

Introductory Study Paper 8; TOWARDS A HIGHER LIFE

The whole order of Nature evinces a progressive march towards a higher life.

H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*

Yoga is a process by which the laws of Nature are intelligently and deliberately applied to daily life in order to realise, in full self-consciousness, one's identity with the Supreme.

V. W. Slater, *Hatha Yoga*

**Lead me from the unreal to the Real;
Lead me from darkness to Light;
Lead me from death to Immortality.**

Invocation from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

Human life is often described as a pilgrimage, a journey or a road. In studies of man's inner life, similar ideas are expressed in terms such as the Path of Enlightenment, the Way of Perfection, the Ascent of Mount Carmel. They imply not merely movement but also direction, a route and a destination. "In the sacred literature of the world", says an introductory note to *The Inward Odyssey*, "there is preserved the teaching of a Way or Path, known to the seekers of all ages. It is referred to in the Holy Scriptures as well as in mystical texts, and although its description varies considerably, it is always revered as the one sure means of divine realization."

The movement inherent in the various terms employed is indicative of the "progressive march towards a higher life" in which humanity, like all else in Nature, is involved. Like a great highway, the route is clearly sign-posted in spiritual literature, and instruction in its rules and conditions is made available to all would-be travellers. The destination towards which it leads - a horizon rather a static goal - is, like the Way itself, recognized under a variety of terms: Salvation, Liberation, Enlightenment, Self-Realization, Union.

Behold the truth before you: a clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect, an unveiled spiritual perception, a brotherliness for one's co-disciple, 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 defence 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.

Collected Writings XII, p503

The invocation given at the beginning embraces the whole nature of the journey, for the unreal is the transitory, the perishable, all that pertains to the world of time; the Real that is sought is that which endures, which is without birth or death, which always IS. The darkness is the darkness of ignorance that obscures the fundamental truth of the unity of all life and is therefore the source of all division and hatred and enmity; the Light is the Light of Truth that reveals the fact of Oneness, the identity of the life in the unit with the Life of the ALL. Death is the limited perception that identifies life with form, the attachment to material existence which by its very nature is separative and temporary; Immortality is the state of conscious identification with THAT which cannot die, the experience of the truth of the ancient affirmation, "THAT art thou".

The essence of the transformation that has to take place along the Way is the abandonment of the lesser self in order to make possible the experiencing of the greater SELF, the One Life. For the majority who have still to learn the basic rules of travel on this Way, the teaching is given in the form of commandments - the Biblical Ten, the Buddhist Five, the yama and niyama that constitute the ethical preparation for higher Yoga, the Rules of conduct given to the layman in the Upanishads.

The explanatory note that accompanies one version of this last presentation of the teaching could apply equally to them all: in order to arrive at the full and unmediated knowledge of Reality, the whole personality of man must be regenerated through appropriate discipline undergone in one or more lives; good works and noble conduct must pre-cede illumination. The aim of the rules of conduct common to different spiritual disciplines is to weaken the intense grip of self-concern, self-centredness and selfishness in its many forms, and at the same time to nurture the seeds of altruism, love and compassion. "Cease to do evil, learn to do good" - the Buddhist injunction epitomises the ethical

foundation of the higher life, while the occult teaching affirms, "To live to benefit mankind is the first step".

Popular forms of religion may be considered as the nursery for babes who cannot yet take the tougher diet of grown men. Until one is prepared to accept and to live by such ethical commandments, it is useless - and dangerous - to attempt the rigorous practices that belong to a more advanced stage. "Let therefore the wise aspirant", says the Upanishad, "knowing the One to be the supreme goal, so shape his life and his conduct that he may attain to THAT".

The kind of life required of those who - if we return to the metaphor of the highway - feel ready to transfer to the fast lane, is one in which the personality is made entirely obedient to the demands of "the Inner Ruler Immortal". The teaching here is traditionally dramatised in allegories of war, struggle and death, in which the sacrifice of the personal nature is the necessary price of a more abundant life.

Give up thy life, if thou would'st live.

The Voice of the Silence

**Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die,
it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.**

The Gospel according to St. John, xii 24

When the I, the Me, and the Mine are dead, the work of the Lord is done.

Kabir

For those who, while having a sincere interest in things spiritual, do not yet feel called upon to give them an absolute priority in their lives, there are books in abundance offering guidance and inspiration appropriate to their needs. Others however, have clearly recognised the nature of the pilgrimage and their own responsibility in determining their rate of progress, and for them a different class of manuals of instruction is required.

These guide-books have certain features in common: they remain practically useless unless the teaching they offer is so acted upon that it becomes integrated into the life of the aspirant and is transformed into living experience. Furthermore, they clearly point to the fact that the goal is achieved only by self-effort and that no external teacher can do more than point the way. An analysis of their various disciplines suggests three 'areas of effort' or aspects of the personal life to which the aspirant's attention is particularly called. Using the classical system of Patanjali as the model, we see these aspects as the ethical (*yama, niyama*), the psycho-physical (*asana, pranayama, pratyahara*) and the mento-spiritual (*dharana, dhyana, samadhi*).

The ethical aspect is the discipline of personal conduct both towards one's fellow men (as indeed towards all beings) and towards oneself; the psycho-physical aspect embraces the disciplines of the body; the senses and the appetites or tendencies associated with them; the mento-spiritual aspect is that inner discipline which, by the control of mind, facilitates the awakening of higher faculties and the irruption into daily life of the influence of the true Individuality, the Higher Self.

The following titles are selected from among those manuals particularly valued by students of Theosophy:

At the Feet of the Master is based on the Vedic tradition as expounded by Sri Shankaracharya, enumerating the four qualifications necessary for the treading of the Path - Discrimination or Discernment, Desirelessness or Dispassion, Six Virtues or Attributes, and the Thirst after Liberation. This small book presents the ancient teaching in simple modern language; it is a commentary on the Four Qualifications and their application in the context of everyday life.

Raja Yoga, by V. W. Slater, is a "a simplified and practical course" of Ten Lessons, suggesting how the Eight Limbs of Yoga described in the Sutras of Patanjali may be practised methodically in daily life. Although there are many translations and commentaries of the Sutras, there does not seem to be any other book offering a systematised course of practical instruction for today's aspirant.

The Occult Way, by P. G. Bowen, is an advanced course in Seven Lessons. It was written to fulfil the intention of the author's teacher, known to the literary world as 'A.E.'. That intention, explains the author, was to make "a definite attempt - the first really definite attempt of the kind made in these

modern times - to teach the Occult, or Inner Way of Life, as it was taught in ancient, and as it is still taught in the secret modern, Hermetic Schools" ; The Publisher's Note at the beginning of the 1978 edition warns the reader that the author "is concerned only to instruct serious students. He makes no attempt to woo the casually interested or to argue his thesis with those who hold different opinions."

The Voice of the Silence consists of extracts Selected and translated by Mme Blavatsky from a Tibetan work, *The Book of the Golden Precepts*. Significantly, it is "Dedicated to the Few", offering instruction, as described in the Foreword to the 1927 Peking edition, in "the processes of meditation and self-conquest by which the earnest disciple may hope in the course of many incarnations to become a Master of Wisdom".

Light on the Path, written down by "M.C." (Mabel Collins), apparently under the inspiration of one of the Adept Teachers, is described by Mme Blavatsky as "that priceless little jewel". It is addressed to "all disciples" and begins with a statement of Four Truths, followed by two groups of twenty-one Rules written "for all disciples - those In a different category who 'take knowledge' " - and for none else. The Four Truths and the Rules occupy few pages, the rest of this small work consisting of a commentary on the Four Truths. It is not a book for the half-hearted, still less for the faint-hearted.

The Inward Odyssey (sub-titled *The Concept of 'The Way' in the Great Religions of the World*) by Edith B. Schnapper, is a scholarly, comprehensive and inspiring study of the many ways in which man's spiritual journey has been recognized in different cultures and religious traditions. The extensive Bibliography shows the wide range of sources - Buddhist, Christian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Hindu, Islamic and others - from which the author has drawn the abundant quotations that illustrate her thesis throughout.

A small document found after H.P.B.'s passing and attributed to her epitomises the occult teaching of the Way:

There is a road steep and thorny...

Just as the future oak-tree is present already in the acorn, so also the future Master of Wisdom is present in the disciple. Here is the final paragraph of the Preface to I. K. Taimni's version of the Yoga Sutras, *The Science of Yoga*:

The important point is to make a definite beginning somewhere and as soon as possible - Now. The moment such a serious beginning is made forces begin to gather round the centre of endeavour and take the aspirant forward towards his goal, slowly at first, but with increasing speed until he becomes so absorbed in the pursuit of his ideal that time and distance cease to matter for him. And one day he finds that he has reached his goal and looks back with a kind of wonder at the long and tedious journey which he has completed in the realm of Time while all the time he was living in the Eternal.