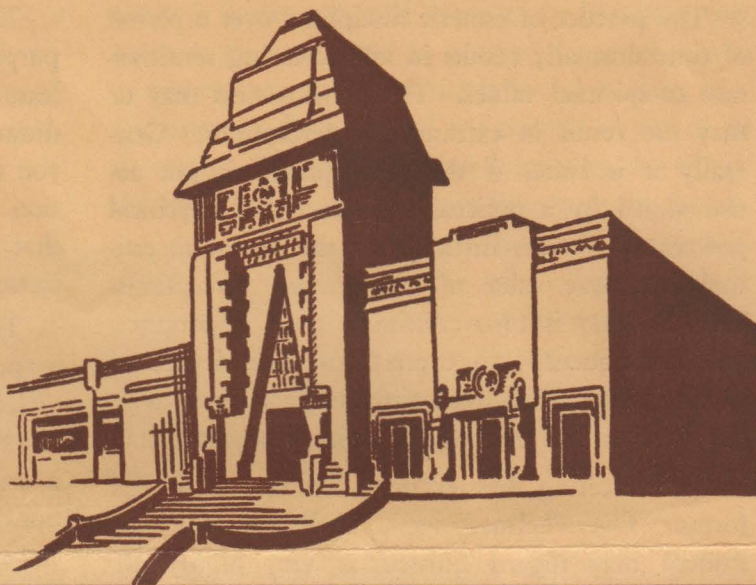


A MONTHLY LETTER

BY MANLY P. HALL



DISCIPLINES OF MEDITATION AND REALIZATION

Tenth Letter

Maggio 1941

Dear Student:

REALIZATION

We have referred already to the power of the imagination in the mental and emotional life of man. It is important to understand that the imaginative faculty is closely associated with, and may be the direct cause of, a kind of pseudo-mysticism. A confusion of imagination and wishful thinking will result in what appears to be genuine spiritual development. Unless the student is protected during the first years of his development, he is quite likely to become involved in the illusions of the astral light, that is the imaginative sphere.

While the disciple is attempting to release consciousness without the protection of an experienced teacher, eternal vigilance is necessary. This vigilance is impossible unless there is a reasonable degree of knowledge of the structure of the visible and invisible worlds, and a very real appreciation of the laws governing them.

Carefully selected reading material is very helpful at this stage, and we recommend that the

thoughtful aspirant secure a copy of *Esoteric Buddhism* by A. P. Sinnett. This is a simple and useful handbook dealing with a wide variety of subjects, all of them directly related to the adjustment of the contemplative life to the cosmic pattern. The book is inexpensive and can be found in most public libraries.

Nor should it be supposed that the study of such a text commits the student to the Buddhist religion. The true mystic progresses rapidly through the illusion of sects and creeds, and arrives at the realization that there is no place for religious prejudice in the enlightened spiritual life. Gradually, therefore, he accepts the contributions of all religions, recognizing the universality of Truth.

However, even reading has its hazards. The mind, confronted with new ideas, or new interpretations of already accepted ideas, inclines naturally to a kind of enthusiasm. This stimulates the imaginative faculty and the student rushes toward conclusions which may or may not be justified by the known facts. Again there must be constant vigilance lest reason be compromised.

The practice of esoteric disciplines over a period of time normally results in an increasing sensitiveness to spiritual values. This sensitiveness may or may not result in extrasensory perceptions. Generally it is better if the development is not accompanied by a noticeable extension of psychical powers. It is very difficult for the novice to estimate the true value of extrasensory perceptions. The tendency is to overestimate their importance, and, consequently, to overestimate the degree of development. This overestimation, combined with imagination and enthusiasm, can prove disastrous.

The resulting disaster may take one of several forms. Overwhelmed by a little progress, the student may regard himself as very highly advanced. When wishful desiring is added to this state of affairs, the novice falls into a vicious circle of imaginary illuminations and initiations which will undermine him spiritually and nullify any legitimate progress he may have made.

Many metaphysical movements have been founded by such enthusiasts—with detrimental results to themselves and others. Numerous so-called teachers of "higher truths" emerge from such psychic chemistry and support fantastic doctrines with the utmost sincerity. Most members of the metaphysical aristocracy with which the entire field of mysticism is plagued are the products of their own imaginations or of the wishful thinking of these so-called teachers.

Reflect seriously upon these facts and strengthen your resolution against the natural temptations arising from imagination and enthusiasm. True progress should be sought after earnestly, and as earnestly protected once there is evidence that some advancement has been achieved. Spirituality should be approached calmly and maintained calmly. It is as dangerous to overestimate progress as it is to underestimate it. No intelligent student wishes to assume the karma for leading others into error. We are responsible for the results of teaching that which is untrue. Therefore, we should instruct only to the degree that we ourselves have been instructed.

This entire series of lessons has as its primary purpose the instruction of the student in the release of the power of realization through the medium of the personality. We hope that already you have discerned the difference between realization as an awareness through consciousness and that pseudo-realization which is merely an intellectual conception.

To make this extremely delicate point as certain as possible, let us review the matter from several different angles. Even though you may be convinced that you understand the subject correctly, it will be profitable to reflect upon these observations and to satisfy yourself that no element of error has insinuated itself into your understanding. A slight error in the beginning, if uncorrected, may become a great fault as you proceed.

An intellectual statement of a fact properly is termed an affirmation. That which is affirmed may be believed honestly, be mentally accepted, and be practiced as a virtue, and yet it may not be a realization. This is a subtle difficulty to grasp accurately. An affirmation is platitudinous unless it leads immediately and directly toward realization. In fact, it is far wiser not to affirm at all, but to reverse the process.

For example, it is an intellectual fact acceptable to all enlightened persons that the world, its laws, and the universal life that sustains it are good. To reason from such an assumption—for even a fact must remain an assumption until it be experienced—may prove satisfying to the consciousness and result in a mental and emotional condition of well-being. Yet the person who believes in the fact that the world is good can become a menace to himself and to society. The affirmation of the essential virtue of life itself can lead to a static condition and a fantastic effort to deny obvious faults and evident failings; it can result in a denial of experience and a refusal to acknowledge and to accept the challenge of progress. Or, again, it may cause the student to attempt to advance spiritually by means of a series of affirmative impulses. He may believe that he is improving because he is affirming good in various concerns wherein that

Maggio 1941

good is not apparent. Each affirmation seems a victory and the enthusiastic affirmer plunges headlong into a condition of auto-hypnosis, scattering affirmations throughout space. Formulas, for him, become facts, and the will to affirm becomes a substitute for internal enlightenment.

True realization differs not only in the method of approach, but in the technic of application over a long period of time in a wide variety of experiences. Realization does not imply an affirmation as to the goodness of the world. Rather as the student grows in realization, the consciousness *discovers* the goodness of the world as inner experience. The fact emerges from a contemplation of life; it is not imposed upon life. That which emerges and becomes evident manifests as a kind of growing thing. It is a living growth through the appearance of things. It is as unnecessary for the mind to restate to itself that the world is good as it is to tell oneself that a plant is growing.

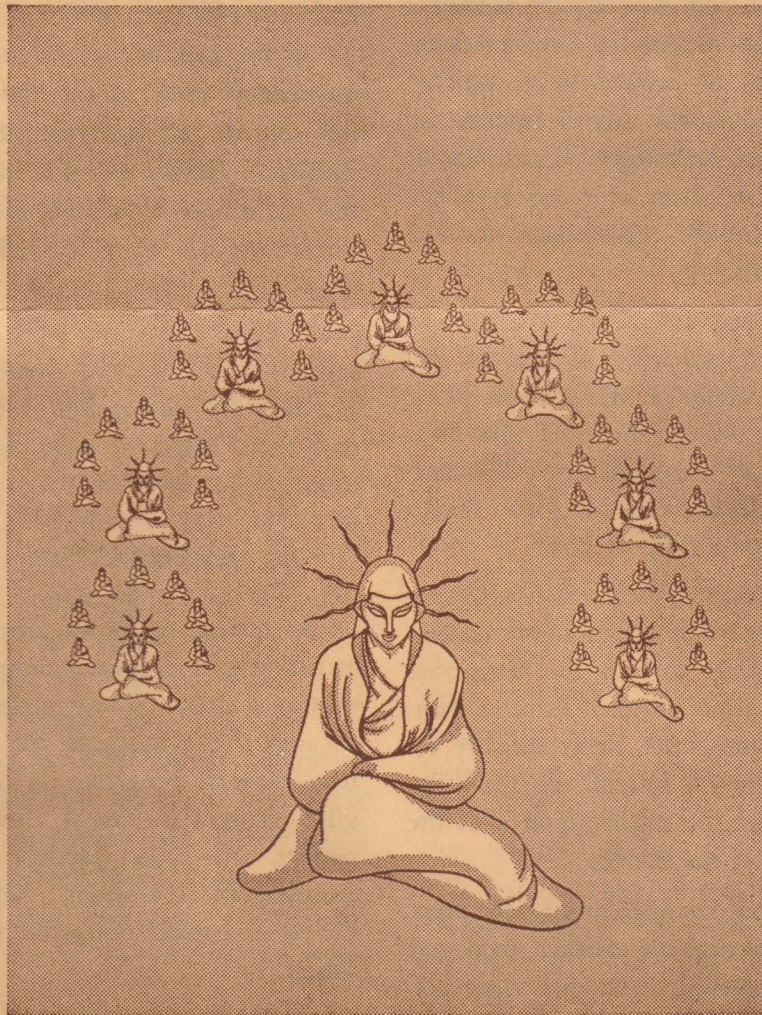
Realization is a kind of seeing of which it may truly be said that "seeing is believing." The world is discovered as good and the experience of this discovery results in an inward orientation of the life. Realization is a recognition both of the good in the world and the world in the good. Further-

more, it is the sustained desire to be like the good, to serve the good, and to become the good. Even as one reflects, these indivisible impulses cause consciousness to flow toward the normal object of its devotion. Thus the world is known as the *Good*; the forces which sustain it are known as the *Beautiful*; and the principle which ensouls it is known as the *One*—not formed, but known; not conjured up by the intellect, but revealed through understanding.

Realization can not be tinged with emotionalism. Religion, as interpreted in the lives of most people, is a series of emotional experiences in which feeling dominates and conditions the fact. As the mind can affirm goodness, emotion can affirm it by a series of pleasure reflexes. These include violent desires to possess the universal good, and such devotional reflexes as comfort, pleasure, happiness, security, and similar satisfying moods. These have

their origin not in the more profound parts of the Self, but in the superficial emotional structure. They are a kind of smugness which, if encouraged, will lead to inertia. They are compensations for the disquietudes of mortal vicissitudes and escapes from the strains of conflict.

Pythagoras taught that irrationality manifests through two extremes or polarities. Man, while



THE TRANSCENDENTAL FOUNDATIONS PERSONIFIED AS SEVEN ARHATS RELEASE THE ORDERS OF THE GENII in the following sequence: Thought engenders the thinker, and from the thinker flow the thoughts.

unenlightened, is a creature of extremes pacing back and forth behind the limitations of his personality. The intellect urges him from one extreme of attitude to another, and the emotions describe a similar arc from opposite to opposite. The mind, worried by the evils of the world which it has not been able to understand, searches eagerly toward a belief that all the world is good. The emotions, sensitive to the discords of human strife, quickly embrace any escape mechanism which teaches the reality of comfort and harmony. Thus life is made up of alternation between hope and hopelessness, optimism and pessimism, attachment and detachment, good and evil.

Pythagoras taught that realization was not to be discovered at either extremity of human impulse, but that Reality abode in the median plane in the center between all extremes. Truth must be sought in balance, not in unbalance. The natural impulses by their frantic searching lead not to Truth, but to the compounding of error.

Seeking neither to escape from evil nor to embrace good, the sage in contemplation releases realization through himself, and in the temperate central zone of consciousness proceeds directly without undue haste or unnecessary delay directly toward the Real. As the motion of universal Reality moves through him, he moves upon it as the singer's voice flows upon his breath.

Realization should not result in any visible emotional reflex. There should be neither pain nor ecstasy. Rather, there should be an increasing placidity visible as an intangible kind of strength, a strength without force, power without strain, and activity without stress.

Once achieved, realization is not easily lost. But it can be dominated by the mind and emotions if egotism is permitted to remain in any part of the pattern. There is a story of a learned Brahman who lived so nobly and so wisely that after death he was carried directly to Indra's heaven where he found himself one of a select group of extraordinary souls. The honor that had been conferred for his previous merits was so great that the poor

Brahman's head was entirely turned. He exclaimed in rapture that he was thankful that he was so much better than ordinary men. No sooner had this thought entered his mind than he felt himself being pitched out of Indra's heaven and falling with the speed of lightning to the lowest stratum of the purgatorial sphere.

As the growing plant may be destroyed by an unseasonal frost, so the unfolding realization can not survive any immoderate mental or emotional complex. Imperceptibly, under a false stimulus, the realization is undermined and shifts back to the status of opinion, affirmation, or emotion. The disciple, often unaware of what has occurred, thus impedes his own progress. The surest symptom by which he may discover that error is entering into his realization is the diminution of his placidity. When he loses poise, he has lost realization.

REALIZATION IN ACTION

As realization flows through the personality, it causes certain definite changes in the objective life of the student. These changes must be observed because they constitute the clearest indication of true spiritual progress. If these physical and tangible changes are absent, then the realization is imperfect. All causes produce effects consistent with themselves. Unfolding consciousness must normalize and make temperate the courses of personal action.

In the doctrine of Buddhism, right action is one of the eight spokes of the "wheel of the Law." According to the Buddhist canon, *right action* is action proceeding from the realization of the Law. It is conduct under Law whereby the life of the student is directed by inner impulses rather than by outward impact. The Self dominates action.

Realization refines and sensitizes the codes of personal conduct. The enlightened individual manifests a sensitivity, a gentleness, and a simplicity in his actions which contrast clearly with the standards of less evolved types. There is no real-

ization without action. And to the enlightened person, there can be no action without realization.

It has been my observation that the study of metaphysical subjects is not sufficient in itself to alter in any marked degree the standards of personal action. Students who have given the best years of their lives to reading and research still exhibit distressing symptoms of misunderstanding and ignorance. There is no virtue in affirming the possession of spiritual graces unless these attainments are evident in the natural reflexes of thought and emotion. To claim enlightenment and to practice criticism and intolerance is to deny with proof that which has been affirmed without proof. In such cases it is apparent that realization does not exist. Perfection is not expected, but there must be a definite evidence of improvement to substantiate any assumption of growth.

As realization unfolds, it produces a natural sensitivity which can not endure conflict within the personality. In the terms of Plotinus, the harmonies within the Self verge toward the harmonies of the world. It does not follow that realization produces a supersensitivity to the problems of the outer life. The true mystic does not expect to change his world, but he does demand harmony within his own personality. The student who can not meditate because his family, or his friends, or his environment is unsympathetic, takes this attitude because he is without realization. True realization demands no change in others, but insists upon certain standards for the self.

Realization produces a marked refinement in the tastes, inclining the mind and the emotions toward an appreciation of beauty and nobility. It does not, however, demand possession in order to satisfy the appreciation. The Indian mystic, beholding a lotus, sees in it the symbol of his whole spiritual aspiration, and reveres it for its beauty of design, its color, and the spiritual truths and laws which it symbolizes. Yet he does not desire to pick the lotus, or to make it his own. He is perfectly content to remain a little way off and to meditate upon its mystery.

The proof of refinement is thoughtfulness. We may define thoughtfulness as a gentle and sincere consideration of any matter. Thoughtfulness also involves the factor of anticipation. The thoughtful action is one performed when the need is recognized rather than when demanded by pressure or expedience. Thoughtfulness is one of life's overtones, something added to the necessary, by which utility is beautified and ennobled. It is not the performance of action as duty, but of action as privilege. The presence of thoughtfulness indicates the extension of realization toward the object of the thoughtfulness. This results in another of the Buddhist articles of virtuous living.

One of the eight parts of the path to the Real is defined by them as *right thoughtfulness*. This term is far more dignified, richer in meaning, than the term right thinking. If we meditate upon the difference, we shall realize that right thinking can be merely intellectual, but right thoughtfulness is understanding released through thinking.

We have emphasized already the mystical significance of appreciation as one of the greatest powers of the soul. Now we must associate appreciation with right thoughtfulness. The result of combining these forces is *right veneration*. Never interpret veneration as a mere acceptance of the sanctity of some object, person, or belief. Veneration is much more; it is a gentleness toward all life, a realization of the intrinsic nobility in all living things. It does not cause the disciple to fall on his knees in blind adoration. Rather, it inspires a desire to love, to serve, and to protect all life.

It would seem obvious that, with such forces stirring within the personality and its sensory extensions, marked changes should be evident even to the uninformed. Therefore, we say that realization moderates all courses of action and becomes, in a sense, visible through the changes which it produces in visible and recognizable consequences.

The Orient places the highest stamp of approval upon evidence of realization in action. Whereas the West rewards activity according to the measure of its intensity, the East honors action in terms of its quality. The Westerner is termed active if he

appears to be in a continuous state of motion and agitation. The cause of the agitation and the direction of the motion seldom are considered. The Oriental regards agitation with definite distrust, and motion without direction as a total loss. The performance of unnecessary action is recognized as a proof of ignorance. Realization, because of the gentleness of its inherent nature, never impels to violent consequences. It never leads to abrupt, disconnected action. It does not produce contradictions, and never inspires intolerance.

Reason stimulates observation—which may be defined as *right seeking*, another of the Buddhist virtues. Observation is a perception of values. Here again the average Westerner is poorly informed. He has been trained to be impressed by mass and grandeur. He is unduly influenced by size, and number, and proximity. His attention is stimulated by the imminent; he sees first that which is nearest in place rather than that which is greatest in quality. Through realization the consciousness becomes aware of the dignity of that which is scarcely perceptible to the outward senses. He knows that Truth, locked within form, manifests only in part according to the development of form. Observation is the power to perceive the degree of realization manifested through the forms about him.

Each of the arts of Asia has a tradition which has been enriched by centuries of observation. The artist is rewarded by being understood by those equal to himself or superior to him in realization. An Oriental art dealer once showed me the treasure of his store. Each dealer usually has some treasure which he does not greatly desire to sell, but which he keeps to show those who will appreciate it. In this instance, it was a lacquered box carefully wrapped in silk and cloth according to the Eastern fashion. He explained that it had been years since he had unwrapped the box. Within the wrappings there was a glorious, jewellike perfection of the lacquerer's art. He opened the box. Within, a little tray occupied the upper half of the space.

Removing it, he explained: "You will perceive that there are no cleats on the inside of the box to support the weight of the tray. It is so perfectly

fitted that it is sustained on compressed air. Yet it is capable of being weighted with such objects as might normally fill the box without falling to the bottom. It has been floating thus for ten years. Consider that this box is made of wood and, therefore, subject under normal conditions to expansion and contraction, and to the effects of dampness, yet it has not warped even a thousandth of an inch. This box was made by one of the greatest lacquer experts more than a hundred years ago. In all that time the tray never has stuck and never has loosened."

He placed the tray back in the box and suggested that I press it slightly with my hand. I did so, and it bounced as on a cushion, but it did not fall to the bottom.

By this time the dealer had reached a pitch of enthusiasm beyond which his Buddhist philosophy would not permit him to go. But he had to dissertate a little more on the subject of the treasure of his store.

"The box with its floating tray may appear to be the product merely of ingenuity or skill alone. But it is more than that. It is a monument to patience. It bears witness to an impulse within the consciousness to do all things perfectly, the impulse to put the most of one's ability into every action. It reveals that the artist understands the dignity of action; it must bear witness to his best effort; it must reveal the inward desire that each action should glorify the Self in the story it tells. When the action is adequately and completely performed, it has been a kind of worship. We honor Truth by performing Truth. We reveal the Law by adequate action.

"Furthermore, those who see this box have an opportunity to share the realization of its designer. It is beautiful in all of its parts, bearing witness to the beauty of understanding which created it. It is perfect in all its parts, revealing that the technic of the designer was adequate to the expression of his inward realization. Therefore, my friend, this is art. Art is the understanding to create perfectly, combined with the skill to express."

Reverently, gently, as he might handle some fragile living thing, the shopkeeper returned the box to its wrappings and placed the treasure of the house again in its obscure place. With a little sigh, he went back to the daily tasks, murmuring: "I wonder if I shall open that package again before I die."

This is a problem in right observation, to see not only the wonderful, but to feel the impulse which created the wonderful; not to be so much amazed by skill, as to be moved by the realization of what was necessary that skill might exist. Thus appreciation combined with observation produces the gentle veneration which was present in the manner and words of the little shopkeeper.

How few there are in the world who could really understand the message of the lacquer box. Only a consciousness which has evolved its own creative understanding could sense the mystic communion with Truth that was symbolized by the simple perfection of this exquisite piece of lacquer work. It would have meant much to Michelangelo who knew that trifles make perfection. But only understanding can understand.

The degree of realization which the student achieves in the studies of the mystical can be determined in part by his reactions toward the exquisite and the fine. If he still prefers the bricabrac with which the uninformed surround themselves, to the dignity of the blank wall, it is evident that realization is lacking.

Take a man into an art gallery and ask him to point out the picture that he likes best. It will then be possible to tell the degree of his understanding. We refer now not to his technical knowledge of art, but merely to his internal reaction to the pictorial. Study the habits of human beings, and, most of all, your own habits. By observing your reactions and reflexes you can determine with certainty whether you have discovered realization or whether what you fondly believe to be spiritual expansion is merely an intellectual conception.

Realization as conduct is the performing of Truth. Realization as observation is the perceiving

of Truth. Realization as appreciation is the enjoyment of Truth. Realization as speech is the utterance of Truth. Realization as meditation is the contemplation of Truth. Realization as veneration is the acceptance of Truth in a spiritual mystery. Discipline as Truth is obedience to the Law. And sight as Truth is the discovery of Reality in form, line, color, and composition.

Thus we have a measure of checking to make sure that our realization is not illusional. If we are honest with ourselves, we know the degree of actual growth which we have accomplished. We know, without being told, the degree to which our tempers have subsided and our irritabilities have been subdued. We know the measure of our honesty and the degree of our integrity—at least approximately. If, after several years of metaphysical study, these temperamental qualities have not changed markedly for the better, we are not studying correctly, regardless of what others may say or how good our memories have become. We have no real understanding unless our lives are better in practical terms. We have a poor memory indeed if we can not remember the laws of life. If memory does not sustain its continuity so that the thing remembered becomes the thing done, little has been gained.

REALIZATION

This month let the realization be a flowing of understanding into action as Truth within the individual is released through realization. Let it be understood as impelling to conduct identical with its own nature. The student should practice the disciplines of the Law. He should know the Law in the motion of his thinking. He should feel the Law in the quality and directing of his emotions. He should express the Law through the rhythm and coordination of his actions.

Let him, therefore, during his periods of meditation, practice simply at first, and later with greater diversity of application, the experience of the Law. Place before you on the table a simple but significant object, preferably something small and

fine, something that you greatly prize. During the process of realization and with the consciousness rather than with the mind, extend your hand and pick up the object. Observe this simple motion. As your realization increases, the action of picking up an object will become symbolical of the entire development of your consciousness. You will find that the impulse will slowly change from a muscular reflex to a motion rich with meaning and rhythm impelled by definite understanding, clearly purposed, and executed with exquisite grace.

As your understanding increases, the motion toward picking up the object will become slower and slower, until, like the Zen monk, you will be able to accomplish the action without movement, but by realization alone. Philosophically, this is immovable motion. The object will be picked up by realization. This does not mean that the physical object will be levitated or will be carried to the per-

son by mental power or any physically miraculous means. It implies, rather, that the reality of the object, the significance, and the purpose which are its real self, will be picked up by the consciousness of the meditating individual without actually being moved at all.

As realization extends throughout the departments of life, the simple act of picking up something will become symbolic of all motion. First it will be beautified, a grace and harmony will be conferred upon action; and gradually coarse action will practically cease, all action being performed within realization.

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall