we recognize anything, such as a chair, even if we don't call it a chair or identify it verbally, there is already a subtle movement in the mind. Be aware that the process of naming, recognizing and subtle judging is going on all the time. Awareness tends to slow down this automatic activity. We become aware of the space in between these thoughts.

Intentions. A special kind of abstract thought is intention. Intentions seem to emanate from nowhere — just popping out into the field of consciousness. We think that we voluntarily choose these intentions, until we discover that they just appear without our willing them. We note in fact that the belief that intentions are voluntary is illusory.

Behind all these is the energy that pervades consciousness — or perhaps *constitutes* consciousness. The energy is not distinguishable from the consciousness. When the energy disappears, consciousness also dims and disap-

pears. We become asleep or unconscious.

When this energy remains, there is awareness. The object of meditation is to maintain this awareness without being identified with any of its contents — thoughts, motives, perceptions, etc.

The Self. Finally, the consciousness may enter into a state of bare subjectivity, of bare awareness devoid of intentions, recognition, preferences and naming.

This state can easily be lost by the slightest perceptions from our senses or the slightest wisps of our memories. Gradually, through practice, the length of time this state can be sustained increases.

This state is like rich soil, where germination or gestation occurs under the ground unseen. A contemplative process goes on imperceptibly, leading to the emergence of a subtle substratum of consciousness that remains even during nonmeditative periods. It's the "presence" that mystics speak of, the emergence of *prajñā*, or of the *buddhic* consciousness.

This substratum of consciousness is a significant development in the practice, because it's the link between the transpersonal and the personal in our daily life. In fact, it's the emergence of the transpersonal in daily life.

Whatever is happening — while we're working, thinking, reading, feeling, reacting — this substratum is a nonparticipating, but influencing, witness. It influences because, by its very presence, it prevents certain unwholesome things from happening, such as tension, suppressed emotions and automatic reactions.

Barrenness. There will be times when apparently nothing is happening during meditation. We must not assume that nothing is *really* happening. Meditation, as mentioned above, is like planting a seed under the ground. We water it every day, and yet nothing seems to be happening on the surface. However, underneath the ground, unseen, the seed is germinating and sprouting. One day, a bud comes forth, silently, slowly, im-

perceptibly, that eventually grows into the luxuriance of the plant.

SELF-TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECTS OF MEDITATION

The regular practice of meditation has a cumulative effect on our consciousness, character and personality.

Meditation, as mentioned above, is like planting a seed under the ground. We water it every day, and yet nothing seems to be happening on the surface. However, underneath the ground, unseen, the seed is germinating and sprouting.

First, it helps expand our field of peripheral awareness, those contents and perceptions of the field of present consciousness that are outside our field of attention and awareness. This peripheral awareness begins to become part of our awareness. The effect is integrative, that is, the contents and perceptions of the peripheral awareness don't remain as independent elements of the consciousness that might eventually result in psychological conflicts and distress. If we become aware of subtle discomforts, we stay with the experience of discomfort until it's resolved, either through processing or reasoning, but not through repression.

As the field of peripheral awareness expands to subtler levels, we become aware not only of feelings or discomfort but even thoughts, motives, attitudes, prejudices or preferences that react automatically to perceptions or stimuli. This is good. They are part of the conditionings we carry within ourselves. This expansion of our awareness accelerates the dissolution of the push buttons in our subconscious. It is thus a working partner of

The Diagram of Meditation

By Helena P. Blavatsky

First conceive of UNITY by Expansion in space and infinite in Time. (Either with or without self-identification).

Then meditate logically and consistently on this in reference to states of consciousness.

Then the normal state of our consciousness must be moulded by:-

Acquisitions

1. The Perception in all embodied beings of Limitation only.
 - o Criticism without praise or blame
2. Continued attempt at attitude of mind to all existing things, which is neither love, hate nor indifference
 - o Different in external activity to each, because in each the capacity alters. Mentally the same to all.
 - o Equilibrium and constant calm. Greater ease in practicing the “virtues”, which are really the outcome of wisdom, for benevolence, sympathy, justice, etc., arise from the intuitive identification of the individual with others, although unknown to the personality.
3. Perpetual Presence in imagination in all Space and Time.
 - o From this originates a substratum of memory which does not cease in dreaming or waking. Its manifestation is courage.
 - o With memory of universality all dread vanishes during the dangers and trials of life.

Note: Acquisition is completed with the conception “I am all Space and Time.”

Beyond that . . . (it cannot be said).

Deprivations

Constant refusal to think of the reality of:

1. Sensation: Gluttony, Lust, etc.
2. Possessions and Personality: Vanity, Remorse, Greed, Selfishness, Ambition
3. The Distinction Friend and Foe: Resulting in absence of anger and bias (Replaced by Judgement)
4. Separations and Meetings Associations with Places, Times and Forms: Futile longings, Expectations, Sad memories, Broken-heartedness.

Note: These deprivations are produced by the perpetual imagination — without self-delusion* — of “I am without”; the recognition of their being the source of bondage, ignorance and strife. “Deprivation” is completed by the meditation: “I am without attributes”.

(*) There is no risk of self-delusion if the personality is deliberately forgotten.

General Note: All the passions and virtues interblend with each other. Therefore the diagram gives only general hints.

self-awareness processing in dealing with the fragmentation of the lower self.

Perceptions, recognitions or stimuli can be likened to a ping-pong ball that enters the field of consciousness. When the field of peripheral awareness is narrow, the ball immediately hits walls of the subconscious, with all its push buttons, bouncing off immediately, that is, eliciting immediate and automatic reaction. This bouncing is unpremeditated, unprocessed and not the result of mature reflection.

When, however, the field of peripheral awareness grows deeper, a different sequence of events happens. The ping-pong ball travels farther before hitting any wall, and thus slows down. If it hits anything at all, the bouncing will be less forceful. If it doesn't hit any wall, then it just slows down to a stop, and floats there until it dissipates. When the peripheral awareness is deep enough, then the coming of the ping-pong ball is noticed by a deeper layer of our consciousness — the illumined mind (*manasa-tajasi*) or the *buddhi* itself. The perception by the illumined mind or the *buddhi* results in an understanding that leads to a subtle response that is now translated by the personality into action (which assumes that the higher and lower triangles are now seamlessly integrated).

Second, the practice of meditation opens the channel between the brain consciousness and the transpersonal consciousness. In the average person, this channel is occupied by the ego or the personal self, with all its connections with the subconscious. Not much from the subtler levels can pass down to the grosser levels. The ego, with all its insecurities, wants to take charge.

In creating a larger peripheral awareness, meditation expands this channel or bridge and, at the same time, deflates the ego. This enables the light of the higher consciousness to filter down into our ordinary waking mind. As we process the concerns of the ego more and more, it becomes thinner and more transparent, becoming less of an obstruction to the descending light from the higher realms. In Yoga, this is described

as the state of *samapatti*, when the self is like a transparent jewel, no longer distorting the surrounding realities. Patanjali says that with this, there is the dawning of the spiritual light into our consciousness.

SAMADHI AND ENLIGHTENMENT

A special aspect of meditation, *samadhi*, needs to be touched upon in view of the vagueness that usually clouds an appreciation of it.

*The practice of meditation
opens the channel between the
brain consciousness and the
transpersonal consciousness.*

Samadhi is often equated with enlightenment in many writings. To the best of my understanding, this is not accurate. Enlightenment is a form of *samadhi*, but not all *samadhis* are the equivalent of enlightenment. In the same manner, *samadhi* and satori in Zen are not synonymous.

Samadhi, as a term used by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*, is characterized by the *absence of the observer* in relation to an object of attention. Out of this state, *prajñā* or intuitive knowledge may emerge. What is normally understood as enlightenment is the presence of *samadhi* plus *prajñā*. *Prajñā* is the insight or knowledge from the *buddhic* or spiritual consciousness.

Samadhi involves a discipline, but enlightenment involves *samadhi* plus a freedom and an awakening: freedom from the conditioned view of life and the cosmos, and an awakening of a transcendent faculty of perception that enables us to see things in their *is-ness*.

It's not necessary for *samadhi* to occur before the light of *prajñā* or intuitive knowledge filters into our ordinary mind. When the insights of this higher faculty, or *buddhi*, filter into the

abstract mind, then the mind itself can be said to be illumined — the *manas-tajasi*, or “radiant mind.”²

INTUITION

It’s unfortunate that the word *intuition* has become confused with hunches and with extrasensory perception. True intuition is none of these, although in its manifestation it may make use of these other faculties of the psyche. Intuiting is transcendent seeing. It’s hard to explain and define to those who think mainly in terms of utility, pragmatism, worldly effectiveness and similar viewpoints. It’s like the travelers who have been walking and walking toward a mountain peak, only to realize that even if they’re not yet at the summit, they have already “arrived.” In fact, they have never been away from the goal. In fact, there was never any goal. This analogy is likely to be misunderstood by the mind. And it can’t be helped, because the mind works the way it does — thinking in terms of linear goals, purposes, objects and three-dimensional things. The analogy illustrates that intuition has got nothing to do with telepathy or clairvoyance or pragmatic hunches such as feeling that it might rain so we

grab an umbrella on our way out even though the sun is shining brightly.

Intuition is “reverse” seeing. It’s the mind somersaulting, such that while we’re back in the same position, we’re not in the same position. It’s turning our shirt inside out.

These are hopeless verbal efforts. But it may give the taste and allow the reader to explore it non-linearly. This is the meaning of *prajñā* or *bodhi* in Buddhism Christianity doesn’t have special equivalent terms to *prajñā* and *bodhi*; *intuition* and *spiritual* come close. The word *contemplation* has been employed for this purpose, but it tends to drag the meaning further away, due to the word’s association with thinking and deliberation. The word *faith* has similarly been used for this, but the word is so heavily laden with other connotations that again it covers more than it unveils.

Notes:

1. Taimni, I.K., *The Science of Yoga* (Chennai: Theosophical Publishing House, 1961).
2. Blavatsky, H.P., *The Key to Theosophy*, “Glossary.”

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Questions for Review:

1. What is the difference between spiritual meditation and other forms of meditation?
2. Why should concentration be practiced as a preparatory stage?
3. Why is awareness of fundamental importance to true meditation?
4. What are the eight stages of Raja Yoga practice?
5. How do we deal with noise of our thoughts in meditation?
6. What is samadhi and enlightenment?
7. What is intuition?

GLOSSARY

Sk.: Sanskrit, Gk.: Greek, Tib.: Tibetan

Adept. A Mahatma or Initiate.

Arhat (Sk. = “a holy one”). A fourth initiate. It is used in Buddhism to refer to one who has attained liberation and human perfection. An Arhat will no longer be subject to the cycle of birth and rebirth unless it is voluntarily chosen.

Astral body. A term that has two different meanings in theosophical literature (depending on the author). The early theosophists, such as Helena P. Blavatsky, uses it to mean the etheric double or *linga sarira*. In later literature, it refers to the desire body or *kama rupa*. Readers should note how each author uses the term.

Atma (Sk. = “breath”). Spirit. The seventh principle in a human being. It is a universal principle that does not belong to any individual soul. It gets individualized only when coupled with *Buddhi*. Hence *Atma-Buddhi* is often termed the *Monad*.

Atma-Buddhi-Manas. (Sk.) The higher human principles that survive death and which reincarnates.

Aura. The glow or emanation around the human body. It usually refers to the etheric aura, that is, the glow or emanation that is seen by clairvoyants which is part of the etheric double. But it also refers to such emanations from the higher bodies, such as the emotional or mental bodies.

Avatar (Sk. = “divine descent”). An incarnation of a divine being, such as that of Krishna.

Bodhisattva (Sk.). An enlightened being who lives for the benefit of others.

Brahmā (Sk.). The Creative God of the Hindus, one of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. It is equivalent to the Third Logos in theosophical literature.

Brahman (Sk.). The unmanifested Deity equivalent to the First Logos in theosophical literature. It is neuter while Brahma is considered masculine.

Buddhi (Sk. = “enlightenment”). The spiritual soul, the sixth principle in a human being. It is the seat of intuition and spiritual consciousness.

Causal body. The vehicle or body of the reincarnating ego. It consists of the higher mental body that is retained even after death, and which envelops the *Atma-Buddhi*. It contains the karmic seeds that have been accumulated by the ego, and which will be the causes of future tendencies, actions, relationships and circumstances, hence the term causal. In Sanskrit, it is the *karanopadhi*.

Chain, Planetary. The view that each physical planet is but one of seven globes (six of which are non-material) that constitute a planetary chain. Evolution of plants, animals, human beings, etc. occur in these globes. A “Round” is an evolutionary period when the life-waves have evolved through all the seven globes. There are seven rounds of evolution in each chain.

Chakra (Sk.= “wheel”). Centers of energy in the inner bodies of a human being. They are like transformers of energy from one vehicle to another. There are seven primary chakras: base of spine, spleen, solar plexus, heart, throat, between eyebrows, and crown.

Clairvoyance (Fr. = “clear-seeing”). A human faculty that enables one to see objects or matter beyond the ordinary physical plane. There are many levels of clairvoyance, such as etheric clairvoyance, astral clairvoyance, mental clairvoyance, etc.

Deva (Sk. = “shining one”). A non-physical being who resides in one of the inner planes of nature. Those belonging to the lower mental planes are called devas with form (or *rupa devas*) and the higher ones are called devas without form (or *arupa devas*). Some of them are equivalent to the English term “angels.”

Devachan (Sk.-Tib. = “land of devas or angels”). A non-physical region where the human soul stays for centuries after death and before the next incarnation. It is sometimes equated with the Christian idea of “heaven,” but it is not a permanent state. It is a happy or positive state because only the experiences of devachan originate from the accumulated lofty experiences of the immediately preceding life.

Dharana (Sk. = “concentration”). The practice of concentration that precedes meditation.

Dharma (Sk. = “law,” “religion,” or “duty”). In theosophical literature, the term is frequently used to refer to the right duties of a person under specific circumstances.

Dhyāna (Sk. = “meditation”). Meditation, which is considered as the seventh of the eight stages of Raja Yoga.

Dweller of the Threshold. A term invented by Bulwer Lytton in his novel *Zanoni*. In theosophical literature, it refers to the astral body left behind by an individual in a previous life but which has not disintegrated by the time the ego is reborn in another body. The remnant astral body is then magnetically drawn to the new incarnation, and it is felt by the living person, usually as a malevolent entity.

Ego. The term may refer to the personal ego, which is *kama-manas* (emotional and lower mental natures), or the reincarnating ego, which is the Causal Body.

Elementals. Semi-intelligent non-physical nature spirits. They have been called elementals because they are classified according to the primary elements that they belong to. For example, gnomes are earth elementals while salamanders are fire elementals. Elementals

have no forms or shapes. The shapes that are ascribed to them have been due to the thought-forms of people.

Elementaries. Disembodied souls, especially of those who have gross or evil tendencies.

Etheric Double. The invisible part of the physical body but which can be seen by clairvoyants as a body that is a few inches larger than the physical. It is the matrix that determine the shape and condition of the physical body, and is also the vehicle of vital energy or prana; thus is also called *pranamayakosa*, or the vehicle of prana.

Evolution. The word is used in two senses. The first one refers to the evolution of forms and consciousness of the various kingdoms of nature (as opposed to creationism). The second sense refers to the “path of return” in the cycle of existence of the universe. The “downward” phase is involution, when consciousness “involves” itself in grosser and grosser matter. In the evolutionary or “upward” phase, the consciousness liberates itself from grosser matter.

Fohat (Tib.). The primordial force in nature which in its more manifested form is perceived as electricity and other forms of energy.

Gnosticism (Gk. *gnosis* = “knowledge”). Mystics or philosophers who taught the “gnosis” during the first three centuries of the common era, such as Valentinus, Basilides, Marcion, etc. They taught doctrines which were at variance with the traditional Christians and hence were declared heretics. H. P. Blavatsky considered that true Christianity were taught some of the Gnostics.

Hell. A term that normally means unending punishment in modern Christianity. In the Old and New Testaments, the original Greek and Hebrew words did not have that connotations. Usually they refer to the abode of the dead, such as Hades or Tartarus. In Buddhism and Hinduism, the different hells are

temporary states of consciousness of the dead resulting from the selfish qualities of the soul.

Individuality. The higher ego, consisting of the Atma-Buddhi-Manas. It is contrasted with the Personality, which consists of the transcendent principles that are discarded after death, namely, the lower mind, desire nature, and the physical body.

Initiation. A stage of development of an advanced soul after one has developed or discarded certain specific qualities relevant to that stage. There are four degrees of initiation in traditional Buddhist and Hindu traditions. In theosophical literature, in addition to the four stages, the fifth is Adeptship.

Involution. The phase where the universe is emanating towards grosser and grosser forms up to the material world, as contrasted to evolution, where the progress is “upwards” towards more and more spiritual levels.

Jivanmukta (Sk. = “soul that is free”). A liberated soul, that is, one who has attained freedom from the bondage of matter, and is free from the cycle of reincarnation. A fully enlightened being.

Kabbalah (Heb.). The mysticism and occultism of Judaism. Its tenets are derived from such books as the *Zohar* and *Sepher Yetzirah* and covers a wide range of teachings that include the genesis of the world as well as spiritual practices.

Kāma (Sk. = “desire”). The desire principle in a human being. It expresses itself through the desire body or kama rupa (also called astral body in later theosophical literature).

Kāma-Loka (Sk. = “desire locality”). The desire world to which the human personality enters into immediately after death, after which the soul goes through the second death and then leaves kama loka.

Kāma-rūpa (Sk. = “desire form”). The desire body of human beings.

Karma (Sk. = “action”). The principle of cause and effect. It is the law that governs the interaction of all existing entities. It is more particularly applied to the acts and consequences of human actions that determine the destiny of individuals.

Kuṇḍalinī (Sk. = “serpent” or “life force”). One of the forces of nature. In human beings it is said to reside in the base of the spine in a dormant state. Its activation will increase latent tendencies in a human being. Thus sages advise that before this energy is awakened, the personality must have been purified of harmful tendencies (e.g., anger or desire) otherwise it will greatly strengthen these tendencies, to the harm of the individual.

Liṅga-Śarīra (Sk. = “subtle body”). The etheric double. Also called the “astral body” by H. P. Blavatsky, although the term “astral body” is used in a different sense before Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater to refer to the desire body.

Lipikas (Sk.) The recorders of Karma, sometimes called the Lords of Karma.

Logos (Gk. = “word”). In theosophical literature, this refers to the Deity or God. Three types of Logoi are usually referred to. The first Logos is unmanifested, the second is pre-manifestation, and the third is manifested. The Third Logos is the creative deity that form the entire universe.

Magic. A term used in the medieval times to refer to the knowledge of handling non-physical forces or powers. Whether it is black or white depends upon whether it is used for evil or beneficial purposes.

Mahātma (Sk. = “great soul”). An adept. One who has attained to human perfection. The two inner founders of the Theosophical Society are the Mahatma Koot Hoomi and Mahatma Morya.

Manas (Sk. = “mind”). The mind. It is divided

into higher (abstract) and lower (concrete) manas.

Mantra (Sk. = “sacred word”). In Hindu practice, mantras are considered as sacred words that have spiritual or psychic potency. It is also used as a tool in the practice of meditation, as in mantra yoga.

Manvantara (Sk. = “between two Manus”). A period of manifestation or activity of the universe, as opposed to an equivalent period of rest or dormancy, called *pralaya*. There are minor and major periods of manvantara and pralaya.

Master. A spiritual teacher, an Adept or Mahatma who accepts pupils.

Māyā (Sk. = “illusion”). Illusion or appearance. It is the view that the apparent world is not the true reality and hence is ultimately an illusion.

Māyāvi-Rūpa (Sk. = “illusion form”). The illusory body mentally projected by an individual, either consciously or unconsciously. It is a different phenomenon to the projection of the astral body. It is the form seen in death apparitions when a dead person appears suddenly at a distance at the moment of death.

Mediumship. The practice of allowing oneself to be an instrument or medium of a non-physical entity, such as a deceased human being. It is the common practice of spiritualist circles. Theosophical literature strongly warns against the practice of mediumship.

Mesmerism. The manipulation of “animal magnetism” as discovered by Anton Mesmer (1733-1815). The invisible fluid in animal magnetism is the same as *ch'i (qi)*, *prana*, or *orgone*. Mesmerism is different from hypnotism.

Metempsychosis (Gk. = “change in soul”). The theory that the soul transfers from one body to another. It is similar to reincarnation except that it includes the idea that the soul can migrate even to animal bodies.

Monad. A term that has two meanings in theo-

sophical literature. Helena P. Blavatsky calls Atma-Buddhi as the Monad because Buddhi individualizes the universal Atma. In later theosophical literature such as the works of Annie Besant, Monad refers to the spiritual principle higher than Atma and resides in the Anupadaka plane.

Mysteries. The ancient Greek and Roman traditions of initiation, found in various places such as Samothrace, Eleusis, etc. The Eleusinian initiations are divided into the Greater and Lesser Mysteries.

Mysticism. The study and practice of spiritual life. It entails the experience of intuitive consciousness or spiritual consciousness.

Nirmānakāya (Sk. = “formed body”). An inner body used by an advanced soul to enable one to continue to be of help to humanity in the physical world.

Nirvāṇa (Sk.= “blown out”). The highest state of attainment in Buddhism that entails the disappearance of all illusion and attachment. It is not annihilation in the sense of absolute non-existence, but the cessation of the activities of the transcendent principles in a human being.

Occult and Occultism. Occult means “hidden,” and hence occultism is the science of the hidden side of life, which includes the psychic and the spiritual world. The words are used in theosophical literature in this sense, as opposed to the modern usage where it connotes something sinister or evil.

Path, The. The road to self-realization, enlightenment or ultimate liberation. Its principles are found in the mystical traditions in the world, whether ancient or modern.

Planes. This world is used in theosophical literature to refer to worlds of varying density. Thus the physical earth is in the physical plane, while the desire is in the emotional plane or world. There are seven planes of nature. These seven are but the subplanes of the lowest macrocosmic plane of the Kosmos.

Personality. The outer ego or nature of human beings. The word comes from the Greek *persona*, which means “mask.” It corresponds to the lower mental, emotional and physical vehicles of the individual.

Prajñā (Sk. = “wisdom”). Intuitive wisdom arising out of *Buddhi* or enlightened consciousness. *Prajñā* is the essence of true enlightenment.

Prāṇa (Sk. = “vital air”). The energy that is present in nature and in all living things. It is equivalent to the *ch’i* (*qi*) of Chinese medicine. It circulates through the etheric double, which is also called the *pranamayakosa*, or the vehicle of *prana*.

Psyche (Gk. = “soul”). The soul in Christianity, as described by St. Paul. It is distinguished from the Spirit which is *pneuma* or breath.

Psychic powers. The powers latent in the lower principles of a human being, such as clairvoyance, telekinesis, etc. It is contrasted to spiritual powers, which belong to the higher principles of human beings, such as intuition.

Purāṇas. A set of ancient scriptures that contain Indian mythology. There are eighteen Puranas.

Reincarnation. The belief that the human soul lives multiple physical incarnations and grows through the experiences and lessons of each life. Theosophical philosophy teaches that human beings do not reincarnate into animals anymore, while some Buddhist and Hindu schools do teach reincarnation into animal bodies.

Round. Evolution in the seven globes of each Chain. See Chain.

Samādhi. The highest state of consciousness in yoga, where the ego center has dissolved and accompanied with the flowering of *prajñā* or intuitive wisdom.

Samskāra (Sk. = “to do together”). The seeds of karma that create the tendencies or predispositions in the future.

Second death. The death of the physical body is

called the first death, where the material body and etheric double are discarded. The soul for a time resides in the *kama rupa* or desire body. After some time, this body is also discarded, which is the second death, and the soul enters into Devachan.

Self. There are several selves in human being: ranging from the outer personality ego, the causal ego, and the Atma. The true inner nature of human beings is the Atma, hence its attainment is called Self-Realization.

Skandha (Sk. = “aggregate”). In Buddhism, the skandhas are the group of states that constitute the self in human beings. They are body (*rupa*), feelings (*vedana*), perceptions (*saññā*), predispositions (*samskara*) and consciousness (*vijnana*).

Soul. The intermediate bodies or principles of a human being between Atma (Spirit) and the physical body. Theosophical literature distinguishes three kinds of soul: the animal soul (desire nature or *kama*), human soul (mind or *manas*), and spiritual soul (*buddhi*).

Spirit. The highest principle or consciousness in a human being, equivalent to Atma. It is distinguished from the soul or *psyche*, which serve as intermediate vehicles of the Spirit.

Spiritualism. The belief that the souls of the dead can be contacted. Spiritualists therefore are commonly engaged in the practice of mediumship, or serving as instruments so that the dead can speak through the living while the medium is in a trance state.

Spiritual soul. An English equivalent to *Buddhi*, the sixth principle of human beings.

Sufism. The mysticism of Islam. The ultimate goal of the Sufi is to attain *fana* or annihilation of all the transient qualities of human life. This is the equivalent of the Buddhist nirvana.

Theosophy (Gk. = “divine wisdom”). The ageless wisdom of humanity. H. P. Blavatsky states that it is the underlying wisdom of all the great religions when the outer husks of

the latter are removed. Its principles have been known in both East and West such as in Platonism and Neoplatonism, Vedanta, esoteric Buddhism, Kabbalah, Sufism, etc.

Upani ads. A body of sacred writings in India expounding on the mystical meaning of the Vedas.

Vedas. The most ancient sacred writings of the Hindus, consisting of the Rg Vda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda and the Atharva-Veda. It contains hymns, rituals, and

philosophy.

Yoga (Sk. = “union”). The practice and way of life that leads to union or ultimate Self-realization. The most well-known exposition of Yoga is the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali which contains eight limbs or stages: restraints (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), postures (*asana*), breath control (*pranayama*), sense withdrawal (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*) and contemplation (*samadhi*).

For Further Reading

The Ageless Wisdom is a vast and profound subject that will need lifetimes to learn. Below are some suggested books to read for the individual who wishes to delve deeper into the subject. The books are not limited to those published by the Theosophical Society.

INTRODUCTORY WORKS

The Key to Theosophy by Helena P. Blavatsky
The Ancient Wisdom by Annie Besant
The Ageless Wisdom of Life by Clara Codd
The Ocean of Theosophy by William Q. Judge
Basic Theosophy by Geoffrey Hodson

CLASSIC THEOSOPHICAL WORKS

The Secret Doctrine by Helena P. Blavatsky
Isis Unveiled by Helena P. Blavatsky
The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett, chronological edition
The Letters of the Masters of the Wisdom, Series I and II, edited by C. Jinarajadasa
The Blavatsky Collected Writings, 15 volumes

BIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL

H.P.B.: the Extraordinary Life and Works of Helena P. Blavatsky by Sylvia Cranston
Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine by Countess Wachmeister
Old Diary Leaves, 6 volumes by Henry Steel Olcott
Hammer on the Mountain by Howard Murphet (biography of Henry Olcott)

Short History of the Theosophical Society by Josephine Ransom

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Light on the Path by Mabel Collins
The Voice of the Silence by Helena P. Blavatsky
At the Feet of the Master by J. Krishnamurti
In the Outer Court by Annie Besant
The Masters and the Path by Charles W. Leadbeater
The Call to the Heights by Geoffrey Hodson

THE INNER WORLD

Thought Forms by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater
Man Visible and Invisible by C. W. Leadbeater
The Hidden Side of Things by C. W. Leadbeater
The Chakras by C. W. Leadbeater

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

The Essential Unity of All Religions by Bhagavan Das
Esoteric Christianity by Annie Besant

Zen and the Birds of Appetite by Thomas Merton

Religions, Values and Peak Experiences by Abraham Maslow

MEDITATION AND SELF-PREPARATION

Concentration: An Approach to Meditation by Ernest Wood

Concentration and Meditation by Christmas Humphreys

The Process of Self-Transformation by Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

MYSTICISM

Mysticism by Evelyn Underhill

Understanding Mysticism by R. Wood

Mysticism: Eastern and Western by D. T. Suzuki

KARMA AND REINCARNATION

Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery by Sylvia Cranston

20 Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation by Ian Stevenson

Evidence of Survival from Claimed Memories of Previous Incarnation by Ian Stevenson

Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect by Ian Stevenson

Karma by Annie Besant

OTHER SUGGESTED READINGS

First and Last Freedom by J. Krishnamurti

Commentaries on Living, Series I, II and III by J. Krishnamurti

Integral Psychology by Ken Wilber

Cosmic Consciousness by Richard Bucke

Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda