

Thoughts on "At the Feet of the Master" by George S. Arundale

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by George S. Arundale

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THE following chapters are reprinted from a series of Correspondence Studies on *At the Feet of the Master* which I have been writing for the last two years on behalf of members of the Order of the Servants of the Star.

I have left the studies practically as I originally wrote them — permitting myself only a verbal alteration here and there. There may be a certain amount of repetition, since I began writing the series in Bude, Cornwall, in 1914, and only finished them in Adyar, Madras, in 1918. And there has been no time to rewrite or even to submit them to a thorough revision.

But some of my friends think them helpful, and at least they may draw the attention of their readers to the wonderful book which inspired them. For myself, I can truly say that *At the Feet of the Master* is my constant companion, guide, and mentor. Ever by my side is the little copy given me by my young teacher. That which he heard, I am trying to understand; and I find in the priceless words in which the teaching is clothed all that, indeed far, far more than, I need for discipline and training. *At the Feet of the Master* has an appropriate message for every human being who at all strives to lead an unselfish life. [Page VI] I earnestly commend it to teachers and students of all faiths and of all races. With the companion volume *Education as Service*, a teacher or student has a complete guide for daily life. And the truths these two great volumes enshrine are the truths upon the recognition and following of which all true citizenship depends. *At the Feet of the Master* and *Education as Service* are Heralds of the New Age, Signs of the Coming Times, and should be carefully studied by those who seek to co-operate with the future, and who are not slaves of prejudice and custom.

Adyar, Madras, 1918

GEORGE S. ARUNDALE

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CHAPTER 1

THE GIVING OF THE TEACHINGS

IN many ways the little book we are going to study together is the most important gift the world has received for hundreds of years, for the words are from the lips of a mighty Teacher, known to the world as Pythagoras and to some of us as the blessed Master Koot Hoomi, the Master K. H. as He is generally called in Theosophical literature. I must take for granted that you know who Masters are— if not you will find plenty of information in such a book as Herbert Whyte's *The Great Teachers*, or in Mrs. Besant's *The Masters and the Way to Them*. Let us proceed to see how these instructions apply, so that we may follow them intelligently.

In the Preface, Mrs. Besant writes : " The teachings . . . were given to him by his Master in preparing him for Initiation." Several questions arise here: How were they given to him ? Where were they given to him ? What is Initiation ?

HOW THE TEACHINGS WERE GIVEN

Question No. 1. You probably know that some people are able to be quite useful on the astral plane [Page 2] I must leave the explanation of this term to some friend, if you do not understand it — and try to help in all good work as much as they can. Many of you who are reading these lines probably help very much when the physical body is asleep and the astral body is the vehicle in which for the time you are living and working. But there is quite as much learning as helping, and many young people, or those who are not yet very far advanced, gather round some one more advanced and learn much that is not only useful to them on the astral plane but helpful on the physical plane also. These elders in turn sit at the feet [An expression which figuratively expresses "learning from", and in the East is literally true.] of someone who knows yet more, while a few will be receiving instructions from the Masters Themselves.

Now Alcyone — to give the name used to mark the soul apart from the various bodies he has been wearing life after life — is one of these elders, " young in body verily, but not in Soul", as Mrs. Besant tells us in the Preface. Marked out for a special destiny, he is privileged to receive instruction direct from the Master's lips, and he is told to write down each morning the phrases which sum up and express the teachings he has received during the night. Alcyone is in a special position because he was already a pupil of the Master when these particular teachings were begun, and they were, therefore, intended to help him to reach quickly the next stage of his spiritual journey — Initiation. The language, it will be noticed, is very simple, for the Master was, in this [Page 3] case, addressing Himself to a physical brain which was still very young, and so was careful to speak in such terms that the young brain might remember and understand the next day. Every sentence, indeed, is exceedingly clear, because Alcyone did not then know much English — the teachings were given in the autumn and winter of 1909—and only a very little was taught at a time, partly in order that he might remember all that was said and partly in order that he might practise each suggestion as it came. Out of the body he knew much more, of course; but each lower body is a limitation of the one next above (of less dense matter, perhaps I should say, as there is no "above" or "below"), and the teaching had to be adapted to the needs of lower bodies, so that they might be brought under perfect control.

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I do not know whether the Master's physical body was asleep when He gave the teachings. Probably the Master retires early, for He can use all His bodies perfectly, and, therefore, functions as easily out of the physical body as in — perhaps more easily, since the matter of other bodies is less dense. If so, as Alcyone would not be at the Master's house until, perhaps, nine or even later, the teaching would be given by the Master in a subtle body and would, of course, be received by Alcyone astrally, *i.e.* on the astral plane. On the other hand, there may have been occasions on which the Master was still using the physical body, in which case you may imagine Him seated in the big arm chair in the large room where He often receives visitors, or perhaps in His [Page 4] study adjoining; Alcyone receiving the instructions "at His Feet". To the Master, all planes are equally accessible, and though awake in His physical body He would see and talk to astral Alcyone as well as He could see and talk to anyone on the physical plane. He would probably withdraw His attention from the physical plane to the astral, simultaneously bringing into play the organs of His subtle body. Physical objects would then be thrown out of focus, just as nearer objects appear vague when we are looking at objects far off. Perhaps the Master experiences no dimness with regard to objects at which He is not directly looking; I do not know. At any rate, our astral Alcyone would be as real to Him as, perhaps more real than, any physical object near Him— the sofas or the table; and He would talk to His pupil using the astral plane as the medium for His voice.

WHERE THE TEACHINGS WERE GIVEN

Question No. 2 - I have already told you that the teachings were probably given at the Master's house in Tibet. If you turn to the map of Asia and find Tibet north of the great Himalayan range, you may see the name of a town called Shigatse. In the vicinity of this town the Master lives in His physical body, and so Alcyone, living right down in the south of India at Adyar, quite close to Madras, could hardly receive the teaching in his physical body. Adyar is a village whose main distinction is the headquarters of the Theosophical Society — situated on a large [Page 5] piece of land facing the sea and bordered by the Adyar river. In this headquarters is a fine building containing rooms for various workers and, on the first floor, the abode of the President of the Society together with a few other rooms appropriated to the use of various members of the headquarters staff. Close to Mrs. Besant's rooms lived Alcyone and his younger brother, further off being Mr. Leadbeater's big room; and thence, night after night, the physical bodies were left asleep while their owners sailed away over the snow-topped peaks of the Himalayas to their Master's home — a long journey, which would occupy many days if the physical body had to do the travelling, but almost as quick as thought for inhabitants of the astral plane. No doubt our travellers stopped on their way to look at scenery, or perhaps to help some one in trouble, but it would not do to be late at the Master's house for He is exceedingly busy and must not be inconvenienced by our carelessness. Probably the teaching did not take a very long time —about fifteen minutes; so, when the party was dismissed, the rest of the night would be filled with all kinds of useful experience in the training of Alcyone's astral and other bodies for future work. At about 5.30 in the morning the physical body would be awakened by its owner, and, after a bath and some food, and then exercises and study, Alcyone would go into Mrs. Besant's room to take his seat at a table in the verandah. There he wrote out very carefully by himself that which had been taught him by the Master, the Master having summed up in a single [Page 6] sentence or so the gist of the quarter of an hour's teaching. *Thus At the Feet of the Master* came gradually to be written, the greater part ... a reproduction of the Master's own words; that which is not such a verbal reproduction is the Master's thought clothed in the pupil's words".

WHAT INITIATION IS

Question No. 3. "Preparing him for Initiation". What does this mean? Well, we must begin some way back if we are to understand what Initiation means. I hope you all know that the real "ourselves", behind the bodies we happen to be using in this particular life, are immortal sparks of the flame of God, and that each little spark which is one of us has been through the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms before entering the human kingdom to which we now belong. In the early stages, millions of years ago and not on this earth at all, the little sparks were not so much separated off from one another as they now are in the human kingdom; they were not, to use a difficult word, "self-conscious" or alive to the world around them. In the mineral kingdom these little sparks were hardly awake at all. In the vegetable kingdom, however, they were somewhat less sleepy; while in the animal kingdom they really began to stir about. So much so that individual sparks began to live separated existences instead of being content, as heretofore, to share their experiences with brother-sparks and live a common [Page 7] life. You have perhaps noticed that while most animals of a particular species have many peculiarities in common, some have very distinct individualities of their own. This is the beginning of the road which is leading them direct to the human kingdom, and then comes a time in the case of each animal when it begins to live so definite a life of its own that the spark inhabiting it finally breaks off from fellow-sparks and, to use a Theosophical phrase, "becomes individualised", *i.e.*, enters the human kingdom.

THE FIRST STEP

Now this individualisation is the first great step made by the divine spark on its way to the realisation of what divinity really means. The first definite step on the road to perfection has been taken when the soul, if I may use the term, traverses the bridge that, leads from the animal to the human kingdom, that, separates definite individual existence from a more or less conscious existence shared with other souls. In the lower kingdoms of nature, souls are joined in groups according to their kind, and the stage of separated existence, when the soul in the animal enters the human kingdom is, as I have said, the first great step on the path of evolution.

THE SECOND STEP

The second great step is when the human being at last begins to develop a definite sense of right and [Page 8] wrong and to realise, however faintly, that wrong must not be done, while right must be followed. This may be called the dawning of conscience, aroused through ages of experience that happiness follows the less selfish action while pain follows the more selfish action. At last the individual begins to realise that he cannot live for himself alone, and the God within him thankfully looks upon a vehicle gradually tuning itself to the divine harmony. The battle is by no means over. Indeed it is hardly begun; but the man's face is set towards the goal and the higher nature begins at last to receive conscious response to the training and moulding of its lower vestures, so that both become better instruments in the plan of Him Who is our world.

Each of these steps is an expansion of consciousness, the soul — from having been but an unconscious cell in the body of God — begins to awaken and to take the first definite steps towards becoming a God itself; and this is God's object in spreading self-consciousness in each part of the organism that is

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Himself.

THE THIRD STEP — INITIATION

Now Initiation is the third great step — another expansion of consciousness, a further growth of the soul. The second great step was, as we have seen, the awakening of conscience. But conscience had to become definitely established as the dominant factor in the man's nature, and he had yet to learn to [Page 9] realise that while self-preservation might be a necessary law at a certain stage, self-sacrifice is the only true guide for the soul eager to know itself divine. Indeed, while conscience had doubtless been aroused, the individual had yet to realise himself and his powers, had yet to assert himself and, for the time, to become entirely centred in himself and his individual growth. In other words, he had to practise his conscience in all kinds of ways. To borrow a phrase from Mr. Leadbeater, he had to become "the centre of his circle", to learn the powers of the lower vehicles and their limitations, and to apply his conscience to their use. At last, developing slowly his various faculties, and gradually coming to the conclusion that self-sacrifice brings more lasting happiness than self-seeking, he begins to live for the world instead of expecting the world to live for him. Now and again he doubtless lapses into the more selfish mode of living, but unselfishness begins to predominate over selfishness; and when the Masters see that nothing will in the long run affect his determination to serve the world, one of Them, who has been watching the man for lives, determines to give him special teaching so that he may quickly gain added power to help.

DISCIPLESHIP

The individual then enters into an apprenticeship in the school of a particular Master and begins a series of very hard but very helpful lives. [Page 10] Perhaps you know that the government of the world is in the hands of a graded band of Mighty Brethren whom we call the Great White Lodge — using the word "Lodge" in its masonic sense of an organised fraternity. At Their head stands the Great Ruler of the world, and around Him are grouped His Ministers, some functioning as organisers, rulers, heads of the races of the world, others as teachers of religions, others guiding the various continents and countries, others influencing non-human races such as Angels and Devas, yet others acting as assistants to these Greater Ones and preparing to take Their places when They shall have passed on to still higher work. Now most of you young people belong to one or to another of these departments in the world's government, and some great Master has His eye upon you, watching for the time when you intend from your heart to give yourself to the world's service, showing unmistakable signs of earnestness. Alcyone, for example, belongs to the teaching department and will some day become a great teacher of religion. The Master who teaches him is, therefore, Himself a mighty Teacher destined to precede Alcyone in a great office in the teaching department. Just as would-be engineers enter an engineering shop to be trained by a thoroughly qualified engineer, so in the real professions of life still more scientific training is available, and the Master Koot Hoomi will train Alcyone to fulfil perfectly the destiny to which he is to be called. This training has definite stages — the first being when the Master determines to take a [Page 11] possible pupil on trial, this stage being called probationary discipleship. Passing successfully through the period of probation or trial, long or short according to circumstances, the pupil is definitely enrolled as a member of the Master's school and becomes an accepted disciple. Very often many years pass — seven or even more — before a candidate reaches this second stage, but Alcyone had in previous lives satisfied the Master as to his fitness for discipleship, so in his case these two stages and the third, sonship of the Master, a specially intimate relationship, were passed in the course of a few months, his Initiation following on January 11th, 1910. The object of the Master's school is thus to prepare its pupils for

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the world's service, and exists partly to train them in such self-control and purity as may enable them to present themselves as candidates for admission to the lowest rank in the Great White Lodge. Such admission is the third great stage on the pathway of evolution — you remember, I hope, the other two — and is called Initiation because it not only means the entry of the approved candidate into an organised fraternity with all that such entry involves, *c.f.* the masonic initiation ceremony, but because the candidate is for the first time brought into touch, during the ceremony, with certain great truths of life which, heretofore, he has only dimly sensed. These truths will have been known to him intellectually long before and he will for long have striven to practise them; but not until the ceremony of Initiation will he feel them as laws of his nature, [Page 12] will he experience them as living realities. His consciousness, his touch with God, expands, and truths which were outside him, however much he may have realised them with his mind, now become part of his very being, and he can never again think or feel or act as if they were outside him.

EXPANSION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Imagine a circle to include all you are and know. Imagine much knowledge outside yourself and a constant pressure from within the circle to include the knowledge outside. In many places the circle expands in the endeavour to touch the truths beyond. After a time some truth outside, which has persistently been touched, is drawn within the circle, and the circle increases its size by the amount of the knowledge gained. Initiation is, as it were, the moment at which some special truths notably the law of unity, pass within the circle. Until this time, the truths were accepted, their existence was admitted. Henceforth, these truths are realised as part, of consciousness itself.

THE VALUE OF INITIATION

To be accurate, I should observe that the object of Initiation is to confer upon its recipient power for service, derived partly from the added truths, and partly from the fact that the individual is now a member of a Great Brotherhood and shares, for use, the power Their unity generates. The word "Initiation" as [Page 13] used in *At the Feet of the Master* means admission to membership of the lowest rank in that great Hierarchy which governs the world, the ranks stretching upwards until alone in His degree towers the Ruler of our world Himself. Each rank is separated from the rank below by deeper knowledge and more selfless service, and admission from a lower rank to that next higher depends upon proved self-surrender, in the world of men, to the needs of others. Initiation is the third great expansion of consciousness, expansion meaning here an increasing realisation by the individual consciousness of the unity of all life, of the God within us as identical with the God without. At the ceremony itself the Master presents His pupil for admission, having previously satisfied himself as to the pupil's worthiness, and the candidate being approved, enters the Brotherhood, formally dedicating himself thenceforward to lives lived for the world's helping. You will notice that in the Preface Mrs. Besant calls Alcyone "brother", and you must remember that this word is deliberately used to mark the special relationship between them as both Brothers (there is no sex distinction) in one Brotherhood.

THE PURPOSE OF INITIATION

People often wonder why it is necessary to pass through the ceremony of Initiation at all. What can a

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ceremony do to increase our capacity for service ? As a matter of fact, I imagine that by a very slow process of growth mankind as a whole may reach the [Page 14] results of Initiation without passing through any ceremony whatever, drifting almost unconsciously through this third great step. But some people are eager to do quickly that which otherwise would take a long time, and they submit to what may be called a kind of forced growth, so as to complete within a few lives that which is usually spread over many. This involves very hard work in a Master's school, and the student needs much help. As the eagerness for progress is entirely unselfish, the student is shown, after a certain amount of training, how to wield powers which normally would come to him much later. Purity of life, and self-discipline, added to definite teaching from a Master, are the certificates entitling him to a spiritual degree which confers upon him definite powers, and these powers are explained to him during the ceremony of Initiation by a delegate from The One in whose Hands our destinies lie. The ceremony of Initiation is an official examination demonstrating the candidate's fitness so to use the new powers to be conferred on him that he may become a better helper in the world of men. Such powers are not common to the period in which the world is now living, and if an individual is to receive them he must prove his fitness before Those who alone can confer them before the normal time.

"TO THOSE WHO KNOCK"

Notice also, please, how Mrs. Besant writes of the "great Portal" as having swung open to receive the [Page 15] new brother, and in this connection see the words which precede the preface — "To Those Who Knock". The Great White Lodge — "white" because white is the symbol of purity and spirituality — is believed to be a Temple of Wisdom, entry to which is through its "great Portal", a door "which opens to those who knock" in the spirit of a great love for the world in which they live, of an eager willingness to use their powers for the benefit of others, and of a humble gratitude to Those who may deign to guide them to wider usefulness and to a love more beautiful.

LIVE THE TEACHING

Initiation, then, is the third great step, the step which many of you are now, I hope, approaching. Another great step is reached when from the human kingdom a Brother passes to the superhuman kingdom, the region of perfected Men, gains the expansion of consciousness associated with the fifth great Initiation — the one referred to in *At the Feet of the Master* being the first — and becomes a Master, Man who has learned all this world can teach. We need not, however, consider this step. Enough that the teachings which fitted Alcyone for admission to the great White Brotherhood have been given to us at the command of the great World-Teacher Himself. Enough that we too are privileged to know how our lives should be lived if we would become one of the band of servers and helpers. [Page 16] "But" says Mrs. Besant, "the teaching can only be fruitful if it is *lived*, as he has lived it since it fell from his Master's lips". So we must now try to see what this teaching is, how we are to apply it to our daily lives. Remember, as an encouragement, that we are not expected to live the teaching perfectly — to do that would need the soul of a Master Himself. But in the effort will lie the measure of success, and there is nothing in this world that we cannot try to do. Young people in many parts of the world are trying hard, and some of them have gained admission to a Master's school. The great World-Teacher needs many helpers for His work in the world. Will you not try to become useful to Him by training yourself beforehand, so that when He comes He may find a disciplined band of workers ready to go anywhere and do anything, a band bringing to Him not mere willingness to help, but, which is far more important, trained capacity to help as well ?

THE REAL AND THE UNREAL

The Samskrit verse which precedes Alcyone's own Foreword or Introduction sums up, as it were, the whole of the teaching that any Master can give His pupil. "From the unreal lead me to the real" is the cry of all who are in earnest. More than anything else we desire to distinguish between the true and the false, between that which gives pain and that which brings joy; and in every life the lessons we learn from pain are teaching us to recognise more [Page 17] unerringly, and, therefore, to cast aside, those thoughts, feelings and actions which belong to the unreal, to that which separates us from the knowledge of God. The unreal is that which does not last, it is the form which veils the soul, and if only we were better able to distinguish the self from its sheaths, there would be much less unhappiness in the world. It is not enough to know with the mind, you must know with the heart. Most of us know with our minds that the body is merely a temporary form chosen by the soul for a particular life, but so much is the form associated with the life within, that we feel we have lost the soul when the form breaks up at death. So you see we are still very much bound up in the unreal, however much in theory we may be able to distinguish it from the real. But you must not therefore think that the unreal is useless. It is through the unreal that we reach the real, which shows up the more vividly by contrast. The stars are shining on us as much in the daytime as at night, but it is because of the contrast with the darkness of the night that we are able to gaze awestruck at the splendour of the starlit heavens.

The world of matter corresponds to the blackness of night, and the souls of men may be likened to the stars. Living in the world of matter we learn to realise — from its ever-changing forms — that there is something which remains unchanged behind these changing forms. Living in the midst of change, the unreal, we are forced to seek the changeless, the real, and each one of us is gradually learning to [Page 18] understand that every changing mood and feeling is no more the full expression of ourselves than is the child-body the complete expression of the soul within. The child-body grows into the youth-body, and the youth-body becomes the man. Behind each the soul has been pressing to express itself more fully, and so it is with each mood and feeling. The mood passes, another comes, and yet another. And the soul may look back upon those that are past and say: "I was not that mood, for it is dead and I remain". So the object of all the teaching is to discover what is this "I" that ever remains, and how best it may be expressed that the form shall be the perfect mirror of the soul. Even then the form must still be unreal, for all that veils the soul is as a fleeting shadow, but the purer the form the longer it lasts, and even the coarse physical body lasts the longer if its particles are pure. We are told, indeed, that those Masters who use physical bodies may cause one body to last for several hundred years if so They choose, and this shows us that purity is more real than impurity, for our own bodies could never endure so long.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

The second line: "From darkness lead me to light", is another form for the same idea, as is also the third: "From death lead me to immortality". We may look upon the word "darkness" as symbolising ignorance, while "light" is ever the [Page 19] sign of wisdom, as the sun is the source of all life. I write the word "wisdom" and not "knowledge", for knowledge belongs but to the mind, while wisdom is the science of the spirit. "From death lead me to immortality" — let the lower nature pass away and the higher shine forth for ever.

Much more might, of course, be written in explanation of this beautiful verse, but I must leave any difficult

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points for elucidation by some elder friend.

CHAPTER II

ALCYONE'S FOREWORD

WE now come to the Foreword itself, and from the first Alcyone makes it clear that he is merely passing on teaching which has enabled him to knock successfully at the portal giving access to the Temple of Initiation. [I might note here that the actual ceremony of Initiation does take place in a kind of temple, so the simile is true literally as well as symbolically.] "These are not my words; they are the words of the Master who taught me". And then comes what is to me one of the most important sentences in the whole book. "Without Him I could have done nothing; but through His help I have set my feet upon the Path". Many people continually wonder how it is that so many earnest and selfless workers seem to be toiling day after day, year after year, and yet make no apparent progress. Surely X, or Y, or Z, who seem to practise perfectly the teachings given in *At the Feet of the Master*, are in special touch with some Elder Brother, are pupils of some Master, have become members of the great White Lodge. Now we must face this difficulty frankly. Mere goodness is not enough to win admission to a Master's school, else there were [Page 21] hundreds of thousands of members. Mere knowledge, however deep, is not enough, else all our foremost scientists and scholars were pupils. Not even a combination of goodness and knowledge suffices. What, then, is the standard? A definite spiritual tone, certainly, and a record, either in this life or in those gone by, of effort devoted to the needs of the world. Also, a certain intellectual level, not necessarily that of a genius, but that of an ordinary well educated man or woman. But beyond this there must be elements of true wisdom, of a true understanding of the purpose of life. It is not for me to presume to suggest a general standard below which a Master would not look for recruits to His school but, so far as I have been taught, there must not only be a realisation of the general plan of the world's government but also an acceptance of the Elder-Brethren as Guides and Teachers. How can anyone enter a school unless he recognises its existence? How can we expect the Masters to spend Their time in teaching the elementary lessons of life to those who could learn them from elders less evolved than the great Teachers Themselves, but at least sufficiently informed to impart the teaching required? It is not until we have already learned, during our course of lives, many of the lessons life in the outer world teaches us, that we are qualified to enter the Masters' world — the world of realities — for which ours is as a preparatory school.

Alcyone at once proclaims his fitness for membership of the Master's school by declaring that "without [Page 22] Him I could have done nothing". Many people believe, no doubt, in the Christ, in Sri Krishna, in the Lord Buddha, in the Lord Muhammad; but either they expect some return for their belief, for example, salvation for themselves, or they regard the object of their devotion as a pillar of strength whose principal function is to stand between themselves and the mistakes of their weaknesses. In other words, the belief of most people as regards one or another of these Mighty Brethren is based rather on the longing for personal salvation than on a recognition that where These great Ones are, there we may one day stand if we gradually learn to live our lives as They lived Theirs before reaching the present summits of Their achievements. Some spiritual people are content to live their lives in feeble yet sincere imitation of the example set them by their Lord, asking nothing for themselves and giving to all who need, irrespective of creed or race, and these are drawing near to that formal discipleship which comes to those who strive, without desire for reward, but out of great love, to live as disciples in the outer world. [I think I ought to point out that in using the term "spiritual" as applied to people who are drawing near to discipleship I do not wish to suggest that they are paragons of virtue. The higher ranks of discipleship are only to be won through the constant practice of all the virtues, but the entry to discipleship and the passing through the portal of Initiation may be gained while the candidate is still very far from adequately displaying the perfect life. If you know any among the lower ranks of disciples you will realise that all have many

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weaknesses, while some may by no means conform to the world's conventional standards of behaviour. Pure-minded the disciple must be, reverent at heart, loving by nature, tolerant in attitude, and eager in his Master's service. Having these qualities in a reasonable state of development, there must be some comparatively outstanding power which lifts him above the normal level as regards usefulness to the Master. Perhaps he is a great speaker, a great writer, a great inspirer, a great artist, a great healer — possessing some force which may be employed in drawing people nearer to realities. Then *Karma* must be favourable, for he must have exhausted all *Karma* which might considerably hinder the Master from employing him. We should not be very useful if we had to spend much time in paying off our own debts. But the outstanding power may have its own outstanding weakness, and while the disciple is likely to have himself fairly well in hand, you would gain a very false idea of discipleship if you were to imagine that it involved a personality negative rather than positive and, in consequence, a somewhat turbulent disposition. You do not look for perfection in young disciples, but you will certainly see power of one kind or another.] But there must inevitably be much ignorant belief as regards the Great Teachers, however sincere it may be, before Their true place in our lives can become [Page 23] known, and where many people shut themselves off from much inspiration they might otherwise receive, is in imagining that their special Teacher is the only source of truth for all. There is a whole age of growth between the statement that Christ is the only Saviour of the world and the knowledge that there are many Saviours, and until we learn through experience that there are many roads to God, that each human being is travelling along a road as direct as our own, though he may be behind us on his pathway, we shall not have gained the power to help each person on his own road—an indispensable qualification for admission to a Master's school. Out of goodness we may strive to bring others to our own road, but that is a narrow and ignorant goodness, and a Master's school trains its pupils to serve and honour all faiths, to help each individual to tread his [Page 24] own way according to the plan marked out for him by the God-to-be within him.

THE UPWARD CLIMB

If you understand what I have written, you will realise that once we begin to gain a glimpse of the real principles of evolution and know that others are in front of us on life's pathway, just as many are behind us, we must naturally long for the guidance of those who know more, not that we may know for ourselves alone, but that our power of helping others may increase. Struggling hard to know the truth, giving up all that the world prizes if only truth may shine upon us, we break asunder the bonds of convention, we reject the dogmas in which lies concealed the spirit of the religion to which we happen to belong. Read Mrs. Besant's *Autobiography* and see how rocky and steep was her pathway to the Masters. At last, clinging only to a passionate determination to serve the world as best she might, giving to it her ignorance if she can find no better offering, she wins her way to her Master's feet. She longs for power and wisdom only that she may use them for others, and when no personal sorrow or despair prevents her from giving all encouragement in her power to those who cry for protection, then at last she shows herself worthy of that true knowledge which may be given only to those who could never use it for themselves alone. Through such battle, you and I, young friends, must pass. Perhaps the struggle will not [Page 25] yet be so hard for us as it was for her, for she is at the end of her pilgrimages to a world from which she has learned all it can teach her, and has in this life for the last time re-lived within the short space of a few years the hardships of man's upward climbing. She has, as it were, recapitulated the lessons learned during many lives in the world school, so that she may stand before the Masters to prove she knows those lessons perfectly. We are still in the world school, and the lessons we learn are adapted to our powers of understanding. But, knowing of Those in front, we are sure that They live but to show us the way to eternal life, and however little we may be able consciously to feel Their guidance, in some dim way at least we know that They are with us, and that without Them we could do nothing. For the time, we

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may forget Their presence, and then we must still struggle on as did Mrs. Besant, but sooner or later we come to Them, and as a ray of sunlight illumines a dark room, so do we then know that without Them we could have done nothing, that all we have done is because of Them. Do not think, my young friends, that this is dependence upon another, for not only in Their service is perfect freedom, but there is the One Life ensouling us all, and They cannot do without us, reverently be it said, any more than we can do without Them. We are one in spirit; what They are we shall be; what we are They have been; and to the great Shepherd we are all sheep of His world-wide fold.

I have written on this subject at length, for I think it very necessary that you should understand these [Page 26] important facts, since, rightly understood, they will protect you from much doubt and difficulty when you enter the outside world.

SUCCESS CONSISTS IN REPEATED EFFORT

I should like you to pay special attention to the rest of the Foreword. "It is not enough to say that they [the Master's words] are true and beautiful; a man who wishes to succeed must do exactly what is said". Again: "You must do what He says, attending to every word, taking every hint. . . . He does not speak twice". How many of us are ready to sit at the Master's feet under conditions such as these ? How often we hear Mrs. Besant, or Mr. Leadbeater, or other elders, tell us the same thing over and over again. Do we not often think that our lecturers are constantly repeating themselves, that they continually reiterate the same truths over and over again, until we are almost tired of hearing them ? Such, however, is the task of the disciple in the outer world — to recapitulate over and over again the same truths until at last we begin to live within the truths instead of outside them. The Master could not spare the time to do this, but, because the world must learn, He permits a pupil to take His teachings to the outer world and to win for them an acceptance, overcoming indifference, hostility, ridicule; gaining for them enquiry and finally understanding. On very important occasions a Master has been known to repeat directions which have not been properly carried out, [Page 27] but the circumstances were very exceptional and of vital importance. If, therefore, you desire to become a pupil of one of the Masters, ask yourselves whether, for example, you persevere in trying to make your daily life conform to the wisdom of *At the Feet of the Master*. This little book ought always to be at hand, so that you may constantly refer to it, and test in the light of its precepts that which for the moment may be occupying you. I may perhaps be allowed to bear personal testimony to the fact that any progress I may have made or any increased power of usefulness I may have acquired has been very largely due to my continual reference to *At the Feet of the Master* when in difficulty or doubt. The book is a kind of modern commentary on the Ancient Scriptures, and our gratitude goes to Alcyone for enabling us to refer many times to advice which we are not yet enough in earnest to hear direct from the Master's lips. One of the privileges of a disciple, as I have said, is to be able to repeat many times that which his Master will only utter once. But do not forget that you who have this priceless teaching always at hand, are worse off, not more fortunate, than people who have never had it at all, if you do not at least *try* to follow its advice. It is sad to receive no gift at all, but it is positively harmful to receive a gift from such a source and to treat it with indifference, for the result will be that in a future life you will long in vain for that which you now neglect. You are not asked to accomplish. You are asked to try not to be downcast at failure. [Page 28] The effort to attend to what the Master says may bring you within the circle of His pupils, for above all He asks for earnestness and perseverance. He does not count as failures mistakes from which springs a still stronger determination to succeed.

Remember that the Master's teaching applies everywhere and to all. It applies as much in the Parliament

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as in the home, as much to those whom the world counts greatest as to the humblest toiler living as an unknown and uncared for unit in our midst. The teaching is indeed a counsel of perfection, but has its teaching and its value at every stage of the upward climb; and one of the greatest mistakes we make is to imagine that perfection cannot be reached, Utopia is not unattainable, for some have reached it, and if you will try your best to fashion every thought, word and deed according to the Master's advice, you will find yourselves much nearer your goal than you ever imagined in your rosier dreams. Whatever is of noble purpose in you — ambition, love, hope, endeavour — will come to you the more certainly for the attention you pay to the Master's words, and one day you too will say, with the conviction of experience behind these words, "without Him I could have done nothing; but through His help I have set my feet upon the Path". [Page 29]

NOTE

IF you are seriously taking up the study of *At The Feet of the Master* you will find that much of the Master's advice conflicts with conventional attitudes and opinions, and I have known people doubt the Master's capacity to understand worldly conditions, "being so far removed from the troubles and turmoils amidst which we live". Certain students, for example, who have wished to translate *At the Feet of the Master* into the language of their country have sometimes desired to omit or modify so-called "inapplicable" suggestions — imagining that their limited knowledge is of greater practical value than the Master's wisdom. For example, the passage: "If you see anyone breaking the law of the country, you should inform the authorities", is thought by some to be in direct opposition to conventional ideas as to loyalty and honour. The Master, it is urged, tells us to betray a comrade if we notice him breaking a law of the country in which we live !

Now I do not wish at this stage of our study to consider the important duty underlying the advice contained in the sentence I have quoted. We will consider it when it comes before us in its regular order. But I think it necessary to point out the great principle underlying the whole of the teaching [Page 30] given us. The Master is emphasising the real, and it is our business to test all that we are, and all that surrounds us, in the light of the reality as presented to us by a Master of Wisdom — One who has, through ages of hard struggle, gained the power at once to discriminate between the real and the unreal.

In taking up the study of this book we are sitting at the feet of One who knows, not of one who only thinks and judges. Take any ordinary ethical book written by the deepest thinker the world has seen, and you will merely be reading the thoughts of someone in the world like yourself, though perhaps of greater ability and deeper intuition. His line of thought need not necessarily be yours, and it is your duty to be respectfully critical though, of course, modestly enquiring. But in *At the Feet of the Master*, you have the wisdom of One who has learned all the world can teach, who has in the past faced in essence all the troubles and sorrows through which you have passed, are passing, and have yet to pass. He has conquered the world, and not one single difficulty the world can produce could perplex Him for an instant. He has mastered the principles of life, and whether He be living in the world of the 20th century or in that of the 50th or of the 5th, all that surrounds Him is but an aspect of these great principles, an application of the laws they enforce.

He states in very simple language certain of these general principles and does not at all limit His teaching to any particular country or to any special religion. True, he is addressing those who desire [Page 31] admission to a Master's school, but such candidates are people who know more than most others and

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who are expected to live in stricter honour than the majority. So all the advice He gives must be of a tone infinitely finer than that to which conventional morality vibrates.

What you have to do, therefore, is to try to understand what is the matter with your point of view when it conflicts with the Master's, rather than to think that either the Master is not conversant with the world's affairs or that His teaching does not apply to you and to your country. The Master does not ask you to accept His teaching and to follow it blindly, neither would He recommend you to reject it because it does not fit in with your scheme of life. That which you do not understand, try to understand. That which you cannot understand, leave to the enlightening power of time and of experience. If you reject the truth it will only return to you after infinite wooing, while if you merely leave it for future consideration when opportunity offers, you will find that in the meantime you have been unconsciously growing towards its understanding.

Use the world's conventions while truer attitudes are hidden from you, for the wisdom of the world is the standard for the average man and woman. But when a Master condescends to speak — listen. Come to no hasty conclusions in your eagerness to follow His precepts, for while He seeks to shatter outworn superstitions He will not undermine beliefs still necessary for the world's growth. Think over **[Page 32]** carefully what He says and try to understand its application to ordinary, everyday life, remembering that in far-off Shigatse He knows infinitely more of the world than our greatest statesman, our wisest philosopher, our most beneficent philanthropist, our cleverest man of business.

When you doubt — reflect; where you would oppose — suspend judgment; but when you realise — follow unflinchingly, however much convention may be against you, provided you are willing to take courage into your own hands, asking help from none, acting gently and tolerantly towards all. **[Page 33]**

CHAPTER III

THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

WE must now consider the qualifications to be practised if we would gain that special power of service which is conferred upon all who are admitted to the great White Brotherhood — through passing the first of the great Initiations. I might just remark here that the Mysteries of Greece and Rome, of which you will find much written in ancient books, as well as modern Freemasonry, are faint imitations of the real ceremony itself and of the tests which the candidate undergoes. The Ancient Mysteries, especially in their purer form, did indeed demand from their votaries very definite qualifications not unlike those with which we are about to deal. Freemasonry in modern times has so little spiritual life that one can only honour it for its far-off origin and for its charity; but even Freemasonry admits to membership those alone who are deemed to be of unblemished reputation. And in the insistence everywhere on qualifications, in the existence of a ceremonial, and in the conferment of certain powers, you have the endeavour on the part of men to remember that there are real ceremonies, to which real powers are attached, through which entry is sought into a Brotherhood which is the nucleus on [Page 34] the spiritual plane of a brotherhood which some day shall exist in the outer world.

THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF LIFE

The Qualifications as given by the Master are: (1) Discrimination, (2) Desirelessness, (3) Good Conduct, and (4) Love; and He adopts here the Eastern classification, probably because it would specially appeal to the understanding of His Indian pupil. Remember that in each religion mention is made of the great Path on which the successive Initiations are stages, and in each religion may be found enumerated the qualifications which alone will enable men to tread it. In *Esoteric Christianity* Mrs. Besant has traced for us the Christian terminology for the various Initiations and for the qualifications leading thereto, and I recommend you to read what she has to tell us on this subject. Similarly, other religions yield identical information, but we will adopt the Hindu classification as given by the Master, partly because it is so clear that we can easily understand it, no matter to what religion we belong, and partly because its' practical value has been demonstrated by the fact that others have followed Alcyone through the Portal, basing their endeavours on the counsel they have received from *At the Feet of the Master*. Do not think, therefore, that you are studying something of no practical application. The precepts of this little book have been brought down into practice in everyday life in the present day by comparatively ordinary [Page 35] people, and they have found their way to the Path. Remember, again, that perfection in the practice of these precepts may only be obtained by one who has passed that great Initiation which confers on Him the rank of Masterhood.

You are trying but to enter the Courtyard of the Temple itself — the Master's school; so it would be foolish to expect to accomplish now that which can only come after many lives. Keep on trying, and remember that an achievement far, far short of perfection will bring you to your Master's feet. When Mrs. Besant says in the Preface that we must live the teaching, I think she means we must take it seriously and concentrate ourselves on it. All our living is imperfect, but the more we are in earnest the less imperfect it becomes. Many people write to Alcyone telling him what beautiful teaching He has given to the world, but all the use most people make of it is to wish that *others* would pay more attention to it than they do. Living according to a certain standard, we are not easily shaken out of it, and when valuable advice is put before us we imagine that we are already doing our best to follow it. More vigorous effort is expected

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from you, my dear young friends, and you should try to realise that you have been given a higher standard towards which to strive, and that you have accordingly to revise your ideas, attitudes and actions in the clear light which has come to you. Be positive in your study of the book, and follow Alcyone's own method of "living" his Master's teaching by taking the [Page 36] various points one by one and practising them for definite periods of time.

DISCRIMINATION

The first two or three pages of the book itself are occupied in laying stress on the importance of the distinction between people who have real knowledge and those who have not. Some of you may wonder why the Master should have insisted upon so very obvious a fact. Of course "there are only two kinds of people, those who know and those who do not know". It is a simple matter of logic. As a matter of fact, however, this obvious truth is by no means generally applied, even by those who ought to know it, and unless you begin to apply it in your relations with the outside world you will not make much progress towards the Path on which you desire to set your feet.

The people who know have the power of discrimination. What is this discrimination? The knowledge which enables a man to distinguish between that which is fleeting, impermanent, and that which lasts, is eternal. "Men who do not know work to gain wealth and power, but these are at most for one life only, and therefore unreal", says the Master. And later on He amplifies this definition by stating that "discrimination must ... be made between the right and the wrong, the important and the unimportant, the useful and the useless, the true and the false, the selfish and the unselfish". So you see that [Page 37] this quality of discrimination enters into the ordinary life of each one of us.

Do not think that the Master is blaming those who do not know. Ignorance is not a crime, it is an episode of growth; and you yourself become one of those who do not know when you are impatient with ignorance. But while you do not blame, nor even pity, you must at least be able to distinguish between that which is ignorance and that which is knowledge, so that you may yourself abstain from error and may help those who know less. All knowledge is relative, and you must bear in mind the Master's words: "However wise you may be already, on this Path you have much to learn". Those who know more than you do are quite patient with the knowledge you have, but which is ignorance compared with their wisdom. They know that the blend of knowledge and ignorance which you possess is the blend appropriate to your stage of evolution, and that you can help efficiently many people who are at a lower level. But however certain you may be of your own infallibility, people wiser than yourself will never allow you to influence them as to their own thoughts and actions, except in special matters on which you have acquired information more accurate than their own. Similarly, you must be careful not to fall into the illusion that because any one speaks with conviction, therefore he is right. You must use your discrimination. Many people are very lazy, and subsist on thoughts which come to them from the outside without caring to exercise their own [Page 38] powers in determining what to accept and what to reject. "Orthodoxy" is one name for this laziness; "custom", "conventionality", are other names. I gather these under the heading "laziness", because you would be lazy were you to allow yourself to follow the smooth and beaten road trodden by the majority of mankind. If the Master speaks of a "Path" it is because *it* is a "Path" and not a road; because few there be that tread it. On the other hand, while using your discrimination, you will remember that the more limited knowledge of those who do not know may be adequate for the instruction of people less evolved than themselves. For example, the Master tells us that no ceremonies are necessary. Therefore we may do without them. But to some ceremonies may be

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necessary, and it would be very indiscriminative to think contemptuously of people who find much value in ceremonial, or of priests who inculcate it. Let others grow as suits them, only neither imagine that because "everybody" thinks in one particular way, therefore you must think in that way also, nor be so lazy in thought that because some people are positive that they are right and express themselves emphatically, therefore you allow yourself to be influenced by a nature more positive than your own. Keen and independent thinking is an essential feature in the character of one who would tread the Path, for, however much the Master may help him, in the long run his rock of certainty must be based on the God within himself, and a time comes for students who are treading the Path when all external help seems to fail, [Page 39] and strength must perforce be drawn from within. Let me finally observe that you should not rush to the conclusion that you must forswear completely all that to you is no longer necessary. It may be your duty to take part in ceremonies for the sake of others who still need them. It may be your duty to surround yourself with, many customs, conventionalities and orthodoxies, but only for the sake of others. Your primary duty is service, and you will not be a successful teacher unless you modify your teaching to suit the intelligence of your class. Neither will you be a successful teacher, however, unless your knowledge is far in advance of that of your class, and while you may yourself use crutches to show a lame man how to support himself, you will not therefore use them at other times as well. If you confine yourself within outgrown forms, except in order to help, you are indeed lazy; but there is no laziness on the part of those for whom such forms exist. So, while avoiding laziness yourself, you will remember that others find a temporary salvation in that which to you would be stagnation, and you will minister to their needs by giving them that which will help them best.

THE REAL KNOWLEDGE

Now what is this knowledge, which should mark you off from those who do not know? I have already told you that it partly consists in being able to distinguish between that which is fleeting and that which endures. Indeed, throughout this little book [Page 40] the Master is continually explaining to us by way of contrast how the real differs from the unreal. For example: "You must discriminate between the selfish and the unselfish", "feel no anger or impatience", "never allow yourself to feel sad or depressed". Why? Because if you do feel anger or impatience or depression you are for the time living in something which will pass away, while in the long run serenity and cheerfulness will carry you to your goal. So the answer to my question is partly to be found in the study of these contrasts. But the Master also points out that the really "important thing is the knowledge of God's plan for men". All the qualities which you have to acquire are, of course, part of God's plan for men. But the qualities are to be acquired for a purpose. "For God has a plan and that plan is evolution", and the qualities you are slowly building into your nature are intended so to purify it that it may be "in tune with the Infinite", in harmony with the working of God's own nature. The laws of nature are the rules of evolution, the signs of God becoming self-conscious in every spark of His Being, and you must understand these laws so as to be "on God's side, standing for good and resisting evil, working for evolution and not for selfishness". Certain of these laws are already known to the world. We speak of the laws of science, the laws of art, the laws of literature: we know of the law of gravitation and of other laws relating to matter. These you must study sooner or later, if not in this life then in another; for you cannot help [Page 41] perfectly unless you know God's laws for His unfoldment. But we are not concerned with these particular laws at present, for the Master guides us to begin from within rather than from without. First learn something about the laws of the spirit, and the laws of matter are seen to be but their reflection in grosser form. Understand the basis of the spiritual life and you will the more easily familiarise yourselves with the principles of the arts and sciences as at present known. Moreover, the world will give you the latter, while, except perhaps in Hindu philosophy, there is as yet little science of the soul worthy of the name.

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THE LAWS OF THE HIGHER LIFE

We younger souls can know but little of these higher laws — "laws of the higher life", as Mrs. Besant has called them — and I cannot, therefore, hope to enumerate even a very few. But the Master gives us several hints as to where to look for them, and His suggestions will help us to gain a general idea of the kind of laws we may expect to find. He says: "All are one, and . . . only what the One wills can really be pleasant for anyone". Here is a law of unity. "All are one". Therefore "only what the One wills can ever be really pleasant for anyone" — the law of a common purpose. We share a common brotherhood and are moving towards a common goal. If your discrimination has led you to this you are on the right road, for, says the Master, [Page 42] "this discrimination is the first step". These two laws of our being give the key to the statement that "those who are on His side know why they are here and what they should do". They are here because the God within them wills to be here, and they know that what they have to do is to combine with others in the effort to reach the common goal. I do not suggest that our knowledge of these two laws is clear and definite. We but dimly sense them, and the object of developing qualifications is that we may gain a clearer understanding. Nevertheless, when we are nearest to our higher natures, nearest to that part of the One which dwells within us, we are sure of these laws, however much we may sometimes "act foolishly and try to invent ways" for ourselves which we think will be pleasant for ourselves.

Now what evidences have we of the working of these two laws ? First, the ever-growing appreciation of the value of brotherhood as conducive to peace and happiness. I need not give examples from the outer world, for you can think of many yourselves. The world is taking slow but unmistakable steps on the road towards the goal of brotherhood, and because life is all the better for these steps we know that the One is willing us to take them. Then again, we know from the statements of philanthropists, mystics, seers, founders of movements intended to spread the spirit of brotherhood, that the moments of real and therefore abiding joy come when they share what they are and have with others. There comes the sense of a larger life, of a freer spirit, when we share with [Page 43] others and when we live for them. The selfish man gains no lasting pleasure from acts of selfishness, though he may doubtless experience temporary thrills at each successful self-seeking. But these thrills are followed by reaction, and the more the selfish man gains the less he is satisfied, until in despair at the impossibility of satisfying his increasing cravings he seeks some other road. The joy of sharing is far different from the fleeting exultation at having gained at another's expense. The joy of sharing has no reaction, is followed by no unhappiness, brings an ever-increasing peace and an ever-growing power of giving more. Unselfishness — that is to say, working for the larger self instead of for the smaller — is its own reward, while selfishness must ever seek outside itself for a reward, which becomes more and more, elusive as time goes on. Are these facts not evidence of the truth of the statement "that only what the One wills can ever be really pleasant for anyone", since the more we live for an increasing number of others, not only do we grow the happier, but we are thereby expressing more of the One who is in us all ? The more we identify the One with ourselves the happier we become.

SERVICE IS THE HEART OF SACRIFICE

Let us try now to see a little more clearly the nature of that Will which governs the world. We see at once that the Will of the One is a perpetual sacrifice, for our own sacrifices lead us nearer to Him. [Page 44]

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Not a sacrifice involving regret, but a joyful sacrifice, though doubtless involving pain, for without the contrast of pain the beauty of the joy would be the less. It is all sacrifice — willing or unwilling. The servant who ministers to the needs of the household, the tradesmen who supply us with food, the officers of government who administer the State, the teacher who teaches and the scholar who learns — all perform daily acts of sacrifice, and the degree of happiness in the sacrifice determines the nearness of the doer to the One whose great sacrifice is in training each one of us — parts of Him — to become self-conscious of His and our divinity. In the East, great stress is laid on sacrifice — and part of the regular daily duty consists in offering sacrifice to the Ancestors, to the Angels (Devas), to the animals, and so forth. Of course, we do not go through life thinking of each act as a sacrifice, for we have acquired the evil habit of imagining that a sacrifice involves denying ourselves some pleasure, and thus many try to avoid sacrifice for fear lest the joy of life be lost, when in fact the true spirit of sacrifice secures to us abiding peace. "We must make some sacrifices for our son's education" — "You must sacrifice something, if you want this or that". A sacrifice only involves the giving up of something lower, never of something higher, and if our servants, our officials, our teachers, our students, our tradesmen, above all ourselves, lived lives in which the dominating purpose was sacrifice — the sacrifice of the lower on the altar of the higher — our work would be far better done, [Page 45] and the world would be a far happier place to live in. There is no trade, no profession, no calling of any kind, no act, however trivial, which does not gain beauty if performed in a true spirit of sacrifice — as an offering to the Lord. This is indeed a difficult task for us all, but we must make a beginning, and the best way is to perform every day a conscious act of sacrifice — an act deliberately performed in the name of, and in homage to, the Great Sacrificer through whose own act of sacrifice we live and move and have our being. The Boy Scouts speak of a "good turn", the Sons and Daughters of the Empire enjoin "a daily act of service" — these are true sacrifices, for service is the heart of sacrifice.

THE HIGHER AND THE LOWER SELF

All sacrifice, if of value, must be ordered sacrifice, and the more we learn of the laws under which it acts the more effective our sacrifice will be. Many volumes might, indeed, be written by a competent authority on the principles of sacrifice, and most fascinating volumes they would be. But within the limits of these talks I must confine myself to one or two special laws of the higher life which it is essential for you to know.

In the first place, your principal duty is to realize that the individual you call "I" is only a portion of that real "I" which is a spark in the flame of God. In other words there is the eternal "I" which sends forth a feeler into this outer world to gain all that the outer world can give. The feeler is not the "I," any [Page 46] more than the root is the whole tree. There is more of you than ensouls your waking consciousness in your physical body, and it is this bigger "you" which guides you to those experiences in which your life is passed. You may call this bigger "you" your higher self if you wish, but do not identify it with the lower vehicles in which it has to live. The higher self desires only the purest form of life, has no leanings in the direction of your weaknesses, is not cast down by your failures, and above all knows on its own plane of existence all that the lower "you" has to learn down here. Many young people think that the higher self ought to have been content with its knowledge. But the sacrifice is not complete until knowledge is everywhere, until divinity is self-conscious in all its parts. God is all-knowing on His own plane, but He desires that His own self-consciousness shall awaken on all the planes of His being so that we — the cells of His Body — becoming awake to the divinity in which we share, may by the very act of awakening become Gods ourselves. First, however, we must master the various grades of matter from the highest,

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which is hardly matter at all but rather spirit, down to the matter of which our physical bodies are composed, and perhaps lower still.

THE FLOWERING OF OUR DIVINITY

Having mastered them, we may one by one cast them aside, until we live on the highest plane of spiritual existence, on the plane of Divinity, only to come forth when the time approaches for an act of sacrifice like unto that which God Himself is making now. This lies in the infinite future, but it is certain — so certain that even at this stage of our growth we can notice that the God within us, our higher nature, is gradually acquiring mastery over the lower vehicles through which He comes into definite contact with the lower planes. Daily He works, and while self-control takes long to practice, and the instruments do not always function as they should, nevertheless every day sees some advance for each one of us, and there is none so low or so degraded that he is not rising according to the measure of his possibility. I want you, if you will, to remember this overwhelmingly strengthening fact as often as you can — that within you is perfection undeveloped, a bud to become a flower. But the bud is there, and in your worst moments, when you feel that you have failed utterly and, perhaps, irretrievably, the perfection-to-be still remains within you and is the constant source from which fresh effort to lead the higher life must keep on coming, no matter what you do. Immersed in matter as we are, surrounded by the objects of the senses, we become confused, imagine that we are lost within their whirl. But the matter which surrounds us, of which our lower bodies are constituted, and the objects of the senses — whether mental, astral or physical — are themselves only waiting to be controlled. Master them, ray upon them your divinity, and they become powers for use instead of forces to be fought, and of which, perhaps, to be afraid.

CHAPTER IV

THERE IS TIME TO ACHIEVE PERFECTION

I THINK that the truth I have endeavored to express in the preceding talk is of vital importance, for the more we meditate on it the more real it becomes, and we begin to realize that however far off we may be from the successful practice of the qualifications as given in *At the Feet of the Master*, perfection must some day come, and with it the happiness of perfect service.

Time for accomplishment is, indeed, necessary, but if one law of our being is that there is a divinity within us gradually unfolding into its perfect flower, another law tells us that the unfoldment takes place slowly but surely (i) in accordance with the principle of action and reaction, or cause and effect, (ii) through a continuous series of dippings down into and withdrawal from the matter of the lower planes, in other words — reincarnation. Let us glance at this law of time which, within itself, involves the opportunity as well, since time would be valueless without the possibility of making use of it. Expressing the law in other terms, we might say that the unfoldment of the divinity within us takes place under the coercion of experience — experience which is ever sifting the real [Page 49] from the unreal, the permanent from the temporary. In Christian phraseology we are told that as we sow so shall we reap, Hinduism speaks of *Karma*, a Theosophist might talk of the law of cause and effect. Put plainly, the law states that, as we think and act so shall we become, and, as time is needed if we are to think and act perfectly, we are continually being immersed in the densest matter of our globes in order by degrees to understand its nature and therefore to become its master. The life you are leading now, the body in which this latest immersion has taken place, are only incidents in a long series of lives, You have had , many lives before, and you have used many bodies before. Between each life you have, as it were, made up your debit and credit accounts incurred during the lifetime on earth; and then, with an ever-increasing spiritual balance, using this word in its financial sense, you go into physical plane business again, both to pay off old debts and to acquire new ones, and thus to amass an increasing spiritual fortune, as by degrees the new debts become less and less and your wisdom grows more and more. You keep on doing this for hundreds of thousands of years, for millions of years if you take into consideration the sleep-life, the dream-life, and the dawning wakefulness in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms respectively. God gave you the capital to start with — your spiritual possibilities; and though from time to time your capital may seem to have become very much tied up, it can never be utterly unreachable, [Page 50] since He will temporarily withdraw you from active partnership in the business in which He is engaged if you act so recklessly that you cannot be trusted to manage your (and His) affairs properly. Indeed, you might conceivably be required to make a fresh start, not, perhaps, at the beginning, but some little way back from the place at which you began to grow improvident. This is probably a comparatively rare event, for most of us are developing our capital by slow but sure degrees.

THE TWO LAWS OF THE HIGHER LIFE

The knowledge of the way in which each one of us ultimately attains perfection is of the utmost value and importance, since not only can we never be completely overwhelmed by despair or reduce the power of drawing on our capital almost to the vanishing point through an insensate accumulation of debts, but we are able to give the most strengthening assistance to those who see nothing before them but debts due and only the generosity of the great Creditor — however certain — to depend upon, if even that. And as it is so important to grasp as clearly as we can the essential features of the laws of the higher life, let me

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recapitulate briefly the truths so far stated. First, *the unity of all*. If I may be allowed to use the simile of a banking establishment, I would say that the Ruler of our world [I distinguish between the terms "God" and "the Ruler of our world". By the word "God" I mean the divine principle animating all life everywhere — God the Father. "The Ruler of our world, "on the other hand, is the official who is at the head of the Great White Lodge, the highest of its members, alone in His rank. Mightier than all others, not a member of our own humanity at all, He is God's Regent upon this earth. In Hindu scriptures He is mentioned under the name of SANAT KUMARA.] is the [Page 51] supreme Director of a great family spiritual banking concern. He Himself started with capital He had developed through experience in countless previous ages, capital which originally came from God, as does all capital. His function is to enable all the members of His family to develop their capital as He has developed His. He is, as it were, pledged so to arrange His business that sooner or later every member of His family must, even though failure come time after time, eventually develop his capital to its utmost value. Herein lies both the unity and the statement of the second law — *the existence of a common goal*. Indeed the first law involves the second, for unity would not be complete unless our destinies were common, unless the future involves the same unity as did the past to which we trace our common source. I have called this common destiny perfection, and, using words to express the simile of the banking concern, I might say that the object of the firm is to develop for each of its partners a substantial spiritual capital, so that each partner may, in course of time, set up in business on his own account. Then comes the question: How does each partner reach this level? The answer is as clear in the spiritual world as it is in the actual business industry on the physical plane. Through experience; in course of time; by setting up in business in a very [Page 52] small way to start with, after going through a certain amount of preliminary training; by accumulating a large number of debts which are not only hard to pay off but take time to pay off too. What was the first stage which I mentioned in the very beginning of this series of talks? Individualisation — the passing from the animal to the human kingdom. Before this, the partner was only a sleeping partner. He was learning the rudiments of subjects whose deeper study would come later on. He was hardly in the business at all — a shareholder, truly, but with no more conscious share in the business than has a bank manager's baby an active share in his father's affairs. But the baby grows and become a young boy with a vague idea as to what his father is. The newly individualised man has a vague idea as to the existence of a purpose in life around him, but he cares nothing for it as yet, save as it affects his personal and immediate well-being. But in time comes the second stage — the awakening of conscience. The youth becomes a clerk in his father's firm, begins at the lowest rank, has very little responsibility. By degrees he is entrusted with small portions of his capital on which to experiment, he is sent out into the world to see what he can do with the capital (conscience) of whose existence he has been hitherto unaware. "I have a conscience, I have the power to distinguish between right and wrong. Hitherto I have shared unthinkingly in the universal conscience of which my own is a part, but now I know that I have a conscience of my own, I must use it and make as much of it as I can, so that [Page 53] it may grow big and strong". So the shareholder, now increasingly conscious of being not only a shareholder to receive dividends but a partner to produce them, goes out into the world — the lower planes — as an active agent and builder of his own fortunes.

Just as a business man goes home, after office hours are over, to rest from the day's labours, to think over what good and what bad business he has done during the day, and to enjoy happiness with those dear to him, so each one of us, after one life is over, rests in other worlds and gathers fresh energy — born of striving in lives gone by — for the life to come, for the new "day" of business on the physical plane. We cannot in one day develop all the capital required. We have to learn how to employ it, what transactions to avoid, what transactions are profitable, and the time taken is the expression of the law of reincarnation. But not only do we need time, we need also experience. We must suffer from the bad transactions and reap happiness from the good ones. Unless we see results, we shall not know how to compare the relative values of various transactions, of whose nature we know for the time being nothing.

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It is the result far more than the cause that tells us the nature of the cause itself. The law of cause and effect states that as the cause is, so the result will be, but in actual experience we first learn that as the result is, so the cause must have been also. It is only after experiencing many results that we either avoid their cause or set it in motion, according as to [Page 54] whether it brings happiness or pain. Even then we are temporarily satisfied with causes which produce results whose pleasure-producing power is but very limited. We are, in other words, content with the immediate however fleeting, provided it satisfies for the moment. This is the case with most people, and places them within the ranks of those who do not know. You will remember, however, that there is a third stage — the stage at which the individual definitely pledges himself to a certain line of conduct, at which he shows himself as among those who are at least learning to know, by passing through Initiation into the wider life beyond. He is the partner who, having shown himself capable of wisely managing his capital within comparatively narrow limits, is not only given opportunities of developing it much more rapidly and widely than would normally be possible, but is allowed to share the responsibilities devolving upon the directors of the firm itself, those whose business it is, under the guidance of the Ruler, to help the junior partners to gain the necessary experience. A young director, truly, but none the less a director, though there are those above him with still greater responsibilities upon their shoulders— those who belong to the ranks of the higher Initiates.

THE ROAD OF EVOLUTION

In this way are the various stages passed, and the individual gradually learns how to develop his spiritual capital so as one day, in the far-off distant [Page 55] future, to become the head of a firm himself, a Ruler in a universe. We already know that the one class of transactions which is profitable, using this word in its best sense, is the class involving the service which is the heart of sacrifice, God is the great Sacrificer, for, instead of living on His capital, He not only shares it among us all, but trains us, through the Ruler of our world, to develop our capital to the utmost. Without irreverence may I say that even our mighty Ruler Himself is the greater for the sacrifice He makes in guiding our evolution, and grows at His exalted level into still further spiritual splendour. When we reach the level at which He made the great and supreme Sacrifice of remaining to toil when He might have passed on to enjoy, at which the development of our spiritual capital has been such as to enable us to make this stupendous outlay, we too shall make the sacrifice and win its reward. To do so, we must pass through all the intervening sacrifices step by step, the less leading to the greater; and only as we serve and sacrifice in proportion to the capital we have, can we hope to develop the capital and so increase the service. The art of service — should I not rather call it the "science" — is not, however, to be learnt in a day, or within the brief space of one lifetime. First comes the service of the smaller self. The whole tendency in modern times, as far as the West is concerned, and increasingly so in the East, has been to force the individual to emphasise himself. He has been learning through competition of all kinds, through strife, through the [Page 56] dictates of personal ambition, to consider his own welfare and that, perhaps, of those immediately dependent upon him. Personal wealth, personal power, personal influence, personal ability — all have been pursued, and the futility of all, save as used for wider service is the lesson learned. Often at the close of a life devoted to such pursuits, a man has at last seen how little true happiness they have given him through life, and hurriedly he strives to tread the other path by lavishing his gains upon a world from which erstwhile he took them. If there were no other lives, the act would be too late, for you cannot atone in a year for a lifetime of selfishness. But the future is before him, and perhaps the lesson has so been learned that in the period of rest between that life and the next he will have had the leisure (and the clearer vision the inner planes allow) to decide upon a life less circumscribed than that which he devoted to the interests of his own small self. Payment will indeed be exacted for all harm done, the debts on the mistaken transactions must be paid in full, but not only has he time in which to pay them, but also time and

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opportunity in which to plan fresh schemes to harmonise with the wider vision he has gained. [Compare the growth of the soul to a house with a large number of windows and doors, most of which are closed. Outside, the sun is shining, but into one or two rooms only do the rays at first enter. Gradually, the occupier of the house — the soul — begins to appreciate the life-giving warmth from the sun, though he still lives partly in the darkness and imagines it to be all he needs. But when he goes into the rooms whose windows and doors he has opened to the sunlight, the contrast between the darkness and the light begins to strike him. Going back into the darkness, he remembers the light and looks for the windows and doors so that he may open them too. Room after room is brightened, until the house is hardly a house at all — only a number of walls between the doors and windows — and serves but the purpose of concentrating the sunlight within its limits. The house is the lower part of man — his mental, emotional and physical bodies. Each room is a power or faculty, and the owner of the house is the higher self — the ego, the soul. The darker the house, the greater the unhealthiness, the greater the dirt, the greater the sordidness. But the Masters' "houses" are merely passage ways for the sunlight, and Their bodies are but lenses — to use another simile — from which the rays of life spread outward with concentrated intensity. Think this over and follow its symbolism if such be your temperament.] [Page 57]

Much more might be written on these great and dominant truths. Many other laws might have been mentioned, and innumerable are the ways of their application. But I can only hope that you will think over these things and fill in for yourselves the gaps I have been forced to leave unfilled. In *At the Feet of the Master* we are taught to discriminate between transactions which are profitable and those which are not. We are shown, as it were, how to invest our capital so that it may multiply. Invest in a kind thought, feeling, word or action, and much will come to you in return — above all, an increased power to think, feel, speak and act kindly. Invest in selfishness, and your capital — your power — diminishes. As your capital diminishes — perhaps it would be more accurate to say is increasingly neglected" — your own happiness, as well as that of others, proportionately diminishes, until you become so barren of happiness that in despair you seek another road than that of selfishness. [Page 58]

NOTE

The whole question as to the purpose of the world, as to the existence of God, as to the origin of being, is most intricate, and a fruitful source of mental confusion. A young friend of my acquaintance, hearing that God made the world, wanted to know who made God, and his question was most reasonable. On the other hand it would be better policy on the part of parents and elders to realize that they cannot expect to be able to answer every question put to them by children; it would be more honest, too. Personally I take the position that as an insignificant unit in this complex world I can only hope to understand a very limited portion of God's plan for men. All that I can hope to acquire is a comparatively imperfect working hypothesis adequate to my temperament and destiny, and though the hypothesis may be illuminative to others, they must nevertheless think out their own hypotheses for themselves — building in such features in the hypotheses of others as may harmonise with the general plan of their structure. The keystone of my hypothesis centres round the fact that there is sorrow and unhappiness in the world, and that while I may bring a certain amount of physical and emotional consolation and strength to those who are susceptible to my influence, I must also bring mental consolation and [Page 59] strength — first by trying to understand the purpose of existence myself and then by applying such understanding as I may have acquired to the helping of my fellow-creatures, both practically and in striving to assist them, too, to see more clearly the splendour of their future, however it may be hidden by the intervening clouds of ignorance and discouragement.

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Let me just restate in other language the ideas that help me in establishing my hypothesis.

A God-Soul — conscious of Himself as Divine — lives only on the plane of pure divinity, is limited by no matter grosser than that of the plane or level on which He lives. In the infinite past He has been as we ourselves are now, a spark heating itself into flame through the friction of matter in all its forms and densities. Now a Flame, He showers out sparks — potential flames — and encloses them in layer after layer of denser and denser matter — itself the substance of which the flame is made. In course of time the spark burns through the layers one by one and in the process — we call it experience — gains increasing brilliance, at last bursting into a glorious Flame. A spark from a fire may, appropriately placed, become itself a fire similar to the one from which it came. The fanning of the spark is accomplished through the laws of nature, by means of karma, reincarnation, and all the innumerable actions, and reactions, connected with the world outside us, which we undergo incessantly. The very matter in which we are embedded is itself so growing that out of it shall come sparks, similar to those which are ourselves. The difference between [Page 60] the matter around me, the trees, the sea, the animals, the minerals, is that within me is concentrated sufficient of God's divine heat to make a spark capable of expansion into a separate flame, while the divinity ensouling the trees and the animals and the minerals is spread over a wider area, has not been narrowed down and focused to a point. A number of animals, a larger number of trees, a still greater mass of metals, share the heat of divinity between them, and ages must pass before any individual form shall, through the experiences of its class, have concentrated within itself such heat as may burst into a spark; and metals must enter the vegetable kingdom for further subdivision and thence pass to the animal kingdom for further subdivision still, until the human kingdom is reached, in which each unit is in itself a spark.

To reach God, therefore, we must become Gods ourselves, and no greater reverence can be offered Him, no more convincing testimony to His omniscience and omnipotence, than to ascribe to Him the will of making each one of us perfections in His own image. For He can do no more than make us as Himself. I might write much more on this, even that which I have set down itself bristles with difficulties and doubts and possibilities, but perhaps if my readers think it over they may find themselves started on a line of thought which may bring order into a world of apparent chaos and purposelessness.

CHAPTER V

THE LIVING OF THE LIFE

THE Master proceeds to point out " that of the real and the unreal there are many varieties and He has previously mentioned one variety when He observed that "it does not matter in the least whether [a man] calls himself a Hindu or a Buddhist, a Christian or a Muhammadan, whether he is an Indian or an Englishman, a Chinaman or a Russian". For " if he is on God's side he is one of us". Now you must not conclude from this statement that religion does not matter, has very little value; although we are told further on that ceremonies do not matter for those who are at a certain stage of growth. Religion matters considerably, but truth matters infinitely more, and those who know — while using some special form of the truth as displayed in a particular religion — seek the truth within the form, and know that God — who is Truth Incarnate — manifests Himself in many ways. In reality, a special form of religion is of the utmost value to those who do not yet know that all religions spring from one source— the great Head of the world's teaching department, who is even now waiting for the world to be ready to receive Him once more. Religion makes truth [Page 62] tangible to those who have still to realize that there are many roads to the One, on each of which He welcomes His devotee — to quote a Hindu scripture. Most people need rules of life to be imposed from without before they learn to evolve them from within, and great Teachers come from time to time either to frame special rules for the special circumstances under which a race is being trained, or to modify the old rules in the light of progress made. Christianity was given to the western world as a statement of the special set of ideals towards which it was to work its way. Hinduism strikes an entirely different note, but one none the less needed for the fulfilment of the universal harmony. Unfortunately, people tend to imagine not only that their own rules express the whole of the truth for all the world, but that they are appointed by God to declare the valuelessness of all other rules and to induce the followers of these to come into the true and only fold. Obviously this is a case of pride, self-righteousness. In the days of the Inquisition violent means were employed to force those who gripped another form of truth either to recant or to be destroyed. In modern times we have the missionary movements to the so-called "heathen" — admirable in their purely medical and educational work, and when directed towards aboriginal tribes, but marred by an intolerable egoism and self-complacency which imagines that God has made them His elect. If missionaries would continue to do all they are now doing along secular lines and were to combine this with an enquiring reverence for the [Page 63] religion in the midst of which their work has placed them, they would be among those who know instead of among 'the ignorant who say: "What I believe is true, what I do not believe is false".

ALL RELIGIONS HAVE ONE SOURCE

We learn from the Master's statement that the form of religion into which a man is born does not matter. In other words, we are born into a special religion either because its peculiar influences are needed for the development of our natures or to learn to break through its binding form without losing reverence for the ennobling truth. Most Christians, for example, are best advised to follow the general principles of their own religion, without, however, paying more attention to form than is helpful. Christian rites and ceremonies will probably be valuable to them, but they should gradually, through the practice of the form, find their way to the spirit within, so that ultimately the form drops away because its work is done. Look around you, at people, at animals, at trees, at flowers, at the sea in its various moods, at the towering rocks. The divine spirit is indeed pervading all, but it is the form which leads you to seek the occupier within, and small wonder that for the time the form suffices. You know that God is within the form, but God and the form are so much one to you that you cling to the form you can touch and feel, and you take

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God for granted. So it is with religious ceremonies — they [Page 64] appeal to the senses, and their inner significance is so much taken for granted that in course of time it becomes ignored altogether, perhaps even lost to outer view. Sooner or later, however, God can no longer be taken for granted, and it is time to begin learning the lesson that forms are but temporary sparks thrown out by God to draw attention to His nature. Play with the sparks and learn to love them —that is inevitable, for even the sparks are part of God. But sooner or later the sparks will flicker and vanish and new sparks will be showered forth, new forms will take the place of old; and in the hopelessness of clinging to forms which must inevitably die is born the desire to find something which endures behind all passing manifestations. Then do we begin to realize that the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Christian the Muhammadan, are all living within their respective portions of the truth. They are like people living in different rooms within the same house. Some are proud of their own rooms and do not know that there are other rooms as beautiful as theirs. Seeing people in other rooms, they say to them: "Come into my room. It is so much more beautiful than yours. Your room is bare and ill-furnished. See how much more habitable my room is !" And the answer is: "My room suits me. I am used to it. It is furnished in the manner most helpful to the work I have to do. It contains conveniences which yours lacks, just as yours contains conveniences for you which mine lacks". We all live in the same house. Until we can move from room to room uncritically, [Page 65] and in reverent appreciation of the arrangements of the rooms of others, each had better keep to his own room. But the time comes when it is no longer pleasant to live in one room only, and the true inhabitant of the house is he who makes himself equally at home and appreciative in all the rooms to the delight of their respective occupants, though no doubt preferring the room which is specially his own.

RACES ARE CLASSES IN GOD'S SCHOOL

Similarly, it does not matter to what race a man or woman belongs— " whether he is an Indian or an Englishman, a Chinaman or a Russian". Each race has its work to do, as has each religion, and those who know are not only without race-prejudice, able to appreciate the qualities in all races, but are thankful to help in any land to which the Master's service calls them. Respecting the customs and beliefs of those among whom their work for the time being finds them, they seek to discover the purpose for which the race exists and strive to forward this to the utmost of their power. Each race has its own note to sound in the universal harmony, as has each religion, and if we dislike a religion or a race it is probable that we shall have one day to be born within their ranks to overcome our ignorance as to the part they play in the growth of us all.

We then come to a variety of general principles on which certain kinds of discrimination are based — discrimination "between the right and the wrong, [Page 66] the important and the unimportant, the useful and the useless, the true and the false, the selfish and the unselfish".

THE MASTERS AND OURSELVES

"Between right and wrong", says the Master, "it should not be difficult to choose, for those who wish to follow the Master have already decided to take the right at all costs". Here is a great truth put in a somewhat peculiar way. Probably you wonder whether the Master was speaking of Himself. Personally, I imagine He was speaking of Those greater even than Himself, Alcyon translating the Master's thought about His own superiors into terms expressing his own relationship to the Master. The point is unimportant; but we do learn the very significant fact that the individual who seeks a Master of the

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Wisdom to be his guide has made the great decision which separates him from those who do not know. Truth is, indeed, our ultimate goal; but sooner or later we must inevitably unite with Those who are nearer the goal than ourselves. You will find people at various intermediate stages, and it is well to bear in mind what some of these stages are. Some people, for example, are devoted to abstract ideals, and do not for the time feel the need of a Master's guidance. Others, engaged in work involving the utmost self-sacrifice, do not in their lower bodies know of the existence of Masters and even, perhaps, deny Their existence. Some, again, desire to follow a Master [Page 67] but do not know whom to follow. Remember that whatever the attitude of anyone may be to the Masters, the Masters Themselves know each and every one of us and guide us to our destiny along the road we have chosen to tread. How could it be otherwise ? In what family, worthy of the name, does not the father, the mother, the elder brother or sister, love, protect and guide the younger members ? The purer the love, the more perfect the guidance; and in the world-family the Perfect Men — our Elder Brethren — give perfect guidance. People may wish to reject the help or rebel against an apparent interference; but they can no more avoid the Masters' care than they can escape from the unity which binds us all in one; while the Masters know full well that no man can grow into perfection save through perfect freedom. But the very brotherhood of all mankind makes Them one with us, and the guidance They give us is the outward symbol of the unity we share. If unity is a restriction on freedom, then indeed we are not free; but unity gives power to freedom and is the living witness of our divinity.

Each individual is for the time satisfied with his ideals, and people will often tell you that the idea of discipleship to a Master does not help them, or that their temperament precludes any idea of dependence or reliance on aught save the God within. If they are content, it is not your task to attempt to disturb them. They are learning the lessons their stage teaches, and, when they have really found the God within they will awaken to the fact that they cannot dissociate [Page 68] themselves from other parts of the one great whole. Then they will know the Masters as Elder Brethren and will realize that just as they themselves owe guidance to those more ignorant, so must the Masters give to them the help that greater wisdom ever owes to less. The God within is conscious of the guidance, and it matters not for the time that the lower self remains unconscious or denies. The babe sleeps safely in its mother's arms; the youth, growing into self-consciousness, seeks to gauge his power by standing alone; the man, knowing his power and limitations, begins to appreciate his mother's brooding tenderness and reverences her now as perhaps he has never done before. Looking back over his life he sees the part she played in guiding him through the troubles of the world, and he notices how in times of apparently greatest freedom her watchfulness and care were none the less active, though unrecognised and unnoticed. As with the mother, imperfectly, so with the Master perfectly, and we have all to pass through the stages from babyhood to manhood. Like little children we must learn to think we walk alone, but the happiest walks are in reality those in which we may gaze at loved Elders in front, with our friends at our side, and those younger in knowledge than ourselves treading in places made smooth by our footsteps.

"THE BODY AND THE MAN ARE TWO"

We now come to the Master's lucid summing up of the conflict through which we all must go. "The [Page 69] body and the man are two, and the man's will is not always what the body wishes". Remember that "those who wish to follow the Master have already decided to take the right at all costs". *At all costs*. But this decision is taken by the highest in us, and while the lower bodies are influenced by the decision, they do not always want to carry it out within their respective spheres. "At all costs" means, therefore, at whatever cost to the bodies in which the highest in us is gaining control over matter of various densities.

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That which is highest in us cannot help taking the decision, the decision belongs to its very essence, but ages have had to pass before the lower bodies can be taught to respond to their master's wishes, just as it takes a long time to train an animal perfectly. So the efficacy of the decision only begins when, after ages of slow evolution, the God-to-be within us at last begins to receive a *conscious* response from its lower nature. The response must for a long time, however, be of a very intermittent nature, for the two poles have not as yet been adjusted to produce a constant spark. So the Master explains to us various ways in which these lower bodies refrain from responding as they should. He warns us: "When your body wishes something, stop and think whether *you* really wish it. For *you* are God, and you will only what God wills; but you must dig deep down into yourself to find the God within you, and listen to His voice, which is *your* voice". In explanation of this He reminds us that we must not mistake our bodies for our real selves — "neither the physical body, nor [Page 70] the astral, nor the mental". "Each one of them will pretend to be the Self, in order to gain what it wants. But you must know them all, and know yourself as their master".

The difficulty consists in knowing at the moment. After some time we can look back upon the various ways in which our lower bodies have pretended to be the Self, and we say: "How stupid I was", or "what a fuss I made over nothing", or "I thought there was nothing else but that at the time." But why should these bodies pretend to be the Self? Because it is to their interest to make evolution as slow as possible. In them the life and the form seem bound up together so that if the form perishes the life appears to have no further value or even existence. Form is their world — the world of the physical, astral, and mental bodies — and any process which tends to do away with form is an attack upon their world's existence. Think how many people there are who still believe that with death comes annihilation. Does the God within think this? The God within knows Himself eternal, and yet the vehicles down here "pretend" that the destruction of the vehicle means the destruction of the life. It is not true, but in his lower bodies the man knows no better. The bodies are anxious, therefore, to preserve themselves for as long a period as possible, and imagine that their preservation depends upon self-seeking rather than upon self-sacrifice.

Much of the competition in modern life, much of the oppression of the weak by the strong, of the poor by the rich, of animals by mankind, has its [Page 71] origin in the very successful pretence on the part of our lower bodies to be the Self. Indeed we are all living more or less under the shadow of this pretence, for much that is luxurious in 20th century civilisation is produced by the inevitable selfishness of our lower selves. The vivisector maintains, for example, that we are justified in experimenting on animals so as to increase our own power to resist disease and thus to prolong the life of the lower bodies. I am not one to condemn the vivisector — he expresses a pretence of the lower self; and we all are victims of its cunning in one way or another. Again, we consider ourselves entitled to kill animals for food; and most of us would not hesitate to eat meat, even supposing that we have hitherto been vegetarians, if we were assured by our doctor that we had to choose between eating meat and dying. But let me for a moment disclose to you the attitude of one who no longer yields to the snare. Mrs. Besant has often told me that she would rather die than eat meat, partly as a matter of principle and partly because the introduction of coarse meat particles would hinder some of her special work. Such a declaration is no heroic outburst, it is simply the statement that while the body must be properly looked after, it cannot expect to be humoured at every turn. If it says: "Since you don't give me meat I shall die", the answer must be: "My friend, you are not my only hope. I can get another body, and though it is my duty to keep you alive as long as possible, I cannot preserve you at the expense of [Page 72] work I have determined to do. Therefore you must go". Whether any particular individual has the duty of disciplining his bodies as Mrs. Besant does hers, whether under all circumstances we must never give way to them, is not for me to say. Each person must judge his own duty for himself. Let the body have its pleasures and amusements as well as its

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discipline and its exercises, but see that it does not try to draw its master away from that which is the link between him and God — his principles of life. You must know your bodies "and know yourself as their master".

THE OBJECTS OF THE SENSES

I think I ought to lay stress on the fact, that we are not told to shun the objects of the senses — all that makes our physical, our emotional, our mental worlds. To possess beautiful objects and to desire them, to submit to the influence of an uplifting emotion and to seek it, to take pleasure in the things of the intellect and to strive for knowledge — all this is not only useful but essential to our growth. We have in these three lower worlds to become familiar with the objects of the senses, but we must not identify ourselves with them if we wish to qualify for admission to a Master's school. People at a certain stage of evolution do identify themselves with the world in which they live, are its slaves; were they not they could not be ready for the further stage of being its masters. Unless they have [Page 73] experienced its clutch they will be unable to sympathise usefully with those who still remain victims of their bodies pretence. But you and I must hope we have passed the earlier stage, though the young will doubtless recapitulate it as they once again grow accustomed in their new bodies to a world full of objects of the senses new since last they visited it. We must know what the objects of the senses are, with what thoughts and feelings and objects the mental, astral and physical worlds are respectively filled. And this is the true basis of the "pretence" of the various bodies concerned. The Self is indeed in each of these bodies, and so far each body may rightly claim that it is animated by a portion of the Self. To this extent in each of these bodies we must seek the objects of the senses, for in such seeking lies our growth. Unfortunately, the bodies take themselves too seriously, imagine they are indispensable, ignore the law of reincarnation which dismisses that pretence at once, and then claim that they are the Self. "I am angry", "I am jealous", "I believe this; I disbelieve that", "I am fond of such and such amusements", "I enjoy food, or special kinds of food" — these are a few of the many statements our bodies are making day after day. The real Self is never angry; the real Self is never jealous; the real Self knows; the real Self tolerates amusements but could hardly be said to be fond of them; the real Self looks upon food as a means to preserve the physical body so long as the body is needed, and cares for the purity of the food and not [Page 74] for its power of exciting the astral vehicle. Use these conventional phrases if you will, but see to it that you are able to distinguish all the time between your Self and its bodies. At least know in theory that the real "you" is not at the mercy of the objects of the senses, and you will have begun to be their master in reality. At least know in theory that the real "you" is never angry, and you have begun to lay the foundations of a calm that can never be ruffled.

How to begin ? " When your body wishes something,, stop and think whether you really wish it." A very hard task to be continually stopping and thinking all day long. But Mrs. Besant told her hearers on the day when she first began a series of talks on *At the Feet of the Master* — November 27th, 1910 — that however irksome the task, it had to be faced. It is part of the preparation, she said, and only those achieve who do not get tired of trying. It means no hasty speech, no hasty action, no hasty thinking even: all must be under control. Do not feel appalled at the prospect, young friends. To gain the immense privilege of membership of a Master's school we must expect to work hard, and if you will but try you are bound to succeed. By stopping even only one hasty word, or thought or action during the week you are far nearer to your Master than those who are content to say: "I wish I could do all this, but I can't, so it is useless to try". The Master acknowledges effort; He knows us too well to expect success. [Page 75]

THE WORD "PRETEND"

The word "pretend" as used by the Master in the phrase "each one of them, [the physical, astral and mental bodies] will pretend to be the Self", seems to suggest a deception on the part of the lower bodies, something of an underhand nature, against which we ought to be on our guard. I think the word was deliberately used to emphasise the fact that the pupil to whom the teachings were being given was expected to live in his higher self rather than to allow himself to be at the mercy of his lower bodies. The desires of the physical, astral and mental bodies had to be labelled as unreal with respect to one who was learning to live from above, and to whom the lower bodies were but as instruments in the service of an awakened higher consciousness. The Alcyone of the inner worlds would fully know how to distinguish between their realities and the fleeting circumstances of the worlds without. But in each outgoing into denser matter — through the mental to the physical — the higher self must needs undergo a limitation, so that its powers will be correspondingly weakened. In addition, while the soul of Alcyone was old, its new bodies were young and untrained. These two circumstances, I think, caused the choice of the word "pretend", so that in the lower worlds Alcyone might remember that however real their objects might temporarily seem, however much his bodies, still young, might long for them, yet their reality was but a pretence compared with the realities of the Masters' world. [Page 76]

From a certain standpoint, there can be no pretence in that which God has created. Nothing is without its value in evolution, and even the most fleeting of the objects of the senses has its part to play in helping us to grow. At every stage of our growth objects of the senses surround us, and, according to our stage we ignore some, reject others, long for these, are repelled by those. We grow by experiencing objects of the senses, thus learning to reach the realities of which they are the shadows in this world of ours. Until we know the realities, as I have already said, their shadows must suffice. And the shadow's pretence to be the reality is not an unreasonable one, for after all it *is* a shadow of a reality and depends for its existence on the reality it represents. But you and I ought, at least so far as regards most objects of the senses in the lower worlds, to have reached the realities of which they are the expressions, and still to accept the shadow as the reality would be a pretence, an imagination, since the reality is known apart. We — in our bodies — would be pretending, and to make our position clear the Master dissociates us from our bodies and explains that only in a lower body could we imagine the part to be the whole. [Page 77]

CHAPTER VI TRAINING THE BODY

THE next few pages of *At the Feet of the Master* contain commentaries on the central fact that "the body is your animal — the horse upon which you ride". It may be the physical body, or the astral body, or the body in which lives the mind — all are your animals, and a very hard team to drive they are too ! The Master makes this perfectly clear in the common everyday instances in which the animals refuse to be ridden and throw their rider. "When there is work that must be done, the physical body wants to rest, to go out walking, to eat and drink; and the man who does not know says to himself: 'I want to do these things and I must do them', But the man who knows says: This that wants is *not* I, and it must wait awhile'. "You shall not hinder me in doing good work", says the rider to the particular steed he is specially using at the time or to the particular steed which for the moment is inclined to be restive. Now you will find that many excellent people think it their duty to drive their bodies all they possibly can. Monks and nuns who inflict self-torture upon themselves, so-called ascetics in India who hope to obtain liberation by making the body do [Page 78] that for which it is not intended — these are examples of such people. Many people in our own country think it wrong to do various really harmless actions, so that they may have the morbid, unnatural satisfaction of mortifying or starving the lower bodies that the higher may shine through more clearly because of their emaciation and weakness. The higher self asks for beauty and not for ugliness, asks for joyousness and not for gloom, asks for a well-nourished, contented instrument and not for a half-starved body beaten into submission instead of evolved into co-operation.

As the Master says: "You must treat it well, and take good care of it; you must not overwork it, you must feed it properly on pure food and drink only, and keep it strictly clean always, even from the minutest speck of dirt. For without a perfectly clean and healthy body you cannot do the arduous work of preparation, you cannot bear its ceaseless strain". We who are learning to fit ourselves for admission to a Master's school must bear these points in mind all the time. Notice that the Master nowhere condemns healthy and harmless amusements, provided, of course, that they neither injure you nor cause injury to those connected with their production. But your lower bodies must not be allowed to indulge in such pleasures at the expense of doing good work. Periodical amusements, even those which have no specially beneficent effect — are amusements pure and simple, help, I think, to keep our lower bodies in fit condition; but we must be [Page 79] careful not to lose sight of the goal before us, lest by indulging our bodies too freely we wake some day to find that we have become their slaves instead of being their masters. "But it must always be you who control that body, not it that controls you".

AMUSEMENTS

"You must not overwork it", says the Master. For active temperaments this seems a somewhat hard injunction. There come times of special stress, we think, when the physical body ought not to be spared in any way. Perhaps in rare instances this may be true, especially if you have to choose between sparing your body and standing firm to your principles. But most of us are not confronted by such a situation, and it may be safely taken for granted that whenever we overwork — whatever the cause — we are doing injury to ourselves and to others as well. Over-exercise, over-study, over-eating, over-sleeping, denying the body that which it needs for perfect health — all these are forbidden because they hinder your utility in the Master's service. Especially while you are young, the body, so glad to be in existence, tends to conceal from you the mischief you may be doing. You feel quite well, even though your elders tell you

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that the body is being over-strained, and it is not until later that the body is forced into the confession that having at the time insufficient force to meet your demands it drew upon the future, and now there is barely enough force left to keep it alive. Nothing is [Page 80] more important than to know our limitations, for, knowing them, we not only realize where the points of strain are, but we learn how to replace with strength weaknesses which in later years may give us much trouble. Apart from the obvious absurdity of competitive examinations as indications of real worth, see how much wear and tear they cause to the body, especially to the brain, and remember that though the few may be able to stand the drain on their physical resources, most of those who have taken part in competitions have definitely lowered their vitality, if they have not impaired it altogether. So it is with many features of modern life, and you must make up your minds whether you are going to fit yourselves for the world's appreciation or for the Master's.

Note that I write "appreciation", and not "service". The world is always best served by those who make themselves fit instruments for the Master's work, and though the world may ignore them, it is better for their unrecognised efforts than for the work of most of those who stand high in worldly favour. But I freely admit that young people are encouraged by the approval of those whose opinions weigh with them, and it is natural that they should find in the world an infinite number of fleeting satisfactions. Still, the glamour of the external must never be allowed to blind us to the fact that the only appreciation worth having comes from the Master, and that the approval of the world often encourages us along wrong lines. By all means enjoy life, provided [Page 81] that no one suffers through your enjoyment and that you do not allow the enjoyments of the lower bodies to interfere with the real enjoyments, if I may use the word in this connection, of the higher self. The lower needs its enjoyments as well as the higher, but most of us lives so much in the lower worlds that there is a danger of our being — in our lower selves — cruel to the higher. You are often impatient with people who say you ought not to have this, that or the other pleasure on which you have counted, but do not forget that you yourselves often deny your higher selves pleasures which they too would be glad to enjoy — pleasures of an infinitely more lasting kind than those which, in your lower selves, you have been pursuing with so much, eagerness. The greatest happiness you can give your higher self is to adapt your lower vehicles to the Master's needs, but the higher self is not unreasonable, is quite willing that the lower should enjoy itself, and only suggests that the more the lower and the higher pleasures can be harmonised and made lasting, the happier for both parties concerned. In the long run, everything will proceed so much more smoothly if both pull together and in the same direction.

FOOD FOR THE BODY

The Master continues: "You must feed it properly on pure food and drink only, and keep it strictly clean always, even from the minutest speck of dirt". The word "properly" means at regular intervals, at [Page 82] such times as may conduce to the best health, the right quantity, and the right kind — "pure food and drink *only*".

Now I am not going to furnish you with a complete table of all the kinds of food you ought to eat, how you ought to eat them, and when you ought to eat them. You must find this out for yourselves, since each body reacts differently to different kinds of foodstuffs. But I must lay the very greatest stress on the necessity for vegetarianism, not because I happen to be a vegetarian, but because the Master speaks, towards the end of the book, on the "cruel superstition that man needs flesh for food". Doubtless we are all under the influence of certain kinds of superstition, but at least we must try to avoid cruel superstitions,

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and as meat-eating is a cruel superstition — the Master says so — we must get rid of it. I want you to look at the matter from the standpoint of reason. We inflict suffering on animals in order to provide ourselves with unnecessary food. This is the bare statement of the fact as the Master sees it. Innumerable difficulties in the way of carrying out the Master's hint will, of course, present themselves. Your body cannot stand vegetarian food. Your parents would disapprove of your becoming a vegetarian. "Are we to give up the use of all leather articles, including boots, railway trunks, etc. ? Are we to inconvenience our friends by eating practically nothing when we take meals with them ? "

Don't you think that your animals are becoming somewhat restive when you allow them thus [Page 83] to argue ? For all these difficulties should be thought of afterwards, if at all, and not at first. So many people are eager to see the Masters, to receive instructions from Them, and envy those who have the privilege. But remember that one of the conditions of receiving direct guidance is to pay prompt attention to what the Master says. "You must do what He says", observes Alcyone in the Foreword, " attending to every word, *taking every hint*". The Master tells us to be vegetarians. Are we trying to become vegetarians, or are we suffering our lower bodies to dictate to the higher ? Are we deceived by the "pretendings" of the bodies which ought to be subservient to us ? I do not wish to suggest that it is easy to change from meat-eating to vegetarianism all at once, partly because the physical and astral bodies suddenly lose a food which has been stimulating them and intensifying their lower aspects, and partly because relatives and friends, who have not been as fortunate as ourselves, will be unable to see any method in, to them, an apparent madness. But in the Master's service we need to start *at once* when a hint is given and do the best we can with the difficulties as they come along. In other words, we do not think of building bridges until we actually come to rivers which have to be crossed. Cautious people will exclaim against me here — "but surely we must see where we are going before we start. Perhaps the difficulties will be insuperable. Perhaps our relatives and friends, for example, will be unable to tolerate our new departure". To which I reply: [Page 84] "A hint from a Master involves a practicable course of action. He does not suggest impossibilities, nor is He unaware — though you may find it difficult to believe this — of the individual circumstances of us all. If *At the Feet of the Master* has come to us, we may take it that He knows it has come. So His words become a message to us through His young brother Alcyone."No doubt you will fail. Many lapses into meat-eating will occur, unless your nature is particularly wiry. But were serious efforts made before the failures, and will serious efforts be made again after the failures ? This is what the Master wants. Let me repeat here emphatically that He looks for effort, not expecting success until many failures and many efforts have taken place. "Rome was not built in a day".

The moment you know that the Master has condemned meat-eating as a cruel superstition and that He wishes the body to be fed on pure food and drink, you immediately begin to stop eating meat and any other form of food you think included in the condemnation. Do not quibble as to whether fish or eggs or cheese or milk are to be considered vegetarian or otherwise. Use your judgment, for the Master as a perfect Teacher merely lays down the principle and leaves you to apply it in everyday life. Personally I have very little patience with people so hypnotised by the letter that they fail to observe the spirit. They tell me that if we are to be consistent we must avoid this and that and the other article of food we use. I do not pretend to be perfectly consistent, but I am [Page 85] trying to be as consistent as I can; and if in my effort to be consistent I make the mistake of including in my articles of diet some which ought to be left out, I do not feel that I have vitally disregarded the spirit of the principles under which I have been acting, though no doubt I have violated the letter. Some day I shall do all things perfectly, in the meantime I am not going to sit idle or be unhappy because I cannot now be what I can only be later on. If you cannot be a vegetarian, be as much of a vegetarian as you can, and ignore those who do nothing because they cannot do everything.

PRINCIPLES OF LIFE

You are expected, however, to use tact and discretion — neither obtruding your principles nor concealing them. Be restrained and quiet in your actions, and above all avoid aggressiveness and feelings of superiority because you think you possess a truth not yet shared by others. Indeed, you do not possess a truth until its effect on your nature is to produce a greater understanding and sympathy than you had without it. Every additional truth you know should make you so much the more tolerant and appreciative, for you are by that truth the nearer to a knowledge of the unity which makes us one with all. If knowledge brings pride and shuts you off from your fellow-creatures you are only in possession of its intellectual aspect. You have not yet reached its spiritual essence. So, when you begin to take [Page 86] the Master's hint as regards vegetarianism, I want you to show that you have a new truth in your possession, first by manifesting a little more of the spirit of goodwill than you have previously been able to show, second by holding fast to your new truth gently and unobtrusively. I think you ought not to give way. No parent or friend with understanding would ask you to give up a matter of principle, if you show by your conduct that the principle has an ennobling effect upon you. But you cannot expect them to regard as a principle something which makes you more fussy and troublesome than before. If, on the other hand your principle is not respected, then the course of action you should take depends upon the amount of strength you possess. In India young men often write to Mrs. Besant asking her advice as to various courses of action which would involve conflict with established custom and would consequently place the individual concerned in great difficulty. So far as I remember her general position is that if advice is asked it often means that the applicant, not being strong enough to decide for himself and take the responsibility, wishes to have behind him some one who will share whatever difficulties come. Also, the advice to be given depends upon the power of the individual to carry it out, and it is useless to recommend heroic measures to a well-meaning but negative personality. People who give advice must to some extent become involved in its results, and by far the best plan is, knowing the ideal, to get as near to it as you can on [Page 87] your own account alone. By all means learn from your elders the principles of right action — you have them in *At the Feet of the Master* — but work them out in your own way according to circumstance and capacity, ever striving to act as truly as you can, combining thoroughness with deference to the wishes of others in all matters not involving principle.

Reading this, young people will often object that they have hardly any definite principles, and hesitate to act on those for the moment swaying them lest they make themselves a nuisance, not to say ridiculous, by upsetting the household with a zeal which may last but a very short time. I grant that this is a difficulty, but it seems to me that, first, all reasonable parents would be willing to submit to such family disturbances as might occur in the course of efforts made by young people to find their moral footing; secondly, it is better to have a temporary principle and to have lost it, than never to have had a principle at all ! Young people must inevitably feel their way. The higher self must take some time to settle down in its new surroundings; and it is most natural to expect a forceful ego to throw itself headlong into innumerable attitudes of mind and feeling, rushing from one to another until sufficient, experiences are gained to enable the choice to be made of outlooks upon life which, will last for some time. We are growing incessantly, and even the most cherished principles of the wisest among us undergo much modification as the years pass, may even in course of time be totally abandoned. So it [Page 88] is after all a matter of growth, and youth must not be blamed if it grow jerkily and spasmodically. Be as true to the reigning principle as you can, and though people may laugh at your bubbling enthusiasms, you will never in after-life regret them, for their influence is all for good. On the other hand train yourselves by degrees to approach a new principle cautiously and to discard it reluctantly, for it must be a matter of honour with you to treat it reverently — neither accepting it unless you feel sure that you can profitably follow it, nor

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relinquishing it without a sense of gratitude for the good it has done you. We may at least say with truth that whatever other effect a principle has had on you its temporary place in your heart will have given you the power of understanding, and of sympathising with, those who are under an influence which you yourself may long ago have passed beyond.

BE TRUE TO YOUR OWN SELF

Let me conclude this portion of our subject by warning you against people who argue that because a leader is or is not a vegetarian, therefore we ought to follow his or her example. A common line of argument is that there can be no particular harm in eating meat or smoking since the great founder of the Theosophical Society — Madame H. P. Blavatsky herself — both ate meat and smoked cigarettes. Or, to take the opposite standpoint, if Mrs. Besant and Mr. C. W. Leadbeater are both rigid vegetarians and [Page 89] non-smokers, we should do well to follow them. Which is it to be, then, H. P. Blavatsky or Annie Besant? Clearly we cannot follow both !

The fact is that we are not at all concerned with the special circumstances under which all great people necessarily live. To be great, an individual must possess a peculiar temperament, and to be an occultist requires conditions quite outside the understanding of ordinary human beings. Greatness is always out of the ordinary, and rules appropriate to mediocrity are often fetters to genius. Then, again there are varying types of greatness with widely differing functions; and it is illogical to argue that because some one whom we recognise as great acts in a particular way, therefore no one is great who does not behave similarly. Further, it is quite conceivable that a pupil's work in the world is so necessary to his Master's plans that He has to submit to a special piece of karma, belonging to the pupil, which prevents the pupil's body from bearing the strain of the service required unless it be coarsened with animal food. In fact, we may reasonably imagine numberless circumstances in which rules quite suitable for us at our level, and perhaps of general suitability at all levels, have to be waived for special reasons. Emphatically this is not our business. It is a matter between Master and pupil, and, in the case of Madame Blavatsky or of Mrs. Besant or of Mr. Leadbeater, it is more seemly in us to be grateful for the beauty of their teachings than to intrude upon the conditions under which the teachings [Page 90] were given. My reply to people who want to probe into the private lives of those who teach us is that if I find their teaching inspiring I shall have enough to do in translating the inspiration into action, without wasting precious time in ascertaining whether the teacher lives perfectly — according, that is, to my own idea of perfection — the words he utters. I might add that we smaller people commit a great mistake if we venture to judge those greater than ourselves by standards which, perhaps, they have long outgrown. One of the greatest obstacles in the way of the average man or woman recognising the great World-Teacher when He comes will be that of expecting Him to limit Himself to their own conception of spiritual greatness. Each little narrow sect of Christianity or Hinduism or Buddhism or Islam or Zoroastrianism will expect Him to be its special champion as against all other little sects. Every faddist will expect Him to be an ardent disciple of the special fad from which he derives his spiritual livelihood. He must surely wear such and such clothes, eat such and such foods, proclaim such and such truths, live in such and such a way. He will live as the world needs Him to live, not as individuals want Him to live. He comes to help all mankind to live better lives, not to flatter the spiritual pride of a few. You and I know that He is the Teacher of the world, and instead of asking Him so to live when He comes that we shall recognise Him without difficulty, we should rather ask that we may so live now as to become worthy to recognise Him when He is [Page 91] in our midst. How the Greatest shall live and what He shall teach is for the Greatest to decide — else we ourselves were greater than He, if our own standard could guide Him. What concerns us is how we shall

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live and what we shall teach so that He may recognise us as His servants. The world has not made so conspicuous a success of its affairs that it can afford to point out to the great World-Teacher Himself the lines along which reform and teaching are needed. He comes because we need His help, and what the world needs just now is to develop sufficient humility to receive guidance which may be diametrically opposed to all existing conventional theories of life. Devotion, Steadfastness and Gentleness — all these the world needs, but pride has in the past been the outstanding barrier between the Teacher and His generation. May it not be so in the 20th century.

CLEANLINESS

The Master proceeds to lay stress on the fact that "without a perfectly clean and healthy body you cannot do the arduous work of preparation, you cannot bear its ceaseless strain". No one who is not undergoing the discipline of preparation for a more thorough service of the Masters can have the slightest conception of the strain it involves. Every individual who deliberately places himself at a Master's disposal by that very act begins to tune his various bodies to respond to the finer vibrations of [Page 92] the Master's worlds, and to become infinitely more sensitive to the life of the world in which he lives. The disciple must not only hear the Master's "faintest whisper above earth's loudest song", he must automatically sense the misery and trouble and need of those who people the world in which he lives, and he must send out to them the Master's force in terms of courage and compassion. This means that the body must be pure, as free as possible from all coarseness, must gradually substitute particles for its composition purer than those in use among the majority of mankind. The disciple is in advance of his generation — what he now is, the world as a whole will become after many years. He must embody in his daily life a new ideal or principle of living: in other words, he must be a living example to those around him of the stage immediately in front of them, the stage towards which they now are passing.

THE CEASELESS STRAIN

In *At the Feet of the Master* we are given a model on which to build our various bodies, and we must expect that people who do not realise the necessity for the efforts we are making, will laugh at us, will regard us as tiresome disturbers of the soporific policy of drifting with the stream. I am often told that reformers are so unsociable that it is almost a nuisance to live with them; certainly it is almost impossible to treat them as ordinary, conventional mortals. I quite agree, and I heartily sympathise with those [Page 93] who, content with life as it is, find themselves forced to have to do with people who clash with conventional codes, the observance of which makes life so much more negative and, therefore, easy. But if you mean business, you are bound to set yourself against the majority of accepted modes of living, and herein lies part of the "ceaseless strain" of which the Master speaks. The force of habit, the pressure of public opinion, a natural tendency to comparative inertia, all combine to keep you within the narrow limits of conventional life. But then you are not fulfilling your *rôle* as a leader, as a forerunner, as an active force in the direction of bringing about a better mode of living than that to which for the present we are content to conform. You must stand outside the pale of "society" to a very considerable extent. You are required to guide your life by principles which do not yet appeal to the majority, and you cannot expect people as a whole to accept you for what you try to be.

You are continually warring against the lower self in yourself as well as against the lower self in the world outside. You are continually setting up a standard of living higher than that to which the world for the time

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being conforms, and you have to strain every nerve to live up to it yourself; for only as you yourself approach the standard will you be able effectively to champion it among your surroundings. The world is ever pressing against you and your efforts, while on your part you have ever to be striving to carry the world with you as you tune your lower [Page 94] vehicles to co-operate more harmoniously with the realities to which they are to be attuned. You are one with the world, and such unity tends to keep you within the limits of the world's average progress. On the other hand, you are trying to make that unity more living by yourself becoming an example of what the world may hope to be at no distant date, thus stimulating the whole to increase its lustre by harmonising with the special brightness of a part.

Indeed is the strain "ceaseless". Vigilance cannot for a moment be relaxed. There is every temptation from the lower to give up the struggle and to resume the far easier path of being led. Innumerable actions which the world approves are denied to you. Many pleasures in which the world indulges must be foresworn by you if you would give the world what it needs rather than what it asks. As I write these words, I can hear some of my readers exclaim: "What is the use of it all, then ? It seems so lonely a struggle, so grey a life. Are there no compensations ? When all goes well and there is no trouble, I admit that the compensations seem as if they were non-existent. When life is easy for the world or for the individual, it seems almost absurd to go out of one's way to keep up a strain for which there is apparently no call. But life is never easy for long, nor is life easy for most people; and the value of the disciple who trains all his bodies as the athlete trains only the physical, is that he is able not only to bear trouble which overwhelms the ordinary individual, but he has accumulated a reserve of courage from [Page 95] which those in trouble may draw the strength to meet disasters which otherwise might render them hopeless and crushed.

Remember that however much you and your friends may be living a life of ease and happiness, there are others near you who are struggling with care, with want, with sickness, with sorrow. Remember that no individual happiness lasts long from which the world is excluded. Who are you that you should enjoy comfort, luxury, the satiety of your desires, while others, in the moments of your supremest joy, are weighed down by the seeming hopelessness of everything. Joy which is shared endures according to the number who share it, and the disciple strives to ascertain the conditions of true joy so that, through leading others to the knowledge, peace and happiness may begin to become permanent instead of being fleeting because restricted to the few. In reality, therefore, while the strain of discipleship is great, there is an ever-increasing tendency to peace and joy because the would-be disciple is always engaged in trying to emphasise these aspects in those around him. He is learning to be a peace-bringer and a joy-bringer, and he must not complain if the process of education sometimes shuts him off from many of the fleeting joys on which his fellows set such store. A child practising a musical instrument may often long to leave his lesson and join in the happy laughter of his young companions in the garden outside, but if he can persevere in the training of his body to reproduce, however feebly, God's message through music, he will [Page 96] some day bring peace to thousands, and to himself a joy well worth the little sacrifice of the temporary happiness which at the time seemed so enticing.

It would sometimes be so much simpler to eat meat, to follow conventional habits of thought, to accept the conventional *dicta* of one's class, but one would be giving up the permanent for the temporary. A bird in the hand is by no means worth two in the bush, provided you know that if you try hard enough you are bound in course of time to catch those in the bush. People sometimes think that they can have the bird in the hand as well as those in the bush, but we have been clearly told we cannot serve both God and Mammon; and so far as I know the experience of most earnest students is that the search after the

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peace of God is only fruitful in proportion to the exclusion of all pleasures which make for selfishness and self-indulgence at an expense to others. I admit that to a certain extent it is possible to combine the two, and, as I said before, there is no reason why one should not enjoy innocent and harmless amusements. But selfishness must ever be a drag on one's efforts to lead the disciple's life, and the less selfishness one shows, the quicker the progress. Most of us are more or less selfish, and the result is that we are only more or less successful in our search for truth. It behoves us, therefore, so to order our lives, that we are continually planning for the greater welfare of our surroundings, partly by active help and partly by self-training. All such preparation [Page 97] involves strain, for we are in effect all day long, and all night long too, striving to transmute into finer forces all coarse vibrations that come to us from without. Hate, dislike, ill-feeling, suspicion, doubt — all come to us, and in return we have to train ourselves to send out goodwill. At first we cannot always do it, we cannot even often do it; but those who once have been able to return good for evil know the peace it brings to all one's bodies and the feeling of fire and vigour it imparts to one's whole being. I feel very strongly that just at present any efforts I may have made in the past are more than repaid by the strength of which I am conscious in these difficult times, and by the eagerness I experience to be of service to the many to whom the War has brought misery and trouble. The War has brought us all nearer to each other. Above all it has brought the Masters nearer to us than we have ever allowed Them to come before, and it has given some of us the happiness of knowing that Theosophy is the one great source from which it is possible to draw courage and cheer for the use of the afflicted. Such times as these are abundant evidence that the "ceaseless strain" is well worth while bearing for the power it generates to serve mankind. When life is smooth the strain may sometimes seem an unnecessary torture, but when times are hard it is known to have been the basis for a confidence which otherwise could not have existed. [Page 98]

THE "I" OUTSIDE THE BODY

The Master then shows us how the training is to proceed. "It must always be you who control that body, not it that controls you". With regard to this Mrs. Besant gave the following instruction — the words are not hers: "What you have to do is to judge for your body as you would for an animal in your charge; you must not overwork it because if you do it has not sufficient physical energy left for efforts in other parts of your work. You must give it as much sleep and food as it requires to keep it in the highest state of efficiency — not necessarily all that it wants. Many of you still give the body too much food, and this is incompatible with the highest point of efficiency, at which we should always be aiming. Young bodies, of course, need considerably more food than do elderly ones; the body must have enough, but you must not let it have more than that. Plenty of kind-hearted people make that very mistake with their animals, with the result that the animals have imperfect health and suffer when they have to walk. You must judge for your body. You ought to have such complete control over your body that you can make it wait without trouble, saying: 'This that wants it is not I. I have something more important to do at present, you must wait till I can attend to you.'

"This is the point that I should advise you to think over and to work upon . . . pull yourselves up constantly and ask: is it I, or my body, that is [Page 99] wanting this or that ? This will gradually lead you to that state of self-recollectedness which is so essential, and which is a thing that untrained people never have . . . whenever you wish something, examine if it is really *you* who wish it. It is one great lesson that has to be learned, this identifying of oneself with the God who is Oneself, instead of with the animal which is one's instrument".

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Let me lay stress on the word "self-recollectedness". We have to *remember* ourselves, we have to remember to distinguish between the machine and the motive power, between the instrument and the user. In the next couple of pages the Master explains to us how we may recollect ourselves, by showing us what the astral and mental bodies respectively desire *on their own account*. He has already told us how the physical body tries to bring into submission the self within — "the physical body wants to rest, to go out walking, to eat and drink; and the man who does not know says to himself: 'I want to do these things'. "But we must say to all three bodies — physical, astral, mental — "You shall not hinder me in doing good work". In other words, we must recollect our higher self, however much our lower vehicles — its instruments — may strive to make themselves heard for their much speaking. People who do not know are so much occupied with their lower bodies that they identify themselves with them almost entirely, and it is only under some great moral pressure that they realise too late that the indulgence of the lower selves has meant the withdrawal of the [Page 100] higher self from the position it might have taken, from the power with which it might have endowed its instruments. The value of the lower bodies consists in their capacity to glean the necessary experiences of the plane to which the matter composing them belongs. If they simply immerse themselves in the activities of their own plane, instead of allowing the higher plane bodies to select as far as possible such experiences as may help the growth of the individual; as a whole, the result will be that the bodies will become more and more entangled in increasingly lower strata of their respective planes and will finally with great suffering be discarded by the Self whose bidding they have scorned. The law of *Karma* is very rigid, and a body degraded to base uses in one life when it might have listened to the God within, becomes unable to serve its owner at some future time, and in the misery of a longing to help, united to instruments through which no work can be done, is gradually learned the lesson that true happiness and progress are alone possible when the lower acts in perfect deference to the will of the higher. How often is not the spirit willing while the flesh is weak — the result of not having yet learned the relative values of the various bodies through which we contact the many depths of God's manifested universe ? The flesh is weak when it tries to depend on itself alone, but it becomes infinitely strong when serving but as the reflection of its spiritual counterpart. [Page 101]

CHAPTER VII

THE ASTRAL AND MENTAL BODIES

"THE astral body", says the Master, "has *its* desires — dozens of them; it wants you to be angry, to say sharp, words, to feel jealous, to be greedy for money, to envy other people their possessions, to yield yourself to depression . . . not because it wishes to harm you, but because it likes violent vibrations, and likes to change them constantly. But *you* want none of these things, and therefore you must discriminate between your wants and your body's".

Let me quote again from notes taken of Mrs. Besant's instructions on this paragraph: "You must exercise continual watchfulness, constant care, because it is more difficult to realize that you are not your astral body, than to realize that you are not your physical body. But if you look at the examples which the Master gives, you will see how continually you identify yourselves with your astral body. 'I am angry or irritable,' you will say. Probably you will not say 'I am jealous' if you are conscious of the feeling of jealousy; for though we may identify ourselves with our feelings, we try to veil the lower ones — so you might call this feeling, not jealousy,[Page 102] but love. 'I am hurt because so and so whom I love 'loves some one better than me ! ' Love is such a far reaching, all-embracing virtue, that we like to shelter under it and attribute to it all sorts of things with which it has nothing whatever to do. Far better is it to examine honestly our feelings and not to play with ourselves and deceive ourselves with pretty words. In the case under consideration, you are not hurt because you love your friend, but because you desire to appropriate that friend to yourself. Wherever there is this feeling of being hurt, it springs from selfishness, which is at the opposite pole to love. You — the Self — cannot feel jealous, but your astral body can; neither are You angry or irritable: these are all moods of the astral body".

I wish to lay stress on this fact that when we feel hurt or offended we are as a matter of fact giving way to selfishness. People will tell you that it is only natural sometimes to feel hurt or offended, and I entirely agree if by the word "natural" they mean "inevitable at a certain stage of growth". We could not feel sympathy with people who feel hurt or offended had we not experienced the feeling ourselves. On the other hand we cannot show them the way to overcome the feeling unless we ourselves have more or less overcome it; and the Master emphasises the fact that the real "I" in each one of us, the "I" we express so loosely in words in daily life — continually identifying it with bodies which only last a short time — can never feel these fleeting moods. From my own experience, although I have only just begun real [Page 103] work, I can bear emphatic testimony to the fact that the more I pay attention to the "I" within, the more clearly do I realise that my moods and feelings of the lower kind are obnoxious to it. I often give way to temptations of various kinds, to moods and feelings, but I am growing increasingly conscious of a sense of strong discomfort whenever the lower has its way unchecked. Not being yet sufficiently master of my lower bodies, they often carry all before them, but I am not happy in their victory, and even while they are temporarily triumphant I know full well that I am not well — that the real "I" is, as it were, ailing. We know much about physical ill-health, but as soon as we begin to place our feet upon the path we learn the meaning of spiritual ill-health, the remedies for which are to be found within the covers of *At the Feet of the Master*. Spiritual ill-health is as painful as physical ill-health — I think more so; for with the eagerness to serve comes the lack of power, a lack due to giving way to the fleeting moods of vehicles which ought to have been servants and not masters. And there is nothing more racking than an inability to make the bodies obey the behests of the spirit.

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I wish to lay stress on the Master's statement that the astral body wants things, "not because it wishes to harm you but because it likes violent vibrations and likes to change them constantly".

You must remember that our various bodies are made up of matter which is still on the downward arc of evolution, and the result is that this matter [Page 104] evolves by violent and constantly changing vibrations. Mrs. Besant remarks : "Students have sometimes put to me a curious question: ' Ought we not to give it the opportunity of evolving?' " No ! You can, without any fear of being selfish, refuse to give these vibrations. It can find them in savages, in animals; they *need* them as experiences to bring out moods of consciousness, and you must not sacrifice your higher evolution for this. The constant desire of the astral body for violent changes is a thing which should help you to realise that it is not you. Moods come over you for no apparent cause, and not approved by your reason; they have nothing to do with you, but are the independent activities of the astral body. You must realise this, and not allow yourself to be made the playground of all these changing moods".

The Master emphasises the fact that *you* want none of these things, and, therefore, you must discriminate between *your* wants and your body's. I think it is well to remember that the more we make progress the greater the force which pours through our various bodies. The result is that while our higher emotions are infinitely more powerful than they were before, our lower emotions also gain in strength. Each one of us, who has set himself deliberately to tread the path of Service, experiences the difficulty that, while he can do much better work than before, he seems to have many more obstacles than he has hitherto known of; in fact all his bodies become more highly vitalised, and the force flowing through them affects the lower as well as the [Page 105] higher. So it is only safe to make special effort when one feels sure that, however much the lower may gain in vitality, the higher will always be able to dominate.

Every one who deliberately places himself on the side of evolution, on the side of self-sacrifice rather than on that of self-seeking, must be prepared to pay the price of the deeper sympathies he will inevitably experience, by laying himself open to greater temptations than those which have hitherto come his way. If he is really in earnest, success is bound to come sooner or later, and when he feels that troubles are overwhelming him he may well say to himself: "These added difficulties are the price I am paying for the greater power of service which I have gained". Whatever happens, it is at least unwise to brood over your failures, or to imagine that a past mistake can never be rectified. It is one of the most ancient of maxims that we should not look behind. If we do look behind we feel despair, repentance, remorse. All of these moods, as Mrs. Besant tells us, are a waste of strength. The energy you put into repentance would be better spent on cultivating the emotion opposite to that which causes the repentance. "Do not look back; . . . pick out all the opposite moods and practise them all day long. If your astral body wants you to be impatient, set your mind on patience; think of patience in your morning meditation and practise it throughout the whole day. If your astral body wants you to feel jealous, do not think any more about jealousy, think [Page 106] of unselfishness and practise it hard, there will be no room for jealousy then. Your mind cannot be filled with two opposing things at the same time". In other words we must strive to be as positive as we can, as long as we can. We must strive to emphasise our better natures rather than to feel grieved at the mistakes we have made.

Personally, I believe most strongly that the past can be modified, both by the present and by the future. I think that our attitude in the present can so modify the past that we may transmute a mistake into a force for good. Similarly, by being careful in the present, the future will be made secure, and will, in its turn,

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react upon the past. From a certain standpoint of consciousness everything is in the "ETERNAL NOW". And all that we have done, all that we are doing, all that we shall do, is summed up in the "Now". The mischief I may have done to my friend last year, I may considerably repair by striving to be of special service to him today. The jealous thought I may have had some time ago, I may render comparatively impotent by surrounding my friend with strong thoughts of unselfish goodwill at every possible opportunity. I do not wish to suggest that every action is not followed by its appropriate karma. But who shall say where an action begins and where it ends ? Down here we see things separated off into compartments: the Master is able to see much more of the unity than we can in this world of separated existences. [Page 107]

THE MENTAL BODY

The Master proceeds to point out in what ways the mental body strives through lower thought-forms to minister to the needs of the matter of which it is composed. Pride seems to be one of the most common conditions of our mental bodies. "Your mental body wishes to think itself proudly separate, to think much of itself and little of others. Even when you have turned it away from worldly things, it still tries to calculate for self, to make you think of your own progress, instead of thinking of the Master's work and of helping others". Mrs. Besant remarks that probably the mind-body is the most difficult of all to control. In my own experience, the mind-body seems able to deceive us more successfully than the other bodies, for the mind associates itself with each individual's personal progress, and makes him think how he is getting on. "How near am I to the next definite stage on life's pathway?" is a thought which often comes to those who are striving to lead the spiritual life, and it is undoubtedly a very natural thought. On the other hand, spiritual progress depends on service to others and *not* upon individual growth, except in so far as it is undoubtedly true that the more you grow the greater becomes your capacity to be of use.

We must not forget the essential unity of all, and this means that no individual growth is possible save as others grow too, while the growth of those around us inevitably stimulates our own. In other words, it [Page 108] is no use thinking in terms of ourselves alone or of the few, we have to think in terms of the many, so as gradually to reach the Master's position of thinking in terms of all.

Undoubtedly the mind-body depends for the completeness of its lower aspect upon the development of its special capacities and powers, and such development begins by making these capacities and powers grow under the forcing impulse of competition and individualism. But all who read these pages should have passed this stage of growth, and should have come to the point of realising that there is no value in any power save as it is used to help the one whole. And so when the mental body wishes to think it is proudly separate, we must look upon this condition as a survival of the past, as something we have, in reality, outgrown and to which we should no longer pay attention. In my own experience, the quickest way of developing the mental faculties at our stage of growth is to use them in the service of others. A boy who is weak in any special subject of study can best stimulate what he lacks by trying to find someone even weaker than himself, so that he may find it possible usefully to employ even the little power he possesses.

Each one of us has the germ of perfection in him, and we are only weak in any special direction by comparison with others who are strong. Compared with those who are weaker, we ourselves are strong. Remember, always, that behind the apparent imperfections are the germs of perfection, enshrined within

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[Page 109] the God within us. We are Gods in the making, and however negligible our capacities may seem when compared with those of our elder Brethren, they have a very appreciable value towards those who know less than we do ourselves. And by helping those to whom our weakness is as strength we gradually emphasise that strength and so develop faculties hitherto apparently of little force.

So you see that, in the long run, the great fact of unity is the assurance to each one of us that we have it in our power, in course of time, to become even as the Masters are. We all depend upon each other, we all grow through failures, and every weakness is but an undeveloped strength.

TEMPTATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Mrs. Besant has often told us that the true server and occultist sees in all surrounding life opportunities rather than temptations. To the ordinary individual temptations must be avoided or at least guarded against. A temptation is something we may succumb to, on account of which we may stumble. But to an earnest worker who is beginning to understand the true value of life, a temptation is an occasion for the fortifying of a weak place, for the building up of a virtue, of a strength in place of a weakness. He does not try to avoid temptations, but rather to stand firm in their midst and to put forth that very strength whose absence made the temptation possible at all. I quite admit that certain people would do well to run away

[Page 110] from temptations, but anyone who means business must endeavour to gain strength to surmount them from the reserve force of earnestness which will carry him through most troubles if he will only let it. Let me emphasise once more in this connection the need for self-recollectedness. Remember who you are and for what you are striving, and remember this especially when a difficulty or temptation threatens to distract an all too willing mind from its Self. The mere endeavour to remember, still more the act of memory, brings its own strength and makes you master of the difficulty or temptation instead of its slave. "You must watch unceasingly", says the Master, "or you will fail", Habit is everything in these matters, and you will either fall into the habit of succumbing to temptations or you will fall into the habit of transmuting them into added capacity. Set up a good habit and it will carry you through troubles you would never have thought it possible to endure. Set up a bad habit and it will take you a long time to unravel the knot into which you have twisted yourself — it cannot be cut! Self-recollectedness means "thinking of the Master's work and of helping others", and when you think in this way you are learning to become the alchemist of your temptations.

RIGHT AND WRONG.

We now come to a most important statement by the Master: "Between Right and Wrong Occultism knows no compromise. At whatever apparent cost that [Page 111] which is right you must do, that which is wrong you must not do, no matter what the ignorant may think or say". Who is an occultist? To this question we have an answer in an earlier portion of *At the Feet of the Master*: "What religion a man holds, to what race he belongs — these things are not important; *the really important thing is . . . the knowledge of God's plan for men*". I have italicised the last sentence because I believe the occultist to be one who is at least beginning to know God's plan in part; no one can know it in its entirety. An occultist has begun to use his discrimination to distinguish between the real and the unreal, between darkness and light, and

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knows that death, is but the instrument of immortality. You who are servants of the Star, perhaps members of the Theosophical Society, are occultists in the becoming, because you know some of the truths at present hidden from the majority of mankind. So it is you whom the Master addresses when He declares that at whatever *apparent* cost the right must be chosen. Note the word "apparent". There is no real cost to yourself or to others when you choose the right and turn away from the wrong. Great indeed is the truth and it shall prevail, however much error may seem for the time to triumph. Pain comes because of wrong-doing, and though it is true that a right action often causes considerable pain to us in the doing, it is because we are breaking through habits of wrong-doing, and the lower nature is still *striving* to keep us within its grasp. The pain of the lower is but the inevitable prelude to the joy of the [Page 112] higher self beginning to feel free and unfettered. Soon the lower no longer binds, and then pain ceases — "the Master is always serene and joyous", not because He is indifferent to suffering but because He knows all that suffering can teach, because He lives in the Self liberated from a bondage the meaning of which it has grown to understand. There is only an "apparent" cost when we look at the conditions from the point of view of those more ignorant than ourselves, of those who do not understand the motive for our action. In other words, the "cost" is the effort to purify the lower nature, and this effort can only be looked on as "cost" when we identify ourselves with a lower which is losing its dominance. People are very apt to judge others and to judge them much more harshly than they judge themselves. We depend far too much upon the opinion of others with regard to ourselves; and the result is that we often act against the dictates of our consciences in the hope of shielding ourselves from the judgment of our fellows. This is what, I think, is meant by the word "compromise". Listen to Mrs. Besant's words: "You will find, if you look honestly at it, that ordinary life is a series of compromises in the outer world; people are always doing a little less than that which they know to be right, in order to make things smoother for themselves, in order to meet that deadliest of questions: 'What will people say?' That fear of other people's opinions is partly due to a weakness which is amiable at its root —the desire to please. . . . Plenty of people see [Page 113] what is wanted in religious and social questions, but how many will lead in reform. . . . I know you cannot carry out your highest ideals immediately, any more than you can get from the bottom of a mountain to the top by taking one leap. But if you mean to scale your mountain, every step must be taken with the view of reaching the summit, every step must bring you nearer to it. Never lower your ideal. That is fatal. 'One thing is right, while the pleasant is another says a Hindu scripture, 'right unto pleasant the wise man preferreth' "

I grant you that the path thus shown to us is hard, because we have hitherto been living in a world of compromises. But the less we compromise the more real joy life brings to us and the more definite consciousness we gain of the Master's world to which we all belong. Later I shall take up the latter portion of the whole question as to right and wrong in the light of the Master's direction as to how we reach the right, and how we may distinguish our whims, prejudices and fancies from that which is really right. [Page 114]

CHAPTER VIII

THE HIDDEN LAWS OF NATURE

I DO not want to trouble you much about the hidden laws of nature, because as you grow you will begin to find out for yourselves what these hidden laws are. Briefly, you must try to understand that the world's laws, those which we call "conventions" and "customs", are by no means necessarily binding upon you. People are far too apt to accept the world as it is, and to allow themselves to drift with it rather than to take the trouble of trying to guide. Each one of us must try to find his own footing, and take his stand on principles he has tested for himself before accepting. To do this you must not rest satisfied with things as they are, nor with the ordinary interpretation of life as accepted by the average individual. Your conscience and your reason are the God within you, and you must ever seek to give these two forces all possible opportunities to guide you to right thought, right speech and right action. If you do this, you will find that they will tell you much about nature that the ordinary person does not know simply because he regulates his conduct in life more according to that which is outside him than to the God within. You will thus come into contact with laws of [Page 115] nature, hidden from the gaze of most people, which will powerfully aid you in establishing yourself upon right lines of growth. For example, most people have thought that the greatest good of the greatest number should be the aim and object of all legislation and statecraft, but the law of nature is that only that which is pleasant for all can really be pleasant for any single individual, to quote the Master's statement. Under modern conditions we tend to ignore minorities, because we do not yet know how to deal with them; but to the One, minorities are of equal importance with majorities. And you and I have to learn how to bring this as yet hidden law into operation, so as to do only those things which God wills — these being the only things really useful for all. Our hidden law, is, then, that we are concerned neither with majorities nor with minorities, but with the will of God, and if we can only understand His will we shall see how all the various modes of life — however opposed on the surface — are but aspects of Him seen from a certain angle. This will give us tolerance, while at the same time we may feel it our duty strongly to press any particular aspect of His will, seen from some special standpoint, which our conscience and our reason tell us to be of dominant value for the moment. When we come later on to deal with tolerance, I shall have much to say on the need for virility in tolerance. I content myself here with asking you to remember that however tolerant you may be of others' views and attitudes, never forget that you, too, have your message to give to [Page 116] the world — you, too, have your angle of vision to emphasise, and you need be no less tolerant of other angles of vision because you pour your whole soul through your own.

Then again, to take up other as yet hidden laws of nature, there is the knowledge as to the various bodies which each one of us possesses, knowledge as to portions of God's plan for men which the world has yet to discover, knowledge as to the existence of Elder Brethren, knowledge as to laws of health and magnetism. Much of such knowledge is at present veiled from the gaze of most of us. But you will gradually learn, as some of us have learned, and then you will be much more careful, more deliberate, more thoughtful, because you will know that, though nothing matters much and most things do not matter at all, yet the motive behind the "things", the attitude of mind and feeling towards them — these matter considerably. And you can only serve the Master truly when you think before you speak or act, or, as the phrase goes, when you "look before you leap". Hastiness and impulsiveness, however common, must not be looked upon as natural, and so excused. Hastiness is carelessness, carelessness is slovenliness, and slovenliness, from this standpoint, is spiritual dirtiness. We need spiritual cleanliness, and to obtain it we must take care to reflect beforehand on the result of the proposed feeling or action or thought. So you see how a knowledge of some of these hidden laws strikes at the root of your very being, and carries you

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along lines often far removed [Page 117] from the road on which the world at present travels.

THE IMPORTANT AND THE UNIMPORTANT

The Master now teaches us as to the relative importance of various courses of action, from His standpoint and not from that of the world. "Firm as a rock where right and wrong are concerned, yield always to others in things which do not matter". Or, as He has put it in another way: "Between right and wrong, Occultism knows no compromise".

The sentence I quoted just before this one acts as a commentary on it, and shows how firmness must always be preceded by discrimination — a quality which, as Mrs. Besant has pointed out, is translated in the outer world as "tact". The difficulty for most people is to decide as to what is really right and as to what is really wrong. They say: "If only we knew *that*, there would be no difficulty at all, and we could quite easily let all else go". Now the Master has been telling us in an earlier part of the book that we must try to realise that our bodies are *not* ourselves. "You must dig deep down into yourself to find the God within you, and listen to His voice, which is *your* voice. Do not mistake your bodies for yourself, neither the physical body, nor the astral, nor the mental. Each one of them will pretend to be the Self, in order to gain what it wants". What you have to do then is to try to be as sure as you can that any idea you may for the moment have as to right and [Page 118] wrong is not one of your bodies pretending to be the God within you so as to get something it wants for itself. If you avoid acting hastily, if you will give yourself time to do a little of that digging deep down of which the Master speaks, you will be almost certain to know whether what is wanted is really right or not. It is all a matter of practice, for, the more you practise, the bigger the channel leading to the real "you," the more quickly you can at any time travel into yourself and know the will of the God within you. Then, again, the more you reach the God within you, the more you become the master of your various bodies, instead of allowing them in turn to dominate you. Their various desires, therefore, will grow feebler and feebler, until you will at once be able to distinguish between that which they want and that which you — the real you — want. Do not expect to be able at once unerringly to discriminate between right and wrong, between the fictitious "right" of your bodies and the real "right" of yourself. At first, just try to stop, when you are about to do something apparently "right", and dig a little, that is to say, make a little appeal to the best in you. If you allow yourself to be carried away at once, the chances are that you are allowing one of your bodies to put its own interpretation on "right" and "wrong", and you begin to juggle with conscience by saying: "Well, at any rate there is no harm in doing this". Remember that nothing matters much, most things not at all; so that ninety-nine out of the hundred occasions on which you [Page 119] think you are following a principle, you are, as a matter of actual fact, simply being led by bodies which ought to be your servants and not your masters. No man can serve two masters, still less the three — astral, physical and mental. We can only serve *one* master — the God within us.

Mrs. Besant puts the same idea in another way when she tells us: "Give way in everything, save in matters of principle". And the fact is that while you must be as firm as a rock as far as regards the general line or principle of conduct on which your life is based, in almost every act of daily life, in almost all your relations with other people, you will be able to give way. "You must be always gentle, and kindly, reasonable and accommodating, leaving to others the same full liberty which you need for yourself". To do this is to exercise true discrimination, or, to employ the worldly phrase, "tact". But remember that tact in this sense does not mean what it is so often supposed to mean — making things pleasant at the expense of truth. It means sympathy and sweet reasonableness, "leaving to others the same full liberty

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which you need for yourself". You could have no truer definition of tact than that.

Listen to Mrs. Besant's words on this important point:

"You see what is important in a certain thing that has to be done, and look after that; in all the rest you let the people do exactly what they like, and you point your will to the one thing in the middle that matters. They will think what a delightfully [Page 120] yielding person you are and follow you quite happily on the important point, hardly conscious that they are following at all. You have used discrimination; you have thrown with both hands to people all the other things — the things which they think matter, and have gone steadily on to the one thing you wanted. This is the thing which the fanatic forgets, and therefore he does not succeed, while the occultist always succeeds. Yoga, you remember, is 'skill in action'. The fanatic will not yield on things which do not matter; he does not discriminate between the important and the unimportant, so he rubs people's fur all up the wrong way, and then they will not follow him, however right he may be, and however important his main object. If, instead, you smooth the fur down, they purr and come along after you. This fact is based on an important fact in nature. In both men and animals it is an instinct to pull in opposition to anyone who is trying to pull them. Do not pull and do not push people, then they will come with you willingly. I saw a little instance of this fact here the other day. A man was trying to pull a calf along and, of course, the calf had planted its four feet into the ground, stuck its tail out, and was pulling against the man for all it was worth. If the man had been sensible he would have stopped pulling, and then the animal would have stopped pulling against him, and with a little patting he would have got it to follow him willingly. Take a lesson from that. If people will not do what you want, look for the fault in yourself. You will [Page 121] generally find that it is something in your way of acting that indisposes them. I follow this plan myself. When there is friction and trouble in a place, I sit down and think what it is I am doing that produces these, and find another way. It is no use trying to force people. You can force them to a certain extent, no doubt, but you only create opposition and trouble by doing so. But put a considerable attraction before them, and they will all come round it of their own accord. This implies a faculty of leadership, and it is a faculty which the Masters will want of you in the future, so try to develop it. The Masters will want you to know how to lead, so that you may help people along, instead of hammering them along." [Page 122]

CHAPTER IX

A SMALL THING

THE Master proceeds to draw a very important distinction between that which is worth doing and that which is not. He says: "Try to see what is worth doing: and remember that you must not judge by the size of thing. A small thing which is directly useful in the Master's work is far better worth doing than a large thing which the world would call good".

In the course of a varied experience I have come across many people who wish to take part in some kind of activity, many of whom come and offer themselves for service. I have always been in a difficulty with regard to these people, for I never can tell whether they are in earnest or not. One does not want to put them off in any way, nor, on the other-hand, does one desire to have round one a number of people for whom special kinds of work have to be found. If a person really wishes to serve the Master he does not mind in the least what he does. But most people are not content to do whatever comes to hand. Either there is some special kind of work which they want to do, and they do not care about doing any other kind, or they expect that some activity shall be created for them. Again, many [Page 123] people are quite unwilling to begin at the beginning. They want to do work which shall draw to them the favourable notice of their fellows, and they desire, therefore, to begin in the middle rather than plod through the early stages through which all good work must inevitably be built up.

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE

Now I want you who read these lines to look to see in what spirit you offer yourself for service. The Master makes the matter quite clear. "A small thing which is directly useful in the Master's work is far better worth doing than a large thing which the world would call good". Try to see, therefore, whether there is a piece of work being done which may be called the Master's work: it is for you, individually, to judge what the Master's work is. The Theosophical Society, the Order of the Star in the East, and all activities subsidiary to these are obviously the Master's work, and if you can find a little place which enables you definitely to be occupied in the service of such organisations, you are doing something which is far better worth doing than some other piece of work — perhaps more showy, but less connected directly with the Master's service. If I might be allowed to indulge in a little personal reminiscence, I began my own service to the Masters by putting postage stamps on envelopes, and writing out addresses for the Theosophical Society when its Headquarters were at 28, Albemarle Street. [Page 124] I remember being thoroughly determined to get a footing in the Office, and while of course my occupation was not very inspiring, I felt that I had put in the thin edge of the wedge, and that it rested with me to hammer that wedge firmly home. I knew that I could do that work, and that probably I should not be turned away, provided I did not show any discontent or desire for other work which might not, at the moment, be available for me. On the other hand, I was on the spot, and if any work should turn up I would be there ready to take it if no one better could be found.

One must, of course, be willing to go on with a special piece of work for an indefinite period. We ought to believe that the Master directly guides the affairs of our Theosophical Society and of the Order of the Star in the East, just as He guides many other movements in the world, and we should be able to realise that He knows who are working for Him, in however humble a capacity, and that when the opportunity offers

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He will give them more suitable work. As a Master-Organiser you can trust Him to make the best use of such capacities as you possess. Let me lay stress on the desirability of being on the spot. To me, in the early days, it proved invaluable, for when Mr. Keightley had to leave for India the Theosophical Society authorities had to look round for someone temporarily to take his place, and there I was at hand. I did not ask to take his place, but they knew — at least I hope they did — that I meant business, and I was not going to be turned away from the Master's service by the fact that there was not [Page 125] much for me to do. The result was that while there may have been many other better candidates for the temporary post, I was selected because they had not far to go to look for me.

Try to think how glad you are to render even the slightest little service to those whom you love. You do not want necessarily to do big things for them. It is not always possible to render big acts of service, but those whom you love are as happy with the small, kindly deeds as they would be with the big ones. Indeed I cannot help thinking it is the little things that make life go smoothly, and though big pieces of work have to be done, they generally affect people in the mass rather than individuals. So if you can bring yourself to realise that the Master is one of those whom you love with all reverence, you will then find out more clearly the meaning of the phrase, "a small thing directly useful in the Master's work is far better worth doing than a large thing which the world would call good".

BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

It is all a question of quiet determination. If you wish to become an engineer you must begin at the beginning. Many people are able to drive motorcars, but most of those who can drive are helpless on the occasion of a breakdown. They then have to engage the services of some one who has been for years learning all about engines, and how to construct and repair them. The same applies equally to the [Page 126] Master's service. When everything goes quite smoothly we all of us can do quite well, but every now and then something goes wrong. It may be in the Office; it may be in the attitude of people either towards the work or towards ourselves; it may be there is some friction between our fellow-workers. To put things straight, you must have had experience of the way in which things work, whether they be office things, or human temperaments. Ella Wheeler Wilcox said once in one of her poems: "Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone". We can all laugh together, but Theosophists and members of the Order of the Star in the East have to train themselves to stand helpfully beside those who weep. To do this, you must try to learn wisdom through the small things before you can hope to achieve wisdom in the larger issues of the outside world.

I repeat once more, the great thing is willingness to do *anything* that comes to hand. During this present War many people who never used to put their hands to anything, feel they scrub floors, wash utensils, do all kinds of so-called dirty jobs, because they now must help, and because they know help is needed. It is sad that we should have needed a war to teach us this very obvious lesson. As a matter of fact, help is always being needed, and we want people who will do all kinds of simple things, which, however trivial they may appear in the eyes of the world, are little bright sparks of light illuminating the nobility of the soul who is doing them. Such actions [Page 127] immediately attract the Master's attention, and thenceforth His blessing plays upon that individual, and so from the doing simple things will come the power to be of greater service.

Remember that when we are reading *At the Feet of the Master* we have come out of our world into the

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Master's world, and in His world things seem so very different from what they appear down here in the ordinary world by which we are normally surrounded. Never think of the world's judgment about what you do or about what you want to do. Try to remember that the Master looks into your heart to see the *spirit* in which you are doing the work, and pays much less attention than does the outside world to the actual work in which you are engaged. Your circle of influence may be at first very much restricted, but if you do your duty within that limited sphere, the Master will take upon Himself to enlarge the circle and will give you an opportunity of doing His work in a wider field. To sum it all up: begin at the beginning, and go on at the beginning as long as you may be needed.

DISCRIMINATION IN SERVICE

The Master then tells us to try and distinguish between the more useful and the less useful. "To feed the poor" He says, "is a good and noble and useful work; yet to feed their souls is nobler and more useful than to feed their bodies. Any rich man can feed the body, but only those who know can feed the soul. If you know, it is your duty to help others to know". [Page 128]

These words contain a very important truth. We, who are members of the Order of the Star in the East and of the Theosophical Society, are supposed to be in possession of truths which will help the world to grow stronger, more useful, and more able to cope with its difficulties. There are not many of us who possess these truths consciously, and the greatest blessing we can offer the world is to spread abroad that which means so much to us. As the Master says, any rich man can feed the body. We *expect* a man who has wealth to give his first attention to the right distribution of his wealth — that is his business. Those of us who may have riches belonging to the spiritual world have, as our first care, the duty of distributing these spiritual riches as wisely as we can. We are so apt to become slaves to the world's attitude toward things, and to forget that, though the world may not recognise the value of our riches, we, at least, have for ourselves and for many of our friends, proved their worth. Few Theosophists may have worldly wealth, but *all* Theosophists have a little spiritual knowledge. If they cannot spread their spiritual knowledge far and wide, they probably would not, were they wealthy people, give of their riches generously.

SPREAD YOUR TRUTH

People sometimes say to me: "I can do so little. You see I have no influence. Money seems to be everything". My reply to them is: "What do [Page 129] you *know* that has helped you in life's difficulties?" The knowledge that has helped you is certain to help others. Many people may not be ready for that knowledge. For such, the voice of the Theosophist will fall on unheeding ears. But there are always some, somewhere, who need the truths we possess, and it behoves us so to spread these truths that they may reach the ears of those to whom they are necessary.

I quite grant that we can do but little without a certain amount of material prosperity. Money certainly *does* help, and without it life is indeed more difficult. On the other hand, we must give what we can. If we do this, then will the Master add to our work the power that money gives. Money is always ready to the hand of those who will use it in the Master's service. And while we all of us have, from time to time, to know what it is to struggle without the help of money, while we have often to see many of our schemes

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fail for want of money, in the long run perseverance with the little we have will bring to us all kinds of help, including financial. The run may be a long one; the length of it depends, to a very large extent, upon the training which the individual has to receive. It may be necessary that he shall go through a long course of poverty to see how far the truths he knows sustain him in trouble. But, as I have said before, he wins through his experience, and no great truth for which some part of the world is ready can ever fail to reach its object because of lack of money. It may fail to [Page 130] reach its object from lack of capacity, from lack of enthusiasm, from lack of perseverance, of the messenger. But once these qualities are present, all other things shall be added.

So take care of that which you already possess, and invest it according to your best knowledge. No possession is of greater value than the spiritual knowledge which gives us stability, peace, confidence, strength. All these things come to us by building into our characters the truths for which the Theosophical Society and the Order of the Star in the East stand. Let us, therefore, make use of these truths in our own daily life, and employ them in service among all who surround us. Life is always more or less hard and difficult. It should be *less* hard and *less* difficult to those of us who know. And we should be able to give of that which helps *us* to courage, to all who have a less sure source from which to draw.

At the present time, when the whole world is in the throes of war, we must be careful to see that the knowledge we possess is spread far and wide, we must be careful to see that we live it more truly than we have ever lived it before, and we must be careful to see that through our example the preaching of this knowledge may be made more insistent and attention-compelling. Personally, speaking as a General Secretary of the Theosophical Society in England and Wales, I feel it to be a special duty to do all I can to make Theosophy widely known, so that those whom the War has caused to seek help and peace, may be able to [Page 131] find something which shall give them courage to endure. I might have joined the army, had my physical health been equal to the strain. But the truths of Theosophy are everything to me, and have pulled me through many hard times. I *could* have given my body to my country, but I feel — I do not think I shall be accused of cowardice in saying so — that I would far rather give my soul. That which has given *me* strength I must give to those around me who are in need of strength. The world may call this conceit, but it is the principle of my life, and I should feel untrue to my higher self were I not, in such a crisis as this, to spread in the most helpful manner possible, truths for which the world is looking, and without which the world can make but little progress. I quite agree that the majority of the youth of the country owe their bodies to the nation, for the war is being partly fought with bodies, but I am equally convinced of the truth underlying the letter of Lord Derby to the Archbishop of Canterbury, in which he agreed as to the need of the service to the country of the ministers of religion. If a man shirk the gift of his body, how shall he offer the gift of his soul. For the soul is a far greater gift than ever the body could be. Yet, if a man feels himself to be a channel for the Master's force, and every minister of the Church should feel this, then he can ordinarily do his best work by leading a life of special purity so as to become an ever-deepening channel through which the Master's strength and blessing may pass untainted. [Page 132]

HOW SHALL WE SERVE ?

The question as to what we ought to do depends, therefore, upon the position which we occupy. It is, indeed, the duty of most to set an example to those around them, and this often involves the putting aside of occupations we like for the sake of duties we owe. I have often and often thought over this question with regard to my own special circumstances, and I have come to the very definite conclusion that so long as I can give the best of myself to my fellow-countrymen, and so long as I can maintain the

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highest standard of living within my power, for so long is it my duty to make as many useful channels as I can through which our Theosophical movement may spread its message. The world may not agree with me, but when I am making big decisions I strive for the time to live in the Master's world, and to make my decisions from *that* standpoint. With the pressure of public opinion around one, and with the strong thought-forms which press upon one from all sides, it is not always easy to keep clear the memory of that temporary life in the Master's world. But I strongly feel the truth of those words of Shakespeare's: "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man". Men may *think* you false; but that is a far different matter from actually being so. I quite admit that people often suffer their own inclinations, their own weaknesses, to enter into their judgments. They try to reconcile desire with duty, and then seek [Page 133] to persuade themselves that it is duty which is moving them and not desire. The question is one between a man and his conscience, and when once one's conscience is clear, one is bound to have adequate strength to meet any difficulties which such a judgment may entail. [Page 134]

CHAPTER X

SERVICE AS EDUCATION

THE Master remarks that: "However wise you may be already, on this Path you have much to learn; so much that here also there must be discrimination, and you must think carefully what is worth learning". He answers the thought by telling us that we must study, because "God is Wisdom as well as Love", and that we must study especially that which will most help us to help others.

This statement of the Master seems to me to be at the basis of all true education, for I hold strongly that no education can be regarded as satisfactory which does not include within it the service of other people. It is sometimes said that the great object of education is first to make a child happy in his child-life, and then to give him useful knowledge. As a matter of fact, happiness, knowledge and service are, in reality, so far as the Master's world is concerned, interchangeable terms. No boy or girl is truly happy unless he begins, even while young, to transmute his knowledge into service. In many of the more advanced schools this truth is well understood, but, on the whole, educational authorities are far too much occupied with conventional [Page 135] method and subject-matter, and pay far too little attention to the choice of method and subject from the point of view of the way in which the child may easily make use of the knowledge he daily gains in school for the helping of those less advanced than himself. In the Central Hindu College at Benares it was always our habit to encourage every single student not only to study but to serve, and, indeed, we found it to be true that any boy who lacked capacity along any special line could very considerably decrease his ignorance by trying to help along that line some one who knew even less than he did. There is no better way of growing oneself than endeavouring to make oneself useful to one's surroundings; and in helping other people we increase our own capacity to learn.

Unfortunately under modern conditions we are very often face to face with the statement that young people must not be distracted from their studies; that their time for service is not yet; that they have enough to do in learning without going into the outside world. With such statements I entirely disagree. I do not think that children are nearly as happy as they ought to be, nor is the world nearly as joyous a place to live in as it should be. There may be many reasons for this, but at least one of the reasons is that the child does not bring into the outer world the joyous childish nature that the world needs, and I long for the time when part of a child's school life shall consist in moving among his surroundings, bringing to them the song that children alone can [Page 136] sing. I do not, for a moment, suggest that children should take an active part in politics, or in the discussion of social questions. But I do say, most emphatically, that there are very definite acts of service which children alone can perform, and which are very much needed both by the elder generation, and by the young themselves.

TWO KINDS OF STUDY

The child, therefore, has two kinds of study to undertake: (1) that which vitalises and makes sensitive his mind, and (2) that which enables him to be immediately of use in his own way. There are many subjects to study; much he needs to know; partly because these things will be definitely useful to him in after life, partly because they give the mind a certain tone, partly because they give the mind a certain discipline, and partly because they bring him, through the mind, into touch with the world, past, present and future. And, on the same lines, training must be given both to the physical and emotional bodies. With these, for

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the moment, we are not concerned. He must also be taught to study his actual place in the world in which he lives — that which the world brings to him, and that which he exists, even as a child, to offer to the world. He has his definite note to strike in the world's harmony, as much when a child as when he as grown up. The child, therefore, who is not encouraged to turn his study into service cannot be [Page 137] truly happy. For one of the conditions of growth is that we gradually find that the less our selfishness is narrow, the more our happiness grows permanent. Children soon get tired of most of their toys, and many parents are distracted at the thought of how they are going to occupy their young people from day to day when studies are over. It is part of a child's nature that he should, from time to time, get into "mischief"— this is but the result of that groping which leads us all to covet experience of one kind or another. The child would get into mischief much less, however, if he could be made to realise that he has a power in himself which he can make use of if he likes — the power to join himself to others, and so to gain a more satisfying kind of happiness than if he were to live for himself alone. I consider, therefore, that every boy and girl who goes to school, or who goes to a University, should combine study with service of one kind or, another. I consider all education one-sided which does not provide for each student an appropriate service.

THE PRIMARY PRINCIPLE

The Master lays down the primary principle upon which all study and service must be based. He says: "You must learn to be true all through, in thought and word, and deed". He thus emphasises that the world is built upon a foundation of truth, and He shows us that this is the first lesson every one of us has to learn, [Page 138] whether in school or out of it. Truth, indeed, is the basis of all growth, and the rate at which we grow depends upon the extent to which we allow truth to permeate our thoughts, our words, our actions. All in the world that is bad, impure, wrong, unhappy, is in reality, untrue. That is to say, it is all a distortion of the true — the force of truth has been misapplied. Absence of knowledge is the cause of all the trouble in the world, and the world needs, above all things, that truth — which is the same as knowledge — should be spread far and wide, in forms suited to the varying understandings of the different stages of evolution to which the peoples of the world belong. The Master tells us how we are to arrive at the truth, and He says that we must not believe that a thing is true because many other people hold it to be true, nor because it has been believed for centuries, nor because it is written in some book which man thinks sacred. He tells us that we must think things out for ourselves, and judge for ourselves. "He who would walk upon the Path must learn to think for himself, for superstition is one of the greatest evils in the world, one of the fetters from which you must utterly free yourself".

FORM IS NOT REALITY

That is why it is so important to have as teachers people who have a certain amount of real knowledge, and who are as free from prejudice as possible. I do not for a moment suggest that forms are not valuable, [Page 139] and during childhood there are many forms with which children are to be associated. But the teacher should never lose sight of the fact that forms are but forms, no matter how beautiful the forms may be, and that the existence of the form depends upon the reality within. Young people are so much brought up to believe that the forms which surround them are the only forms of any real value that, either they rebel against them, or become dwarfed by them. In either case mischief has been done, and suffering inevitably follows any belief that form *is* reality. We must try, therefore, to consider all forms as signposts pointing to the reality which they enclose. In the early stages of child-life, the form attracts most, and we cannot expect any considerable effort to look through the form into the reality beyond. But,

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as education proceeds, forms become increasingly insignificant, and should serve but to emphasise the beauty of an underlying unity which can find expression in so much apparent diversity. All of us, therefore, have to see how much we are at the mercy of conventional habits of thought. It is, of course, the reverse of sensible to disbelieve simply because a large number of people believe, though that is the attitude of many otherwise independent thinkers. But we must be continually on the alert to see that we do not unconsciously drift, either with our surroundings or with the general current of thought along which our nation, or the world as a whole, is drifting. Those who would serve the Master must learn to think for [Page 140] themselves, and this involves a very searching analysis of the motives which precede our thoughts, our words, our deeds.

CAUSES OF MISUNDERSTANDING

The Master then remarks that we must not think of other people that which we do not know. This is, of course, one of the most difficult lessons to learn, and one of the most valuable acts of service which both young and old can offer in helpfulness to others. We are all of us far too prone to *imagine*, and then to treat the imagination as if it were knowledge. Much of the ill-feeling which exists among people is simply because they often think that which they do not *know*, and which frequently turns out to be untrue. A personal talk with someone, whom one *imagines* to be in opposition to one, frequently removes the misunderstanding. Indeed, most people are much more antagonistic *away* from their objects of disapproval than when they come face to face. As a general rule, when two people come together, a very slight effort is always made by the underlying Unity to assert itself, and with goodwill this little effort often overcomes the misunderstanding which has been largely born of distance and ignorance.

Then, again, there is in most people a very definite tendency to exaggeration, and this also causes much misunderstanding and difficulty. As the Master observes, we often imagine that people are thinking ill of [Page 141] us: "If a man does something which you think will harm you, or says something which you think applies to you, do not think at once, 'he meant to injure me'." "Nothing is more true than the fact that each soul has its own troubles, and that its thoughts turn chiefly around itself. Our attitude towards others very largely depends on the way we ourselves are getting on in the world at the moment — on the state of our physical health, on the hopes we have for the future, on our memories of the past. Generally speaking, it is not so much what someone else does that matters, as the relation of that action to the little world in which we live. A little matter which I thought nothing of yesterday, I may to-day regard as of essential importance because toothache has entered my little world, and has upset my nerves. All kinds of apparently trivial conditions may combine to make us take a very uncharitable view of the actions of other people. Mrs. Besant has often told us that to feel hurt is a condition of selfishness, because *our* business is what we ourselves do, and not the attitude of others towards us.

This is a hard lesson to learn, because in the past we have so much depended upon the world outside us. If we would become pupils of a Master we must become far more positive in character, and make our condition depend upon what we give out rather than upon what we take in, I often think that the lives of clerks in the City depend far more upon what happens to their employers in the domesticity of home than upon the carelessness or cleverness with [Page 142] which they attend to their employers' business. An employer finds that his morning egg is bad, has a few words with his wife, is disturbed by the boisterousness of his children, could not find his collar stud while dressing, lost his favorite train, found his favorite seat occupied by some one else, and the result is that the office becomes unbearable, and everything his subordinates do is wrong. The subordinates may imagine that their employer dislikes

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them, or has some grudge against them, whereas the fact of the matter is that the whole mischief began with the loss of that collar stud ! I do not, for a moment, wish to suggest that this is always the case, but it very often is. As the Master observes: "Probably some one or something else has made him angry, and because he happens to meet you he turns his anger upon you. He is acting foolishly, for all anger is foolish, but you must not therefore think untruly of him". **[Page 143]**

CHAPTER XI DISCRIMINATION

THE Master proceeds to explain that when you become a pupil of one of the great Masters "you may always try the truth of your thought by laying it beside His". He explains that the pupil is one with the Master, and only needs to put back his thought into the Master's to see at once whether it agrees. This remark obviously does not apply to pupils yet on probation, but only to those whose consciousness is in some wonderful way blended with that of their Master. Many people have said to me that they cannot understand how this laying of the thought beside that of the Master can be accomplished. The only explanation I can think of is that the pupil who is accepted by the Master may always listen, if he will, to the great harmony which the Master sends forth into the world. Any thought the pupil has either harmonises with the Master's harmony, or is a discord, and in this way the pupil somehow feels whether his thought is true or not. If it is true it gives him a sense of fuller life, and causes him, as it were, to glow throughout his being. If the thought is not true, it gives him a sense of discomfort and of being ill at ease. He feels, in some way, out of tune with things, and [Page 144] intuitively knows that he is not as genuine as he ought to be. Probably most people have this feeling in greater or lesser degree. At a certain stage when conscience becomes active, we know in a general way what thoughts are constructive and what thoughts are destructive in our nature. We have certain ideals, and we know, at least, whether we are, on the whole, living up to these ideals or not. Indeed such people may always ask the question: "What would the Master think about this? What would the Master say or do under these circumstances?" But the pupil of the Masters has these feelings with very much greater intensity, and the only way in which I can describe the difference between the thought which harmonises and the thought which does not, is by telling you that the former gives a sense of freshness and clearness, while the latter causes a clouded and uncomfortable sensation. It is of course possible to be so immersed in one's thoughts and actions as to shut oneself off from the Master's consciousness, and very often thoughtlessly think or do or feel things which do not make us feel nearly as uncomfortable as they ought to, because we do not take the trouble to test them in the light of the Master's consciousness. We identify ourselves so entirely with the lower planes of Nature that we cannot listen to the voice of the spirit, and it very often happens that we go through a whole series of wrong thoughts or feelings or actions before awakening to the fact that we have made a mistake. Especially in times like the present, when the great [Page 145] world-crisis concentrates our energy so very much in purely worldly activities, there is a danger of forgetting that it is the Great Teachers who order the destinies of Nations and who guide Their peoples to right action.

LIVE IN YOUR IDEALS

We cannot expect, therefore, that the ordinary individual will be able continually to think that which the Master would think, or say, or do under such and such circumstances. But anyone who has a definite link with his Teacher *ought* to be able constantly to hear the harmony of his Master's life, and so almost automatically to accept this, and to reject that, thought or action which may come to him in the course of his daily life. As a piece of general advice I would urge students to live, just at present especially, as much in their ideals as possible, so as to allow these ideals to become as dominant as may be. The ideal may be a great Teacher or a great principle, but now is the time to keep it strongly in mind, and to prevent all attacks upon it from becoming successful. At the present time we are at the stage of a conflict between ideals and worn-out forms, between the New Age and the Old, and our ideals are therefore specially susceptible of attack because the Old wishes to remain in possession, and strives to kill that which would take its place. In some ways at the present time it is easier to have ideals because the dawn

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of the New Age stimulates them almost [Page 146] prematurely. On the other hand it is easier also to abandon ideals and to accept worn-out conventionalities and general world conditions.

TOWARDS LEADERSHIP

There is always a temptation to move slowly with the majority rather than to lead with the few. Leadership is hard work and involves not only much sacrifice, but also much sorrow and disappointment. It involves also the ridicule, contempt and disapproval of your ordinary surroundings. Do not imagine for a moment that any leader the world has ever produced has gone through life to the plaudits of his fellow men. We may not, at present, be ready for leadership, but now is the time to make a beginning, and the making of a beginning consists in trying to understand what our ideals are, and to adhere firmly to them. That is the first stage towards leadership, for the Master does not need among His pupils any who are not ready for leadership or who are not ready at least for that training which leads to leadership. The preliminary stage is to learn to stand on your own feet; to give such help as you can to others, and to ask as little as you can from them. It is good that others should help you, but it is your business to do without such help as much as you can. I do not suggest that the help, if offered, should be rejected. It is as blessed to receive as it is to give, and the blessing comes both to the receiver as well as to the one who gives. But what I wish to lay [Page 147] stress on is that we must not depend on the help of others, because our task in life is to help others who still need to depend upon the strength they may be able to get from the outside. The way in which this works out in practice is more a subject for psychology than for these elementary papers on *At the Feet of the Master*. Nothing is more complicated than progress on the Path. I only wish to indicate here a few general principles, so that these may be known and studied. Each of them will work out differently in different people according to their respective temperaments, but the principle remains the same in all cases.

DANGERS OF EXAGGERATION

I do not suppose it is possible for any of us to practise perfectly the Master's statement: "You must never do or say or think what you cannot imagine the Master as doing or saying or thinking". He places that as an ideal and asks you to work towards it as earnestly as you can. It takes a long time to get, one's various bodies in order, and no one should be despondent either because he cannot bring order out of chaos all at once, or because he often fails. I have never yet heard that the Master condemns failure, but I do know that He expects us to go on trying, however often we fail.

We are then told of various ways in which we must try to harmonise our own lives with those of the great [Page 148] Teachers. We are told to be true in speech — accurate and without exaggeration. Exaggeration is a most common fault among us all, specially among those of a highly imaginative temperament. We do not exaggerate because we are wilfully desirous of perverting the truth, but because our astral bodies like violent vibrations, and because we like to create a definite effect upon our surrounding's. Facts as they are might not have the effect either of stimulating the astral body, or of arresting the attention of our surroundings. When they do not have this effect we intensify them so as to get the result we want. The effect is to acquire a loose habit of thinking, of feeling, and speaking, and sooner or later people will cease to trust us, and so our power of usefulness in the world will be considerably diminished and we shall be further from, not nearer to, the Master's service. In the pain produced by having great eagerness to help, and at the same time being powerless to help, we shall learn *how* to help without exaggerating,

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or in any other way causing things to appear that which, in reality, they are not. Many people complain that their circumstances interfere so seriously with their eagerness to be of service. One of the causes of this may be that in the past they;have not used truthfully the powers they then had. So they have to learn in the present life what it is to have eagerness, and yet to be shut off from its application.

We are told not to attribute motives to another, which, again, is one of the commonest of our [Page 149] faults. We see the act or the thought or the feeling, and we immediately interpret the cause. My own experience has been that most people act from reasons that never enter one's mind when one is criticizing them. In my own case I know to how small an extent people really know the motives which underlie my actions, and I must assume that this is true of other people as well. People have their own troubles and sorrows and griefs, and very often they act under the influence of these troubles and sorrows or griefs, although the action itself, from the standpoint of the outsider, cannot have any possible connection with them. The greater the leader, the more he interprets kindly the attitude of other people to him. I have often wondered why Mrs. Besant allowed herself so often to be deceived, as it seemed to me, when she must surely have known that those who were deceiving her were doing so from evil motives; but I believe that at a certain stage you can only think in a kindly way about people, and while it is true that you may in some ways be more easily deceived, yet because your thoughts are thoughts of goodwill the deceit recoils upon the deceiver and earns for him a terrible lesson. Moreover, by thus generating a continuous stream of goodwill you acquire a power that somehow or other prevents people acting towards you as they might were you less pure of heart, and it is clear that your capacity for serving the Master is immensely increased by a purity of thought which no adverse external circumstances can besmirch. [Page 150]

One of the most valuable pieces of advice given in *At the Feet of the Master* is: "If you hear a story against anyone, do not repeat it, it may not be true, and even if it is, it is kinder to say nothing". The human race seems to have a special *penchant* for repeating stories about other people, and I imagine that half, at least, of the world's sorrows and troubles are caused by this pernicious habit of exaggeration, which is due to lack of power of controlling our various bodies, which are always craving for excitement of some kind.

We are told also "to think well before speaking, lest you fall into inaccuracy", We are far too impetuous and impulsive both in speech and action, and if we could be a little calmer, more contemplative, more self-controlled, we should speak more deliberately and with a greater sense of responsibility. But many of us, I am sorry to say, are like butterflies, flying hither and thither, and caring little about the result of speech or feeling or action, provided we enjoy them at the time. We are too prone to imagine that the future can take care of itself, but when the future comes we often wish that we had paid a little more attention beforehand to its construction.

IMAGINATION VERSUS PRETENCE

Then, again, we must avoid pretending to be that which we are not. This is a most difficult matter for many people. We are often in the habit of pretending [Page 151] in order to create an effect, in order to induce other people to give us more attention and respect than that to which we are, from our condition, entitled. If only people would realise that the more natural they are the more effective and useful they must necessarily be. Sooner or later people cannot help seeing through pretence, and then the castle

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which you have been at such pains to build up dissolves into thin air. You are left in your nakedness, and the world turns away from you. Many people try to induce others to believe that they have powers which they do not possess, and then, of course, begins a series of deceptions which some day overwhelm them. On the other hand I do not think it is a mistake for people sometimes to imagine themselves as they hope to be in the future, provided they do not allow this imagination to deceive others. If you can imagine yourself to be more kindly than you are, and if you try to make that imagination a fact in the outer world, then the imagination may be valuable. If you imagine yourself to be truthful when, as a matter of fact, you are untruthful, then your imagination, if carried into practice so far as you are able, will help to stimulate in you the growth of truth. If you imagine yourself to be purer than you normally are, and if you make this imagination a kind of embodied reminder to you of the need for purity, then you are likely to grow in this respect. Imagination of this kind is far different from the pretence of which the Master speaks, for it is a clearing away of the obstruction [Page 152] between the outer world and the light of your soul, while pretence is an effort to deceive the world into believing that your nature is better than you are actually trying to make it. It is good that your friends should think well of you, that they should think better of you than you deserve, but you must not yourself try to deceive them. If they think that you are really better than you are, it may not be necessarily wise for you to disillusion them, but at least you must try to live up to the standard which they have created for you. A leader is very often much greater in the eyes of his followers than he is in reality, and may feel, therefore, almost as if he were deceiving his followers, and that he ought to make them understand that he is far more ordinary than they think. I do not think he is at all bound to take this course, partly because it would not help his followers at all, and partly because if he is a true leader he is striving day by day to rise to the needs of his followers, and to the ideal which he is to them. Apart from this, remember the Master's words: "All pretence is a hindrance to the pure light of truth, which should shine through you as sunlight shines through clear glass".

THE GOOD IN ALL

Two more points are emphasised. One, that we must learn to distinguish between the selfish and the unselfish, and the second that we must learn gradually to realise that good is in everyone and everything, "no matter how evil he or it may appear on the [Page 153] surface". "Selfishness", says the Master, "has many forms, and when you think you have finally killed it in one of them, it arises in another as strongly as ever". The only way to get rid of selfishness is to concentrate your thoughts or feelings, or your actions, on the service of other people, *then* you will have no room for selfishness. Selfishness only arises when we think too much of our small selves, and too little of those larger selves to which others too belong.

Finally, let me quote that beautiful passage which concludes the Master's observations on discrimination: "You can help your brother through that which you have in common with him, and that is the Divine Life; learn how to arouse that in him, learn how to appeal to that in him; so shall you save your brother from wrong". It is essential we should realise that we are not apart from the sinner any more than we are apart from the saint. Mrs. Besant has often laid stress on the fact that while we are very eager to claim unity with the saint, we are far less eager to acknowledge unity with the sinner. Sinners and saints share a common life, and are striving towards a common goal, and the condition of our gaining strength and help from the saint is that of giving strength and help to the so-called sinner. After all the sinner is merely ignorant, and we ought to know by this time how ignorant we ourselves are. We are all sinners in some degree, and we are all thankful for whatever help we can get. Let us earn the help from others above us by cheerfully and thankfully giving help and strength to others less evolved than ourselves. [Page 154]

CHAPTER XII

DESIRELESSNESS

WE have now come to the second of the great qualifications given by the Master — that of Desirelessness, and at the outset of His remarks He points out that people feel that they *are* their desires. I suppose that this feeling of unity is part of growth, for unless we have it we do not fully understand the desire with which we identify ourselves. We are all made up of our likings and dislikings, and so much are these part of our daily lives that we feel that if these were taken away "there will be no self left". As we pass through the portal of death into the intermediate stages which precede rebirth we are taught that these desires and likings and dislikings are not really part of ourselves, for we learn that only by withdrawing from them can we reach the higher regions of the heaven world. But we need not wait until death for the lesson as to the need for desirelessness. Alcyone remarks — for it is he who speaks in this sentence, not the Master — that those who think there will be no self left if their desires are taken away "are only they who have not seen the Master; in the light of [Page 155] His holy Presence all desire dies, but the desire to be like Him".

Alcyone makes this remark with the memory of the great unifying fact of standing in the presence of the Master. I myself remember on one occasion standing in the presence of one of the greatest of earth's Teachers and experiencing the most complete sense of unity I have ever known. In the first moment I felt acutely my own unworthiness, but in a flash that was past. He lifted me into Himself, as it were, and I was one with Him — seeing with Him, being with Him. So I can of my own experience testify to the truth of the statement that "in the light of the Master's presence all desire dies, save the desire to be like Him". And the desire to be like Him is immediately accomplished by the Master's power of drawing us away from the smaller self. The Master feels so strongly His unity with us that it temporarily compels the feeling on our part of unity with Him. But we must remember that this feeling is a temporary one, and that when out of His presence, away from His compelling influence, we tend to fall back into the illusion that if our likings and dislikings are taken away from us there will be no self left. Fortunately, as we are told, desirelessness does not depend upon being in the presence of the Master. His great value to us consists in His continually emphasising the true desirelessness in His own nature, and sending out strong impulses which gradually tend to awaken wise desirelessness in us. We, on our side, must be alive to these great [Page 156] impulses, and must gradually train ourselves to make use of them. Now they are always playing about us, but they cannot affect the God within, save infinitesimally, unless and until the God within, of Its own volition, wills Its upward climb. In connection with desirelessness the Master points out that "discrimination has already shown you that the things which most men desire, such as wealth and power, are not worth having; when this is really felt, not merely said, all desire for them ceases". Hence we must begin by finding out what things are worth having and what things are not worth having, and gradually we eliminate those we realise to be no longer worth having until at last we find, so far as our own evolution is concerned, the *only* thing remaining worth having.

RELATIVITY OF RIGHT DESIRES

At our varying stages of evolution various things are right to be desired. Most men, we are told, desire wealth and power, and it may be that these desires are a necessary stage for them. For we only reach the higher desires by climbing upon the down-trodden forms to those which are higher. So unless men desire wealth and power, and through such desire proceed to realise that wealth and power confer

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merely temporary benefits, they will not be ready for the next stage, which may be "to gain heaven, or to attain personal liberation from rebirth". So you must not imagine that because an individual [Page 157] has a desire which you have outgrown, therefore he ought to have outgrown it too. In the matter of desire always learn "to mind your own business", and do not expect other people to conform to your standards, any more than you can imagine the Master as limited by ideals which, to you, are the highest conceivable. It is not for you or for me to say at what stage an individual ought to have realised that any particular desire ceases to be worth having. If he wants an experience, if he desires an experience, it is probably because he has not yet passed the stage appropriate to the experience. Of course, if we are in charge of young people it becomes our duty to try and make their desires as noble and unselfish as possible, but we must, at the same time, remember that they may wish in their young lives to run rapidly through a series of desires which we, in this particular life, have managed for the time being to outgrow. I often hear of young people saying that while they feel that in the long run Theosophy is the only thing worth working for, for a little time they would like to experience the ordinary worldly life. You and I perhaps, having experienced the ordinary worldly life, know its valuelessness and desire it no longer. Possibly we may have substituted that which, to us, is a higher desire. Our young friends will doubtless come to this stage, but there is no reason to suppose that they may not have to pass through a series of experiences similar to those which have led you and me to our present position. The young physical body desires above all [Page 158] things contact with an outer world which it has not had so great an opportunity of knowing as have had older people. We sometimes jump to the conclusion, therefore, that young people are not as earnest as we are ourselves. This may have been a conclusion to which elder people may have come when we were young, and when we ourselves turned from those ideals which the elder people of our generation had already reached. A desire is a desire, and does not cease to be desire because it ought not to be desired. The only way to cause cessation of desire is to experience its object, and while I do not by this wish to suggest that we should rush headlong into the satisfaction of all possible desires that come haphazard into our consciousness. I nevertheless feel that it is not in the least degree helpful to baulk desires which are insistent. I should, in the case of young people, proceed along the lines of strengthening the powers of discrimination, so that they themselves may be able to decide between the various types of desire, so as to select the more noble as against the less noble, the less selfish as against the more selfish,

DISCRIMINATION IN DESIRE

That is why in *At the Feet of the Master* the qualification of Discrimination comes first. First get a standard based upon past experience, and upon the realisation that certain desires afford less permanent satisfaction than others. This standard will be the main factor in helping people to turn away [Page 159] from desires which tend to make them identify themselves with their lower bodies. I do not say to young people that they ought to have this desire, and ought not to have that; I say to them that they should pay attention to their experience, and make their experience their guide. Those who feel to a very considerable extent at the mercy of their desires, may very well make a point of carefully reading all that the Master says with regard to discrimination. Remember how He asks us to distinguish between our various bodies and ourselves; between right and wrong; between the important and the unimportant; between the more useful and the less useful. Remember how He advises us "that the small thing which is directly useful in the Master's work is far better worth doing than a large thing which the world would call good". Then again, remember how He tells us that "God is Wisdom as well as Love", and that the more wisdom we have the more we can manifest God. Then He emphasises the need for truth, for unselfishness, and for realising the God in everyone and everything. In these various ways our discrimination becomes reliable and helpful, and so we are led to a realisation of that which

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desirelessness really means.

We must not forget, when we are reading what the Master tells us about desirelessness, that He is addressing a pupil about to pass through the portal of Initiation, and His remarks do not necessarily therefore apply to those who have not yet reached that stage. They do, however, represent an ideal, and [Page 160] as those who read these pages should be within reasonable distance of discipleship, it is well that they should standardise their ideals as far as possible in conformity with those required by men and women already accepted as the Master's apprentices. The spiritual condition of the pupil addressed in these pages becomes clear when we read that he must not fall into the error of desiring heaven, or personal liberation from rebirth. "If you have forgotten self altogether, you cannot be thinking when that self shall be set free, or what kind of heaven it shall have. I think the Master in this passage is probably referring to the fact that the candidate for Initiation dedicates himself to the service of the world, and so no longer desires heaven for himself, or his own personal liberation from the round of births and deaths. This does not mean that for many people such desires may not be entirely proper. They are only not appropriate for those of us who wish to prepare ourselves for the Master's service, since the Master's service means the service of the world, and forgetfulness of the individual self.

How difficult that service is, is made clear when the Master tells us "that *all* selfish desire binds, however high may be its object, and until you have got rid of it you are not wholly free to devote yourself to the work of the Master". There are very few pupils ready to devote themselves to the work of the Master! Speaking as one of the humblest, I notice how considerably my own selfish desires bind, and interfere with the duties I owe to my Teachers. [Page 161] But my own condition may perhaps give comfort to others, in that they may realise that we are not expected to get rid of all selfish desire before we can hope to become pupils of one or other of the great Teachers. But we are expected, at least, to make Their work the dominant activity of our lives, and to be willing at all times to subordinate our individual concerns to the needs of the world for which we strive to live. However this may be, selfish desire *does* bind, and so there are but few who can consider themselves as true servants of the Master. Indeed, desire is a most subtle form of illusion, and the Master shows us how many subtle desires there are which, perhaps, we are inclined to call quite natural.

DESIRE FOR THE FRUITS OF ACTION

"Surely there is no harm in wanting to see the result of work, or to see how much we help other people?" I quite agree that for most of us such desires are natural, inevitable, and perhaps helpful, inasmuch as they may make us work and help other people. On the other hand, the Master tells us that such desires imply want of trust. "When you pour out your strength to help, there must be a result whether you can see it or not; if you know the Law you know this must be so". So far as I am concerned, it may be well to confess at once that I often desire to see the result of my work, and to see how much I have helped people. I think I may go so far as to disclaim any desire for people's gratitude, [Page 162] though gratitude is certainly a most pleasant experience. But I realise quite clearly how necessary it is to have desirelessness as regards the result of work, and as regards the amount of helpfulness an individual receives in relation to the amount given. So I am trying gradually to work towards this, and to do right for the sake of right and not in the hope of reward — not in the hope of seeing the result. The Master points out it is a question of love. The intensity and purity of the love determines the amount of desirelessness. If we love an individual we give him of our best, whatever the result may be; if we love our work we pour our whole hearts into it and have no time to think of the result accomplished. We leave results to take

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care of themselves, as indeed we are justified in doing. Love is the great purifier of desire, and while it is true that many people are inclined to mistake passion for love, true love is utterly self-sacrificing and derives the completest joy from the mere process of giving. As the Master says: "You must give yourself to the service of the world because you love it, and cannot help giving yourself to it".

SERVICE ONE STANDARD

The Master proceeds to explain to us that it is very unwise to desire further powers until we have adequate control over those we already possess. As He says, they will come when He knows that it is **[Page 163]** best for us to have them. Most of us who are really in earnest soon find out that we have as much as we can do, indeed more than we can do, to use wisely and moderately the powers we already possess — the powers that ordinary people possess. We find, too, that we are very far from having learned how to use the force already at our command, and that it will take us a very long time indeed to be sure of ourselves. I always wonder at the conceit of people who want to acquire psychic powers, in other words, powers beyond those which we normally possess. Psychic powers belong to a world different from the physical, and it seems to me to be very undesirable to want to add the experiences of another world until we are fairly sure of our attitude in connection with the experiences the physical world affords us. Some people have certain psychic faculties. Perhaps they see nature spirits, or auras, or they can read the thoughts and feelings of other people. But the fact that they can see these things does not mean that, *therefore*, they are able to draw correct judgments from such sight. We know how difficult it is with the waking consciousness in the physical brain to draw just conclusions from all we see around us. This is none the less difficult when our waking consciousness is transferred to the astral plane, and is in contact with the experiences appropriate to that plane. To understand the world in which we live for many hours of the day is difficult enough, and for my part I think it is just as well to confine our attention to that world until those **[Page 164]** wiser than ourselves deem it desirable to impose a greater burden on our judgment than has hitherto existed. If I see a certain colour in a person's aura, how can I be really sure what that colour means in connection with that special individual ? And even if I am certain, what means has that individual, who perhaps is not a clairvoyant as I am myself, of judging the extent of my infallibility ? In the Theosophical Society we have many people who profess to see this, to experience that, to hear messages, and so forth. Personally, if ever I judge at all, I judge of people by their actions as I see them, and by the extent to which self-sacrifice seems to dominate their lives. Unfortunately, however, we have in our ranks people who long to be continually in contact with the mysterious, and who are willing to believe, to almost any extent, that which is out of the ordinary. The Master teaches us that we belong to Him according as we make service of our fellow creatures an ever increasing part of our lives. That is the standard, and those who live lives of continual self-surrender are alone entitled to receive respect for statements made in connection with conditions which the ordinary individual has no means of judging. The fact of the matter is that the more an individual really has these psychic powers the less he talks about them, the less he imposes them upon other people. He uses them for helping, but realises at the same time that it is not wise to ask other people to attach credence to that of which they have so far had no experience. As the Master observes; "In any case the time **[Page 165]** and strength that it takes to gain them might be spent in work for others". In the course of development these powers will undoubtedly come, and those who truly rely upon the Master will not trouble about them until He gives directions as to their unfoldment, or unless they have come naturally and without effort. If only people would remember that it ought to take us all our time to use the powers we already have in the service of our surroundings ! **[Page 166]**

CHAPTER XIII

DESIRELESSNESS (Concluded)

THE Master then lays stress upon a few very common desires which the candidate for Initiation or discipleship must strive to avoid. It is a great pleasure to many of us to appear clever, to shine in conversation. But in the Master's world nothing is said save that which is true, kind, and helpful. I say deliberately, "in the Master's world", because I am afraid that this direction can only be successfully carried out by those who either are Adepts, or are approaching the Adept level. Nevertheless, we must gradually strive towards this ideal, and perhaps take one of the conditions at a time. We might, for, example, determine for a certain period of time to be utterly truthful, and then by degrees qualify truth with kindness and helpfulness. It is a matter for experiment and gradual development. The useful maxim: "Think twice before you speak", might, for you and me, be extended to: "Think seven times before you speak". I am often told by people to whom I give this advice that anyone following these directions would hardly ever be able to say anything at all, or that by the time he had thought seven times the necessity [Page 167] for the remark would have passed ! This is quite probable, and it might be worth while to remember that most of our conversation is both useless and unprofitable, and there are many remarks which after reflection we wish we had not made. The teaching comes to this: that we should be deliberate and not impulsive; that we should realise that truth is far more helpful than outward splendour; and that, as the Master points out, we must get used to thinking carefully before speaking, for as we grow truths are given to us which it would not necessarily be helpful to utter to the outside world. Above all we want t» be helpful, not to appear learned.

THE DUTY OF NON-INTERFERENCE

"Another common desire which you must sternly repress", says the Master, "is the wish to meddle in other men's business". Note that the Master uses; the word "sternly", indicating this to be a desire to which we are all uncommonly susceptible. I suppose that more harm is done by yielding to this desire than people at all realise, not only because we interfere with another person's responsibilities, but also because we imagine that everyone else must look upon things from the same point of view from which we ourselves regard them. We are all at different levels of evolution: all have different duties, different conceptions of life, different lines of activity, and have different parts of the plan to help in working out. So we must never forget that each individual is [Page 168] working out his destiny in his own way, and while there is no reason we should not help him if he asks for help, or if we feel we can usefully be of assistance to him, we must never forget that we cannot possibly see things from his standpoint, nor can we imagine what his "dharma" under certain circumstances would be. There are circumstances, of course, in which certain steps have to be taken, in which a certain course of action has to be adopted, and such steps, or such course of action, may possibly be in opposition to the views and principles of some members of the body which has to take the decision. For example, in the present War there are people who believe that the War ought never to have been begun at all, and yet it is quite possible to imagine that the War is inevitable, and that people who believe that it ought never to have been begun must, to a certain extent, be ignored. Sometimes the will of the majority must prevail; sometimes the will of the minority; at all events, it does not follow that everybody must have his, or her, way at all times.

But this is a far different matter from judging other people, or from trying to interfere with what, after all, is *their* business. "Everyone", says the Master, "has full right to free thought and speech and action". But, of

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course, he must not interfere with the freedom of other people, except under very abnormal circumstances. We constantly hear, at the present time, of such freedom being interfered with, and of various kinds of oppression being directed towards those who do not think with the [Page 169] majority. The point is a very difficult one because, in such difficult times as these, I can conceive it necessary, on occasion, for much individual freedom to be surrendered for the sake of the freedom of the whole. I do not wish to lay stress on this aspect of the situation, because it would involve me in a long line of argument outside the particular object with which *At the Feet of the Master* was written. Suffice it to say that much turns upon the way in which we define the word "freedom", and before you allow yourself to suppose that the Master has laid a ban on all restriction, just think over the question as to what freedom really means, and try to fit in your definition with the fact that perfect freedom means perfect service. The point on which I imagine the Master is laying stress in this particular paragraph is that we must not imagine that that which is true for us is necessarily true for everybody else — or ought to be ! In other words we must grow increasingly tolerant. You claim freedom to do what you think proper. Other people must have the same freedom, and are entitled to the same respect and appreciation for their sincerity of purpose as you would unhesitatingly claim for your own. These remarks specially apply, of course, to the outer differences which people so often think to be of supreme importance. The colour of a man's skin; his religion; his customs ! All these largely affect the judgments of many people. Some of us believe that our religion alone is the true one, that our customs alone are sensible customs, that the colour of our skin is typical of the [Page 170] highest stage of evolution at present reached. We instinctively depreciate those who do not conform to standards to which we imagine that we ourselves conform, "He is not in our set. He belongs to the lower classes, he does not eat as we eat, his habits are not ours" — all these may, no doubt, be statements of fact, but they should not be implications of inferiority. It is for this reason that the Theosophical Society couples with its declaration as to Universal Brotherhood an insistence on the unity of all great religions, and a declaration that distinctions of sex and colour do not affect the essential unity of mankind.

MAN, THE MASTER OF HIS DESTINY

People who are keen about other people's business are generally uncertain about their own, and are eager that other people should conform to their own standards in order that these standards may have behind them the strength of many. On the other hand, behind your own standards of life should be the strength of your own purity of conviction. Strength does not lie in numbers but in sincerity of belief. People sometimes believe that law ultimately rests upon force, but as a matter of fact law rests upon consent, for it is impossible to force a law upon an individual who does not choose to obey it. You may kill the body but you cannot kill the spirit, and this is what many governments have found out to their cost. The Romans killed the bodies of the Christian martyrs, but the spirit of the Christian [Page 171] martyrs built the Church which has endured long after Imperial Rome ceased to exist.

You will notice that the Master takes care to observe that there is no harm in suggesting to an individual that he is doing wrong if you feel it would be helpful to tell him so. Parents, for example, often have the duty of telling their children that they think they are wrong, and sometimes they have to restrain them from doing that which they think to be wrong or unwise. There is never any harm in placing your knowledge at the disposal of other people, but you must not imagine that you can force *them* to believe that which you happen to know and believe. Experience must always come from within, and while people may sometimes act according to your advice, even though they do not necessarily understand it, the only good karma they will get will lie in the action and not in the motive, for the motive is yours. Theirs is the

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good karma of obedience, but yours is the karma of knowledge, and the karma of knowledge is even better than that of obedience.

People are often very anxious to live near one of the great Teachers so as, probably, to be relieved of the responsibility and anxiety of using their own judgment, thus learning through mistakes. They do not understand that they would, under these circumstances, only be using the Master's judgment instead of striving to develop their own. From time to time the Master can stimulate, but man is indeed the master of his destiny and must work it out for himself. Those people are most helpful in the [Page 172] world who have themselves gone through many experiences, who have had to suffer the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune", and who have gained from the buffeting a strength which they can use, not only for themselves, but in the service of others also. When, through experience, our judgment and discrimination have become keen and strong, then is it that the actual presence of the Master might be of very great advantage. In the meantime, while He exercises a paternal watchfulness over us, He leaves us to mind our own business, and to learn what is the nature of true freedom.

GOSSIP

I should like to lay great stress upon the Master's warning that we should not go and gossip with some third person about another person, unless, of course, there is some special, and helpful, reason for so doing. But many people spend their time in taking other people, to pieces, enjoying the gossip because it has a stimulating effect upon the astral or Mental bodies. But such action is, as the Master says, "extremely wicked". It is wicked because it creates thought forms which tend to fasten upon the individual's weakness, and make it more difficult for the victim to overcome his deficiencies. We irritate the sore places and the result, of course, is that they take infinitely longer to heal. It is very difficult to bear this advice in mind, because gossip is so extraordinarily common a failing, and many people would [Page 173] have nothing to say at all were they to cease gossiping. Nevertheless, we are continually being told that our speech should be helpful, and gossip is very distinctly harmful.

RECOGNITION OF THE EGO

I can quite imagine people saying that they would not like anyone to tell them if they were doing wrong, not so much because they dislike to be told but, probably, because they fear the manner of the telling. It is perfectly true that some people take a delight in pointing out to others their mistakes and weaknesses, and in pointing them out in a comparatively cruel manner. They point them out harshly and unsympathetically, without making the person feel they are with him in the effort to correct his fault. Everything depends the way in which you do things. There are some people who have the faculty of never giving offence, no matter what they say. Others can hardly open their lips without causing trouble. It all depends on what is behind the action, behind the speech, behind the thought, behind the feeling. Anyone who is genuinely desirous of helping, and who has a strong feeling of sympathy for others, can always safely point out to his friends any faults he may think they have, because his manner of pointing out would be to show these individuals that he had a real brotherly sympathy for them, and that he assumes no superior attitude, being conscious of his own defects. On the whole, however, we should [Page 174] realise that we have as much as we can do in strengthening our own weak places, and the more we can do to emphasise other people's good qualities, the more we shall help them to grow. In this connection I should like to point out the value of a book written by Jerome K. Jerome, entitled *The*

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Pacing of the Third Floor Back. In this book one of the characters — a stranger — is continually laying stress on people's potential qualities. He goes to a boarding house in which are a number of quite ordinary people, and by identifying himself with their higher natures he causes them automatically to drop the foolishnesses which had been making their lives so ineffective. Hitherto they had all been looking contemptuously at each other and had been criticising each other, and the result was that each became confirmed in his own vulgarities and found himself estranged from his fellows. The coming of the stranger altered all this, and when he came into the room everybody's lower nature retreated into the background and the higher stood forth triumphant. You may say, if you like, that he idealised people. Indeed, Mrs. Besant is often accused of being deceived by people because she trusts them or because she idealises them, "because she does not know them as they really are", people would say. As a matter of fact it is because she *does* know them as they really are that she idealises them. What we see in them is merely a temporary phase; what *she* sees in them is the eternal reality, and it is the reality that she is trusting. The reality is thankful for the trust, however [Page 175] much the temporary lower nature may seem to be unworthy of it, and the result is that the individual whom Mrs. Besant trusts, or whom she idealises, is infinitely the better for the trust and the idealisation. People's lower natures may sometimes take advantage of her, but the ego has been respected and recognised, the result being that it acquires increased strength to dominate its lower vehicles. I believe that this attitude is the attitude we should all strive increasingly to adopt. The test of spirituality in an individual is his capacity to pierce through the outer form into the inner reality, to dismiss as fleeting that which many of us might regard as of the essence, and to associate himself with the reality which *most* of us may be unable to see. Each one of us has his defects, and many of our friends stop short at these defects, but the leader draws out from the individual his higher self, and calls upon that to dominate the ignorances, and gradually to diminish their obstructive power. The leader is one who induces a sense of capacity, of life, of energy, of power to surmount obstacles, to overcome difficulties. He is able to do this by evoking the God within, and his power to evoke the God within is determined by the extent to which his own inner nature has become strong through experience.

THE DUTY OF INTERFERENCE

The Master points out that it is our duty to interfere in cases of cruelty. In such cases it is not a question [Page 176] of "minding your own business" but of protecting the weak against the ignorance of the strong. And there are, of course, certain ignorances which cannot be tolerated. If we see a case of cruelty to an animal or child it is our duty to interfere, but not with brutality or passion. We sometimes become furious at the wrongs done to other people, and such fury is a necessary stage, but the power and force of the fury could better be employed in other ways. Anger never really helps in the long run; people are much more dominated by calm than they are by storm.

We are told also that if we see anyone breaking the law of the country we must inform the authorities. This is one of the phrases least understood by readers of this little book. They do not see that our primary duty is to be on the alert against laws which we conceive to be wrong, and to fight bad laws as actively as we can. So long as we acquiesce in the law we must accept it as part of the machinery for establishing peace throughout the land. Those who break the law are, under the circumstances, therefore, disturbers of the peace, and our business as good citizens is to see that the peace is as little disturbed as possible. People so often declaim against a law without taking the slightest trouble, either to agitate for its repeal, or deliberately to submit themselves to its provisions in order to show its injustice. Our first duty is to help to make the laws of the land as righteous as we can make them. If we are so

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doing, then we must help to see that they are not broken. The difficulty is that [Page 177] people pay little attention to the laws of the land, and only take an interest in them when they are strongly brought into conflict with them. You will notice in Mrs. Besant's *Autobiography* how she always gave notice when she was going to do anything wrong, in order that the law might be applied, because she knew that the existence of law in the country was the only safeguard for individual freedom, and while she thought it her duty sometimes to fight the law, she fought it openly, and with a willingness to come under its authority. Indeed, she always went out of her way to assist the authorities to take cognisance of her actions, so that while she might be breaking the law she would not actually be breaking the peace.

People sometimes tell me that they would not be traitors to individuals fleeing from justice and who trust in them. I do not believe that such an attitude is necessarily true loyalty, either to the individual or to the State. If an individual has offended against the laws of the country, it is necessary that his offence should be brought home to him for the sake of experience. If the laws of the country are unjust, we should already have been busy in striving to have them replaced by better edicts. It means that people do not take their citizenship sufficiently earnestly, do not take sufficient trouble about their civic duties, do not realise their individual responsibility for the laws of the land. Those who have no responsibility for the law of the land, and who cannot affect it in any way, are, indeed, in a difficult position, but most of us have such a responsibility, and, having it, must stand [Page 178] by the law while it is law, and seek, if we think proper, to modify such portions as may seem to us unjust. It means, of course, that not only must we be watchful about the laws, but also about the authorities. It often happens that the authorities are men or women who have no business to be authorities at all, who do not know how to use their power wisely; in which case, by informing the authorities, we might be placing the individual in the hands of those whose sense of power overwhelms their sense of justice. So we must be careful to see that we place in positions of authority only those who are worthy of the trust. I quite agree that this takes time, but we must be ceaseless in our efforts to improve the conditions of society, and it is because we do not take these duties seriously enough that we find ourselves in the difficulty of having to choose between our duty to the country in which we live, and our sense of justice in regard to the individual who asks for our protection. The country ought to be able to protect as justly as ourselves, and if it cannot we must help it so to do. Remember also that the welfare of the many is of greater importance than the needs of the one, and we must not allow our personal sympathy for the individual entirely to override the conditions which make for the peace of the country as a whole.

THE ETHICS OF A LIE

In this connection there often arises the question as to whether it is right to tell a lie to protect another. [Page 179] I have been sometimes asked in meetings whether, if I wanted to protect a refugee from justice, I should be willing to indicate to his pursuers that he had gone in a direction different from that actually taken; My answer is that it all depends upon the circumstances; upon the nature of the wrong done; upon the various points to which I have just alluded. On the other hand, if I choose to tell a lie and to accept the karma for so doing, it is my own business and no one else's. It is quite clear, of course, that people should not lie, but I can conceive, personally, that circumstances might arise in which, rather than tell the truth, I would tell a lie and accept the karma of the evil action. The question is, of course, a very thorny one, and the motive for lying would have to be an extreme one. Under very few circumstances are we justified in telling lies, but I am not, myself, prepared to say that I would never tell one. In asking the question people seem to me to be laying too great a stress on their own personal progress. They do not want to lie, not so much because it is wrong as because it would interfere with their personal progress,

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and because it would increase their burden of karma. I consider this to be a selfish reason.

CONCLUSION

The Master concludes by telling us that it is sometimes our duty gently to tell people of their faults, especially if we are placed in charge of them, and I would venture to emphasise that word "gently". **[Page 180]** Harshness is far too general an attitude of those who desire to correct. I close this with the priceless words: "Mind your own business, and learn the virtue of silence!" **[Page 181]**

CHAPTER XIV

THE SIX POINTS OF CONDUCT

WE now come to the six points of conduct to which attention must be paid by all who are seeking to serve the Master. These six points are, of course, well known to Hindus, since they are specifically dealt with in Hindu religious literature. I do not want to trouble you with the Samskrit names for the various lines of development indicated by the Master. He has used certain English words by way of translation, and we need not trouble about the original terminology.

You will probably have noticed that the Master gave us at the outset Discrimination, because by discrimination we are taught how to distinguish between right and wrong. This capacity is, of course, the foundation of our evolution in the human kingdom. We possess a conscience, that is to say we possess in ourselves the result of past experience whereby we are able to test experiences as they come along and to accept or reject them according to our knowledge of their uplifting or degrading effect.

Stress is then laid on the qualification of Desirelessness, using the word desirelessness in the true [Page 182] sense of not allowing yourself to be dominated by your desires. As the Master says: "The qualification of Desirelessness shows that the astral body must be controlled", and we are told that the first of the six points of conduct, namely self-control as to the mind, shows that the mental body must be controlled. You may perhaps wonder why this particular qualification is not given a chapter all to itself, as was the qualification of desirelessness with reference to the astral body. As a matter of fact, with most of us, the astral body is more fully developed than the mental body. Our mental body comes to us when we pass from the animal to the human kingdom, and is therefore of comparatively recent growth. The astral body, on the other hand, has been with us during our life in the animal kingdom, and has to a very large extent been the medium through which our growth so far has taken place — the animal, for example, depends for its growth largely on the vibrations of its astral body. The result is that, coming over into the human kingdom with an astral body trained to vibrate in many directions, the new lesson we have to learn is to control it, largely through the help of the new mental body which is, up to a certain point, in the human kingdom the special medium for growth. The Master, therefore, lays great stress on the need for controlling the astral or emotion body, and places this particular qualification in its natural position after the supreme quality of discrimination. [Page 183]

CONTROL OF MIND

At once the Master takes us to the most important aspect of control of mind — control of temper and of nerves. Calmness of mind is one of the most important qualifications, for unless we possess it there is very little chance of our being able to control our emotions. An agitated thought inevitably reacts on the astral body, and, since the mental body is a more powerful vehicle than the astral, the effect of a disturbed mental body is largely to increase the disturbance of the astral. Then again as regards the nerves which are the means of conveying impressions to and from the brain, it is very necessary to have them under control so that both their receptive and their expressive power may be even. The difficulty always is, especially to those who really mean business and are trying to acquire sympathy and love, that in order to do this they must inevitably make their bodies much more sensitive to outside impressions so that they may respond to them more readily than hitherto. This means that every outside impression

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affects them much more easily than it would the ordinary individual, and the result is that the nerves become tired of communicating so many responses and impressions, and so tend to get out of hand. Hence irritability and depression — in other words nerve exhaustion. At the higher levels individuals are able to control the response of the nerves to the outside stimuli, and may refuse to part with more nerve power than they can afford to spare, so, while [Page 184] being as sensitive as their younger brethren, they husband their resources more carefully and respond to the best advantage instead of in a haphazard manner. Those of you who have been trying to put into practice the principles given us in *At the Feet of the Master* may very likely have noticed an increased tendency towards irritability, towards an absence of calmness, even towards a passage through the mind, or through the emotions, of undesirable thoughts and feelings. If you really mean business you may take comfort in the fact that probably much of this is an inevitable concomitant of your efforts towards progress, and much of it belongs rather to the outside than to you — comes from outside sources, but is regarded by you as *yours* because of your power of imagination. Remember that sympathy and goodwill are largely dependent on imagination, and if you train yourself to imagine along one line you cannot help tending to imagine along another line as well, and you can control your imagination only after you have already exercised it to a considerable extent. I should like to lay great stress on this matter of the imagination, for many people who are doing their best become almost martyrs to imagination — imagine all kinds of difficulties and troubles unnecessarily, imagine all kinds of evil things unnecessarily. On the other hand, just in so far as they are able accurately to imagine the sorrows and troubles of those around them, so far will they be able usefully to help them. At present the world is a very difficult place to live in. There is so much disturbance both on the mental and [Page 185] on the emotional planes that those who are highly sensitive find life in a big town, where masses of people are sending violent forces through these planes, a very difficult business. In the first place, there is much anxiety, much trouble and sorrow, much, hopelessness and despair, much doubt and confusion. All these are like so many blows to the sensitive person, and he often becomes confused as to whether the blow comes from within or without. The world is in a whirl of excitement, and unless one has sufficient power to steady oneself against the whirling forces, one hardly knows whether the excitement is from within or from without.

THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TRAINING

It is for this reason that religious training generally takes place away from the world, in the sense of away from its outer activities. In older days the teacher and his pupil retired to the forest and lived under the soothing and unifying influences of nature. I am told that the experiment is now being tried of allowing some part of this training to take place in the outer world. If the experiment is successful, progress can obviously become much more rapid, because a larger number of experiences can be crowded within a comparatively short time. On the other hand the strain is infinitely greater, however much more rapid the progress may be, and we have to pay in terms of strain for the quickness with which we may be able to grow. Speaking from my own [Page 186] experience, I would never recommend anyone to offer himself without very careful consideration for such special training as *At the Feet of the Master* is intended to give. It is all infinitely worth while if you can do it, but it is no use pretending that it is easy or that it has not its moments of extreme sorrow and unhappiness. Such sorrow and unhappiness are undoubtedly due to the lower bodies, and need have no place in the training at all. The fact of the matter is, however, that they are there, and I do not know anyone now on the Path who would not say that, while the goal is worth any effort, nevertheless it does indeed demand an effort of no inconsiderable magnitude. Fortunately there is the normal and ordinary rate of growth, and I myself sometimes wonder why I was not contented with that. Remember, no one can be forced against his will to move more rapidly than the normal rate. No one could have said to me: "You must move more quickly than you want to". What they

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might say would be : "If you want to move more quickly the opportunity is open to you — it is for you to decide". I can imagine my readers saying it is difficult to know what to decide if you do not know in fact what is before you; you can only decide on the basis of past experience, not on the result of the experiences of other people. This is true, but I think that the ego probably knows what is likely to be before him, that he makes the choice with that knowledge, and that the whole difficulty consists in training the lower bodies to do that which their master wants [Page 187] them to do. Down here, on the physical and on the emotional planes, we are more ignorant than is the ego, for the ego is the direct reflection of the Monad — a spark in the flame of God. Further, our physical and emotional bodies have had things a good deal their own way in the past; we have used them for purposes of growth, and they want to go on being used, even though we no longer need them for this purpose. What we need them for now is that they may become vehicles for the expression of the ego's will. We want them more as messengers than as independent individualities. They have already grown, in the case of those who are candidates for the Path, as fully as is necessary. Their respective functions are established. Force has been generated, and it is now the ego's business to direct it into the proper channels. I do not say that this is the case with everyone. Doubtless there are many people who need much more expression for their physical and emotional bodies than they have hitherto been able to obtain. But that does not apply to us, for our special business is to acquire the qualification of desirelessness.

Remember that our great objective is to vibrate as much as possible in harmony with the vibrations of our Master, so that His force may be able to flow through us uninterruptedly. While we vibrate at one rate, and He at another, the passage of the force through us is very much more difficult, and in many cases almost impossible. What He is telling us, therefore, in *At the Feet of the Master* is how to harmonise our vibrations with His, so that, all being more or less [Page 188] at the same rate, He may be able with comparatively little effort to send through us His messages to the outer world. Calmness of mind is needed, not only that we may not think hastily, and not only that we may have a peaceful atmosphere into which, and through which, the Master's force may flow, but also that we may be able to meet *fearlessly* all the troubles and difficulties that come to us when we are being tested as to our strength. The Master wants us, as He says, to make light of the troubles which come into our lives, and to avoid worrying about little things. I think one of the most wonderful passages in the book is where the Master tells us that all that happens to us from the outside — sorrows, troubles, sicknesses, losses — belong to the past and are therefore of no importance. I must candidly confess that I find myself a long way from being able to reach the standard set by our Teacher in this respect. I know it in theory, which, I hope, is some progress in the right direction, but I cannot at present put it into practice. Then I cannot always remember that troublesome things are as transitory as happy ones, although the Master tells us that they are. The fact of the matter is that the Master wants us to remember all the time that we should be the masters of our destinies and not be enslaved by them. What comes to us in the present is what is due to us from the past, and the more cheerfully and happily we bear it, the quicker it will be over. That is of course obvious, but when one is in the midst of trouble one does not know how long it will be before it is over, for [Page 189] it would not be trouble if one could detach oneself from it.

WORRY AND DEPRESSION

We are told that we cannot alter our sorrows and troubles, so it is useless to worry about them; and indeed I have heard some young friends of mine express these sentiments with the most cordial approval. But I cannot help thinking these young friends of mine refuse to worry because, as a matter of fact, they have nothing to worry about. It is not very wonderful to avoid worrying when you have no

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worries, but it is a very definite spiritual advance when, having worries, you refuse to allow them to worry you. If I may be allowed to hazard a guess, I imagine that only those of the rank of Master are likely to remain at all times completely joyous and serene. I do not say this in order to give people an opportunity of thinking that they cannot be expected to be joyous and serene. We are all expected to be joyous and serene, but the lesson takes time to learn, and it does not very much matter if there are a certain number of backslidings on the way. People pay far too much attention to their lapses from successful striving in the direction of the Qualifications, not realising that these are inevitable. As little attention as possible should be paid to them. . If we did not often fall by the wayside we should not learn how to sympathise with those who fall perhaps more frequently than we do ourselves — **[Page 190]** if possible ! Out of failure comes success, and unless we ourselves have had the experience of failure, we cannot help others at times when they most need help, namely when they themselves fail.

Then, again, we are told never to allow ourselves to feel sad or depressed, because it makes other people's lives more difficult. Here again we have a long way to go before we can hope to accomplish the duty thus laid upon us by the Master. At such a time as this its accomplishment is doubly hard, for there are many people who naturally feel depressed because they have no knowledge, as we have, of the laws of Karma and Reincarnation to help them. They have no knowledge of the fact that much that they cannot do in this life they can do in another; of the fact that things they have longed for, but have been unable to accomplish in this life, some day they will be able to achieve, nor do they know that there is no such thing as separation from those they love. With ignorance on all these points it is not astonishing they should be depressed, especially since we, *with* all this knowledge, cannot help being depressed ourselves. But we must recognise that depression is a manifestation of ignorance, of inability to apply in the right way the knowledge we possess. We must try to throw it off as soon as possible, but this is of course all the more difficult in the midst of a great war which sends its sorrows into the hearts and homes of every one. Above all things we need knowledge if we would dispel depression, and it is for this reason **[Page 191]** that every effort must be made for movements like the Theosophical Society and the Order of the Star in the East to spread the knowledge they have, especially through books such as *At the Feet of the Master*, for in this way people may acquire the strength to bear the pressure of evolving life.

One of the ways of avoiding depression is, as we are told in the next paragraph, not to allow our thoughts to wander. If we have had troubles, these troubles have made grooves along which thought and feeling flow easily, and if we allow our thoughts and feelings to wander, they naturally take the easiest channel, and that channel may be the channel fashioned by trouble or by pain. If we let our thoughts wander they may flow along the channel of pain and trouble, and so resuscitate difficulties which perhaps in reality have passed away. Also, if we let our thoughts wander, all kinds of evil thoughts from outside can come into a mind of which we have not full control, and so our brains may become receptacles for undesirable thoughts which we very likely think to be our own and which cause us great trouble to reject. The Master points out that we ought always to try to keep good thoughts in the background of the mind, so that when it has nothing special to think of, these may come into the foreground and keep us not only steady but conscious of that relation which subsists between ourselves and our Elder Brethren. In this way the channel is always kept open, and at any time the Master can send through us His helpfulness to the world. **[Page 192]**

CHAPTER XV
THE SIX POINTS OF CONDUCT (Continued)

WE now come to a very important observation with reference to the practical ways in which we should strive to control the mind,

PRACTICAL WAYS OF MIND CONTROL

The Master suggests that we should think each day of some one who is in trouble, surrounding him with loving thought, so that from the loving thought he may draw courage and power of endurance. In most Occult Schools there are definite systems of training whereby the members are shown how to control the kinds of thought that enter the brain, how to get rid of those they do not wish to receive, and how at any time to draw the mind from any special line in which it is engaged and to focus it elsewhere. When I was Principal of the Central Hindu College, Benares, I was in the habit of helping large numbers of students in this direction, and I suggested to them that they should set aside three special times during the day during which they would allow only a special kind of thought to pass through the mind. The first of these times was in the morning [Page 193] before rising, the second was about midday, and the third was just before retiring to rest. In the morning I advised them first to think of what they were going to do during the day and to try to make up their minds to do everything deliberately, at the proper time, and without haste. In this way they were to fill their day as usefully as possible, allowing, of course, ample time for recreation and rest. Having made a mental plan of the day, they were then to turn their thoughts in the direction of those who needed their help. There would be fellow students or friends, or there might be people in distress and sorrow to whom they could send, as the Master directs, a loving thought. They were then to turn their attention to their families, to send thoughts of goodwill to the brothers and sisters and other relatives. After this they would pass to the elders — father and mother, teachers and professors. Finally their thoughts were to be turned to their highest conception, whatever it might be. I generally recommended the Hindu students to think of their Gurudeva and mentally to bow in reverence before Him. Some might turn with thoughts of love to a revered teacher, others possibly might think of Mrs. Besant, others might think of one of the great Masters of the Wisdom. It would not matter to whom they turned, provided they lifted themselves up at this moment to the highest they knew. In this way they would become permeated at the beginning of the day with the greatest thoughts they could reach, and a note would be struck which, in [Page 194] course of time, by frequent repetition, would continually be sending its sound vibrating through the day. As a result, a definite force would be created, tending to minimise the chances of mistake, and the individuals concerned would be centres through which the Divine force could more easily flow. The whole process need not take longer than five minutes — or at the outside ten — and ought to give a dignity to the day's proceedings which these do not possess when we hurry unprepared from the night's rest into the ordinary activities of what is called the waking world.

Then at noon, no matter what they were doing, I asked these young people to turn their thoughts to their ideal, whatever it might be, so as to show themselves capable in the midst of worldly occupations of withdrawing the mind from that in which it might, for the time being, appear to be absorbed. The thought of the ideal should never be absent from us, no matter what we are doing, no matter how strenuously we are working, and in order that the ideal may not lose its position, I would recommend people in the middle day to switch themselves off, as it were, from that in which they are engaged and to turn to the highest reality they know. This would mean but a second's distraction, and far from injuring the work in hand

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would produce increased energy and power of concentration.

In the evening I asked my students mentally to look through the day's proceedings in order to see what was well done and what ill done, not in order [Page 195] that they should worry over the mistakes, but that they should take note of them so as to strive to prevent them recurring. Having done this, I asked them to offer themselves in thought for such service as they might be capable of performing during the night, and they were to end by striving to lose themselves in the thought of their ideal, so that it might carry them through safely on to the astral plane. Of course there are many other ways of bringing about the same result, but this is not a difficult method, and from the experience I have had I know it can be extraordinarily successful.

After a time the thought of the ideal becomes a habit, and during the course of the day the individual tends automatically to refer to this thought the various actions which he has in contemplation. He sets them by the side of his ideal and accepts or rejects them accordingly. This is a most desirable condition of mind, and although it certainly takes time to establish, it is worth any amount of effort because, through it, we gradually learn the value and possibility of laying our thought beside that of the Master, a statement which many people find difficult to understand. As a matter of fact, unless one has already had practice in trying to compare one's ordinary thoughts with one's highest thought, it is difficult to imagine how the Master's thought may similarly be used for purposes of comparison. The process is easier in the East than in the West, because in the West there is so much competition and hurry [Page 196] and rush that people seem to have hardly any time in which to be deliberate and, above all, in which to draw down their highest spiritual consciousness. But sooner or later all who mean business must make up their minds to follow some such scheme as I have outlined above, and they must be willing to carry it on whether results show themselves or not. People are far too inclined to feel that the system is wrong if results do not come when they expect them, or that they are incapable of achieving success and so need not try further. We have to learn to be far more careless as to results than we actually are — the *motive* is all-important, and there is nothing we cannot accomplish if we have both the will and an infinite power of perseverance.

THE IGNORANCE OF PRIDE

We are then told to hold back the mind from pride — for, as the Master says, "pride comes only from ignorance". I do not know what opportunity my readers have had for observing those who are truly great, but for my own part I have specially noticed that the greater the spiritual stature the greater the true sense of humility. You will find, for example, that Mrs. Besant refers back to the Master all her successes, and recognises that it is such ignorance as she has that accounts for such mistakes as she may make. In other words, she is as the "wise man" who "knows that only God is great, and that all good work is done by God alone", and [Page 197] by "God" we can, if we like, mean either the Master, or our higher self, or whatever our ideal may be. People who are proud are generally those who, knowing very little, wish to make the most of the little they know, for the more, people know the more they realise that they have yet to learn many things, and those who know most have the keenest sense of their weaknesses. I can truly say, from my own experience, that since I have begun to learn from my leaders I have increasingly realised, not only how little I know, but also how many more imperfections I have than I had before thought possible. The fact of the matter is that if we offer ourselves for the Master's service we have to be tested before we can be trusted, and the testing partly consists in making us aware of our weaknesses so that we may as far as possible not only get rid of them, but try to prevent them from hindering such

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good work as we may be capable of accomplishing. So you must not be surprised when you start on your life's true career — either by joining the Order of the Star in the East, or the Servants of the Star, or the Theosophical Society — if difficulties seem to multiply and if, somehow or other, life not only becomes more troublesome, but even the worst sides of your nature seem to spring into activity. They were there before you associated yourself with one of these great spiritual movements, but they were slumbering. Now that you spring forward to vitalise your higher nature you must not be surprised if the vitality flows through to the lower nature as well and makes it emerge in its true [Page 198] colours. People sometimes become depressed when this happens. They say they did not know how wicked they were, or that they did not know this to be the effect of joining a spiritual movement. Sometimes they blame themselves and say that they are unworthy to join, but sometimes, if they are specially selfish, they blame the movement, thinking that the movement is really not as spiritual as they had imagined, for otherwise how is it that they seem so much worse after joining it? They have not learned that force *is* force, and that it depends on us as to how we use it. What we gain from joining some great forward movement is added force, an added force which is capable of being turned with comparative ease in the right direction. On the other hand, it is also capable of being turned in the wrong direction, and we have, therefore, to be careful not to allow the lower nature to gain any control of the added force which has been given to us through membership of one of these movements.

A great Teacher can give a person *power*. It depends upon the person as to how he uses that power. Indeed, it does not at all follow that he may not sometimes use the power unwisely, but this does not mean that the Master has made a mistake in entrusting it to him. If the Master sees that on the whole the power will be used wisely, He may feel able to take the risk of such unwisdom as may from time to time appear. An individual who joins the Order of the Star in the [Page 199] East, or the Theosophical Society, is in reality given a little added power, and the force rushes through the whole of his nature, and it is only if his nature rests mainly on the higher and not on the lower that he will be able to make good use of his membership. I have always thought that people would not probably be allowed, save for some very special reason, to join one of these movements, because of the added responsibility involved, unless there seemed to be a fair certainty of the force being used for good purposes on the whole and only rarely in the wrong way. Mistakes we are sure to make, and when we join one of these movements we shall probably make more mistakes than before, but on the other hand we may hope to do more good than before, and gradually we shall learn through the mistakes to direct the force more and more wisely. But pride is a fatal barrier to the useful exercise of spiritual capacity. Those who are proud, even of their spiritual knowledge, are of comparatively little use. I have been told that, it is impossible entirely to get rid of pride until very far up in the evolutionary scale, but we must make a beginning now and do all we can to realise, not only how little we ourselves individually know, but how little we really know even of those around us. So our advice must always be very tentative. As has been said in *At the Feet of the Master*, only the Master knows about His people. Only the Master knows a man's motives, and it is *motives* which count more than anything else in the spiritual world. I do not wish to suggest by this that actions [Page 200] do not matter. Actions matter on their own plane, but motives matter even more than actions. There is karma from both, but the karma of motive is more powerful than the karma of action. [Page 201]

CHAPTER XV

THE SIX POINTS OF CONDUCT (Continued)

WE now turn to the consideration of Self-Control in Action. The Master remarks that thought alone will not suffice; there must be no laziness in action; but He points out that we must not therefore try to do other people's work as well as our own, unless we are asked to help. As He says: "For many people the most difficult thing in the world to learn is to mind their own business". People seem to find it very difficult to understand that if they try to do other people's work they are preventing those people from evolving as rapidly as they might. People grow through the work they do, and if *you* try to do so much that you prevent other people from exerting themselves to the utmost, not only will you do your own work badly but you will be stultifying the growth of those around you. It should be clearly understood that the true leader is he who helps other people to work along their own lines more successfully. It is not so much a question as to what the leader himself does as the extent to which he inspires other people to do things. If he helps them to take a more active part in life, to feel more vital, [Page 202] to feel more interested in their work — then is he truly leading and guiding. But if when he takes up a piece of work he centres it all in himself, and makes other people feel that they are entirely dependent on him for all originaive effort, he is one of those who do not know how to mind their own business. We are often told that none of us are indispensable, and the reason we are not indispensable is that there are always people to do the work if the work *has* to be done. We need to have among us people who will try to understand what it is that those around them have to do, and, while doubtless being in general charge of a special piece of work, they will take care to be behind the scenes as much as possible, and to give everyone about them the opportunity of growing through independent, and yet harmonious, action. This is what I think is at the root of the Master's statement that we should leave every man to do his own work in his own way. Of course we should be ready to give help when asked or when needed, but, as a general rule, it is far better for people to learn through the making of mistakes, and to feel themselves free agents within reasonable limits. It is true that in times of emergency the leader may have to take full control, and demand from his followers obedience rather than initiative. But such times are rare, and in most cases what we have to stimulate is initiative and the sense of independent, yet co-operative, capacity. [Page 203]

THE DAILY ROUND, THIS COMMON TASK

Then the Master observes that however much we may be interested in what is called "higher work" we must not neglect the ordinary duties of life. Indeed, upon the fulfilling of these ordinary duties depends our progress and our usefulness. If we cannot do the ordinary things well we are not likely to do well what are called the "higher things". Just for the time being, under the influence of their glamour, we may put our energies into them, and so appear to do them better than the ordinary things. But the glamour will not last, and if we have been in the habit of doing ordinary things badly, we shall find ourselves in course of time doing the higher things badly too. And it is much more serious to do the higher things badly even than to do the ordinary things in a slipshod manner. The fact of the matter is, of course, that there is very little distinction to be drawn between the higher and the lower. We learn to grow as rapidly through the performance of the humblest duty as through the accomplishment of higher tasks. The Master tells us that until the ordinary duties of life are done we are not free for other service. Notice that He uses the word "other" and not "higher". We have been told, in fact, that until an individual gets rid of the more obstructive portions of his karma he is not free to undertake the burdens of discipleship. And the only way to get rid of obstructive karma — indeed of any karma — is to try to do the little things as well as possible. [Page 204] Of course little things seem rather humdrum and uninteresting, but while they seem

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so to us, we must remember that we should soon lose our interest in the "higher things" if we had the opportunity. It is only while they seem new and out of the ordinary that our attention is turned more directly towards them, and so in fact we prove that our attention turns more to that which excites us than to that which needs doing. Until the attention is so trained that it turns automatically to that which needs doing, we have not gone very far. Hence we must try to remember that the little things are the stepping-stones to bigger things. I have no doubt that what I am writing here does not sound particularly interesting, or helpful, or inspiring. I can hear my readers exclaim that there is so much more drudgery in making progress than they had thought. Perfectly true ! There is a great deal of drudgery until we begin to realise in fact that nothing is drudgery. We have none of us yet reached that stage, but the great principle of life is that nothing which is needed to be done has in it the essence of drudgery. Such drudgery as there seems to be is due to our ignorance, and to the fact that for many of us nothing seems worth while save that which causes an unusual excitation of the astral or mental bodies.

CONCENTRATION OF ENERGY

We are then told that we should undertake no new worldly duties. I do not suppose this means [Page 205] that we are never to attempt anything fresh, but, rather, that it is very unwise to keep on trying to take up new work, to extend our attention to new interests, when we are not really fulfilling our duty to the work and to the interests we already have in hand. Many people always wish, for example, to belong to everything new, to join every new movement, to take part in every possible new activity, The result often is that they fritter their energies away, and neither give to these activities, nor receive from them, that which should be the result — an increase of vital power, both to the movement and to the individual. On the other hand, if one feels that one can help some new activity by taking part in it, there is no reason why one should not join it after careful consideration as to the amount of time one can place at its disposal, and as to whether such amount of time could produce adequate fulfilment of any obligation involved. In other words, one must proceed deliberately, and not take on new worldly duties simply in order to be "in" with everybody else, and to get as much as we can from them. We must not forget that there is the karma of *non*-fulfilment of obligations, whether the obligations be undertaken deliberately or lightly. The link is made, and we must not imagine that we can avoid our karmic responsibility if we drop the activity when we no longer feel interested. In a word, we must do as much as we can but not more than we ought. The fact of the matter is that those of us who mean business, and who are striving to get into touch with [Page 206] one or other of the great Teachers, have to remember that the Master tells us that we have to do ordinary work *better* than other people do it. If we perform our duties no better than other people perform theirs we should not be worthy of the special tie we hope to make between ourselves and the Elder Brethren. Indeed, every human being already has his tie with an Elder Brother, but if we want to make our respective ties stronger and brighter, we must show our worthiness, and in order to show our worthiness we must live more intensely and more vigorously, with more attention to detail. Any who have had the privilege of watching the Masters at work will know how extraordinarily careful They are with regard to the slightest and, apparently, most trivial details. Not a moment is wasted and every moment is used to its fullest extent, and with it all there is no appearance of rush or hurry. On the contrary, there is every indication of calm, strength, and power, because there is no waste. Waste inevitably means weakness and looseness of purpose, and a dulling of faculty. So it is not so much a question of the kind of work that is done as the way in which it is done, and the man who manages affairs of State lazily and carelessly has much to learn from the crossing-sweeper who is careful to keep in utmost cleanliness the crossing upon whose cleanliness his attention is concentrated. As the Master says: "If you are to be His, you must do ordinary work better than others, not worse; because you must do that also for His sake". [Page 207]

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TRUE INDEPENDENCE

I should like to lay special stress upon the Master's statement that the work we must do must be work that we recognise as part of our duty and not the imaginary duties which others think we ought to perform. There are many people in the world today who are trying to make other people do that which *they* conceive to be the duty of these other people. They seem to know so much better what is good for others than they know what is good for themselves. The position is obviously absurd, but we have become so much dependent upon outside opinion that we are much more likely to pay attention to another's views with regard to our duties than we should be likely to hearken to any independent personal intuition. Obviously, when people are quite young it *is* the duty of parents and teachers to help them to discover what are their individual duties, and sometimes it may even be necessary to impose duties upon them. But teachers and parents should be extremely careful not to make their charges think that parents and teachers inevitably know better what is good for them than the children themselves can know. In the long run each individual must be a law unto himself, and the duty of the parent or teacher is to help the boy or girl to find out what their particular law is. In other words it is their duty to stimulate the discriminative power of those placed in their charge, and not to impose their own discriminative faculties [Page 208] upon them. Children who have not been trained to think and act for themselves are of very little use in the world, and are much at the mercy of the opinions and influences of their surroundings, depending for their actions upon the advice and opinion of their friends. We *have* to learn not to believe things simply because other people believe them, or to perform actions in a particular way just because other people perform them in that way. We *have* to become independent, and to learn that true independence by no means involves antagonism. So many people are inclined to believe that you cannot be truly independent unless you are rude and disagreeable, unless you deliberately try to do things in ways entirely different from the ways in which other people do them. It is sometimes thought that you must strike out a fresh note for yourself. I do not object to the phrase, provided the note is a harmonious one, but if it be discord, then, unless there be some specially strong motive for its existence, it had better not appear. With regard to the question, for example, of religious observance, I think it highly desirable that every boy and girl should be trained in the beliefs and ceremonies of the faith into which they have been born, but I also think it most important that parents and teachers should explain to children that they are given these ceremonies and beliefs, which have been very helpful to large numbers of people, only until they find out something which may perhaps be more appropriate to their particular temperaments. [Page 209] I should never think it my duty to try and make a child believe that any special form, or any special truth, is the only form or truth he ought to accept. Since karma has brought him within the teaching of certain definite forms of truth, he may as well grow up in them, but a loophole should always be left for his individual judgment, so that he may feel that he can act freely without becoming a traitor either to his elders or to his traditions. There is no reason why a child who begins as a Hindu should not become a Christian later if he feels irresistibly impelled, but if he is born a Hindu he had better remain one until he has arrived at maturity of judgment sufficient to enable him to decide whether he wishes to make a change. There is never any harm in training a child to understand the forms and truths which have been helpful to a large number of people, for such training will bring into being a sympathy which will enable him later on to help, even though later on he, himself, finds other forms and other truths more appropriate to his own special line of evolution.

TOLERANCE

All this brings us to the consideration of the third point of Conduct, namely Tolerance. Above all the

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Master lays stress on the need for our feeling a hearty interest in the beliefs of those of another religion. Religious differences have done an infinite amount of harm in the world, and now we have to [Page 210] begin to work so that religious differences may no longer imperil the real unity beneath. As the Master remarks: "*Their* religion is a path to the highest just as yours is" and then He says what is probably at the back of His mind through the whole of these teachings: "To help all, you must understand all". This is indeed the key-note of the teaching. Every word written in *At the Feet of the Master* is intended to give the reader power to be of more service to those around him. If you wish to belong to the Master you must be able to go anywhere and do anything. You must be able to help all kinds of people, you must be able to adapt yourself to all kinds of circumstances, and to sympathise practically with troubles which perhaps you have never yourself experienced. In order to be free to serve in this way you must take care that you yourself are not bound by the very fetters from which you seek to free others. If you yourself think that *your* religion is the only true religion, if you yourself think that *your* customs are the only useful customs, if you think that *your* nation is the only truly great nation, if you think that *your* modes of life are the only really useful modes of life — then you are blind, however much you may be trying to help others as blind as yourself. As the Master tells us, we must "be free from bigotry and superstition". This does not mean that everyone must be free from bigotry and superstition, but rather that those who wish to be servants of the Master must themselves be free from conditions which would hamper their activity, [Page 211] however much these conditions may help other people. At certain stages, no doubt, bigotry and superstition are inevitable. They are the scaffolding by means of which the building is erected. But when the building is completed there is no further need for the scaffolding, and our own spiritual building should be in such a forward state that these two pieces of scaffolding can usefully be dispensed with. For you and me most ordinary ceremonies are no longer necessary, that is to say such ceremonies are no longer necessary for those who may expect to be taken within a comparatively short time as apprentices in a Master's school. We may take part in them if we like; we may enjoy them; but they must cease to be necessary parts of our existence; otherwise, as the Master points out, we shall think ourselves in some way better than people who do not perform the special kind of ceremony which interests us.

Here again the Master's statement is not meant to convey to us that no one should perform any ceremonies. Remember He is addressing one already a pupil in His school and therefore subject to very special teaching. Ceremonies may possibly be necessary for some of us, and, indeed, for most, but it is laid down that they are no longer necessary for those who are being specially trained. You will obviously be wrong to feel contempt for those who still need them. The Masters feel no contempt for our colossal ignorance in many very essential matters. They desire to help us where we stand, and [Page 212] this should be our attitude towards those less evolved than ourselves. We must try to help people where they are and *through* their own special lines of growth. This is why it is so very necessary to "understand all". In other words, before anyone can become a pupil of the Master he must in previous lives have passed through a wide series of experiences so as to enable him intuitively to grasp the varied conditions and stages of belief, even though he, himself, may not actually have passed through these conditions. He must have acquired the *spirit* of the experience, though he may not, necessarily, have passed through the individual form. But we must take care that people do not try to force upon us things which they know to be essential to themselves and which they think, therefore, to be equally essential to us. People often strive to do this. They feel so *greatly* the need of a certain experience themselves that they cannot imagine for a moment how it is that other people do not need it equally, and in this way have arisen the Inquisition and other forms of narrow cruelty. People must not be allowed to interfere with us in the performance of what we conceive to be our duty, however much that duty may differ from the duties of those around us. But while we must insist upon our rights, nevertheless we must "make allowance for everything; be kindly towards everything". [Page 213]

CHAPTER XVII

THE SIX POINTS OF CONDUCT (Continued)

ONE of the most informing similes in *At the Feet of the Master* is where the Master tells us that many customs, ceremonies, and beliefs, which individually we may have outgrown, may still be needed by large numbers of people, just as children need double lines to help them to write straightly and evenly until they have learnt to write better without them. The position is, as the Master explains, that we must remain in sympathetic touch with those who possibly may not have yet reached our level of evolution. "He who has forgotten his childhood and lost sympathy with the children is not the man who can teach them or help them". There is a very general tendency on the part of people as they grow older to become impatient with children and to find no interest in the ways in which children live. Children's interests cease to interest them, and gradually they drift into what I may call a crabbed old age, out of touch with the aspirations and impulses of the younger generation, and convinced that everything is gradually going wrong. Many middle-aged people are convinced that in *their* young days everything [Page 214] was very much better than it is now. They feel quite certain that children were brought up in a better way, that the government of the country was less vacillating and weak, that there was less license and more true liberty. They feel that people no longer know their place. The fact is that these middle-aged and old people do not know *their* place. In other words, they have lost their place and cannot find it, and the result is that they feel out of harmony with the world which has really left them far behind.

THE NEED FOR ADAPTABILITY

Now this attitude will not do. The older we grow, the more we must make every effort to keep in touch with the young, to be young with them and, above all, to realise that the ideals which have sufficed for our generation need not necessarily be the ideals appropriate to the new. The fact of the matter is that a true server must do all he can to adapt himself to the ever-changing conditions necessitated by the world's growth. I consider that one of Mrs. Besant's most remarkable characteristics is that she *understands* young people and is able to voice their aspirations. She unites the wisdom of age with the enthusiasm of youth, and so you will find her always in the forefront of all new movements — restraining impetuous and inexperienced ardour, but not hindering good work. The same may be said of Mr. Leadbeater: indeed, all true helpers of the world [Page 215] have this special characteristic of being able to live in the spirit of the time and of responding to the changing needs of the world. This means, of course an intuitive and adaptable temperament; we must ever be on the alert to discover the signs of the times and to understand in the aspirations of youth the dawning of the New Age. The older a person grows the more valuable becomes his experience, and the more therefore he should be revered and honoured, provided he places his experience at the disposal of those who have not yet had time to acquire it. You should remember always that the world in its future condition belongs to the coming generation, and all we have to do is to help the transition from the old to the new to be as easy and simple as possible. The French Revolution was largely due to the fact that the older generation had no understanding of the new. They came into terrific conflict, and the result was a transition period of terrible suffering. Just at present we are in a similar transition stage, and much depends upon the wisdom and co-operation of the elders. We must unceasingly study the lines of thought of young people. We must ever be on the alert to watch for the signs of the new conditions which may manifest themselves in the lives of the younger generation. We must keep ourselves up to date, and must give not a sneer but a welcome to the new order which is taking the place of the old. It is all a question of sympathy and realisation that other people's ways may be just as helpful as, possibly more helpful than, our own. Above all, [Page 216] if we are in the position of

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having outgrown certain customs and beliefs appropriate to the world as a whole, we must not therefore imagine that everybody else has also outgrown such customs and beliefs. Our business is to help people where they are, and not to force them along a line for which they are not yet ready. It must of course be conceded that, for the sake of example, one might occasionally feel an obligation to associate oneself with some special custom or belief. For example, if I were living in the country, I might find it helpful to go regularly to church, not so much for my own sake as for the sake of those for whom church ought to mean much spiritual guidance. But I must not be *bound* by customs or beliefs which I have outgrown, although I may, if it is desirable, occasionally clothe myself in them.

CHEERFULNESS

The Master then lays stress upon Cheerfulness, and He tells us many important truths. In the first place we have to try to understand that it is an *honour* that suffering comes to us. I presume He means here that it is an honour if suffering comes to us in larger doses than would normally be the case, for all suffering is of course the result of past actions, so from this standpoint it is hardly a matter of "honour" or dishonour, but a matter of law. On the other hand, if we offer ourselves to the Master, such suffering as we need for the purposes of [Page 217] purification becomes concentrated within a comparatively short time so that we may get rid as quickly as possible of our evil karma. As the Master says, in this way we work through in one or two lives that which otherwise might have been spread over a hundred. Until we have got rid of the most obstructive portion of our karma we are not free to share with our Teacher the burden of the world. Our shoulders must be comparatively free from past karma if we are to go into the outer world and stand side by side with those who need our help. This does not mean, of course, that before we can become pupils we must exhaust practically all obstructive karma. Not only is this not the case, but, on the contrary, our debts come tumbling down upon us when we offer ourselves for service. But they are not debts which stand hopelessly in the way of continued service. Debts which bar us from practically any strenuous service must first be got rid of, for, if we would offer ourselves to the Master there must be something worth offering. So we must be comparatively free from burdens. as I have said. But it would be very foolish to expect lives of ease: on the contrary there will be lives of exceeding difficulty, but it would be unwise to complain. We have offered to pay our debts as quickly as possible, and if this offer works out in pain we must not be surprised. We shall the sooner be free, although the process may, for the time being, be agonising. [Page 218]

The Master tells us that, however hard our karma is, we should be thankful that it is not worse. I must confess that very often one cannot see how it possibly could be worse ! But I have no doubt that it may be to a certain extent a comfort to think this. I try to imagine that it *might* be worse, so that I may realise that, however far down I may be, I am not actually at the bottom ! All I would say, however, is that it would seem in some ways almost more satisfactory if one could feel that one were at the bottom, so as to know that things *could* not be worse than they are. If you are thankful that things are not worse, you may possibly be wondering whether in a short time they may not become so. What of course the Master wishes us to understand is that we must keep cheerful and always look on the bright side of things. Part of the payment of our karmic debts consists in paying them cheerfully: our karmic enemies soon cease to trouble us if we take their hostility — our own creation — cheerfully and good-humouredly. Perhaps we can do this more satisfactorily if we continually try to realise that all that comes to us is part of the inevitable training that we have to go through as we proceed from unconsciousness to self-consciousness.

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The Master then goes on to observe that we must give up all feeling of possession, because "possession" is an aspect of the lower nature. The higher self expresses itself through the sense of Unity; the lower through a sense of possession. Hence the Master urges us to get rid of this feeling, because by so doing we get [Page 219] rid of that which obstructs. He points out that karma may take from us even the people whom we love most. That is to say, karma may appear to take them from us; we can never lose that which we have drawn into the universal Unity. Loss is *entirely* of the lower planes, it is an illusion, although I know full well it is an illusion which causes an infinite amount of suffering. There can be no doubt that the physical plane exerts its inevitable plane influence, and a physical plane loss cannot but be felt while we are for the time being immersed in physical plane matter. But however hard the parting may be, it does not therefore follow that it is a real parting. Personally, the more I learn, the more I find that physical plane partings are less depressing as I establish myself more firmly in the larger life. A physical plane parting undoubtedly has its disturbing features, but the more we live in the Masters' world, the more we definitely find that those whom we love are in reality always with us, and every parting is intended to bring this lesson home to us.

The Master concludes His observations on cheerfulness by reasserting the truth that depression is wicked. He observes that He often needs to use His servants in order to pour force through them for the helping of others, and He remarks that He cannot do this if we yield to depression, because depression builds a black wall round us through which little comfort may come from outside, and through which little of the Master's light can pierce into the outer world. It is worth while to remember that depression [Page 220] is as often caused either by an unhealthy body or by outside circumstances as it is caused by some disturbance of our own centres of life. We must not therefore conclude that *because* we are depressed, *therefore* the depression comes from within. To help to guard against depression it is necessary to have as healthy a body as possible and to take care that it keeps healthy. When our nervous system becomes devitalised through over-strain or through some other form of ill-health, then cheerfulness is more difficult to maintain, because the channels of communication with the Master's world are, for the time being, out of repair. Similarly, we must guard against disturbances from the outside. Many thoughts and feelings which appear to be ours are, as a matter of fact, visitors, and we ought to try to imagine as far as we can that all undesirable thoughts and feelings are visitors, and that we can turn them out if we like. Never let us suppose that any thought or feeling is an inalienable part of our nature.

ONE-POINTEDNESS

We now so on to One-Pointedness, which means doing the Master's work. Everything, as a matter of fact, which is helpful and unselfish is the Master's work. We must not imagine that only work connected with the Order of the Star in the East, or with the Theosophical Society is the Master's work. Living helpfully at home is just as much the Master's work. Playing our games well, [Page 221] studying well, are just as much the Master's work. People sometimes wish they could do more in the Master's service than for the moment seems possible. They say their karma is against them ! Karma, as a matter of fact, is never against anybody, for it is nothing more than a stepping-stone to the higher life — we spring to a higher position from the springing-board which our karma has fashioned for us. However lonely you may be, however isolated from Theosophical surroundings, you can none the less do the Master's work, and the Master's work consists in the way in which you do that which comes to you to do, day by day. Everything that comes to us, of however trivial a nature, is a little piece of training specially given to us to bring us nearer to the Master's world. You and I may not be able to realise this. We may wonder how an apparently trivial piece of business can possibly have any relation to the Master. A clerk in an office, for

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example, may wonder how writing an unimportant letter on behalf of his firm can possibly be of service to the Master. As a matter of fact if he can write that unimportant letter well, he will be able to write a less unimportant letter well, till the time will come when he can write important letters well, and some day he will perhaps have the opportunity of writing the Master's letters well. Every . act of life is a step on the ladder of evolution, and leads to the step next above. No matter what the act may be, it is a step nearer than the act before it, and definitely leads to the step beyond. The fact is that every [Page 222] action becomes part of the Master's work if we remember Him while doing it. Try to understand, therefore, that the nature of the action is of no importance; what matters is your recognition of the fact that the Master watches everything you do and in this way makes everything you do a possible link between Him and yourself.

The rest of the remarks on one-pointedness merely emphasise the need for realising that every day of life can so be used that it shall draw us appreciably nearer to our Master. As the Master says, we "must become one with the Path", and the Path is everywhere. People sometimes think that the Path is nowhere save at the headquarters of the Lodge to which they belong, and that they are only treading the Path when they are attending meetings. The whole world and every part of it, and every condition of it, is the Path leading humanity to its goal, and while certain conditions undoubtedly assist to an increasing consciousness of the Master's world, that is because there are people living in those conditions who have vitalised them. You can as much become conscious of the Master's world in your home life, in your school life, in the playground, as you can anywhere else. But do not let temptations, or even worldly affections, draw you away. There is always a tendency that these shall become difficulties in your way because there is a natural tendency for all grades of matter to emphasise inertia. Matter always wishes to stay as it is, to avoid disintegration and change. For this reason many people fear death, but you must try as far as you can to avoid that [Page 223] which tends to hinder your growth. People sometimes say that it is only natural to be at the mercy of worldly affections or at the mercy of worldly temptations. But the word "natural" is here used in the wrong sense. It is not according to nature to be at the mercy of these things, but it is undoubtedly customary and habitual. In other words, people certainly tend to be at the mercy of all kinds of conditions which hinder progress, but you and I should remember that we must no longer be fettered by habit and custom, and we are never truer to nature than when we strive to grow by breaking the customs and barriers through the help of which in the past we have been able to evolve.

As regards the question of worldly affections, I do not want my readers to imagine that we should try to stifle the love we bear towards our friends and relatives. On the contrary, the more love we can manifest through our nature the more quickly shall we grow. But we must not allow our affections to become selfish and make us weak, for this would neither be helpful to ourselves nor to those whom we love. The most loving service we can render to our friend is to become a rock and support whenever that friend needs such help, but we cannot be this if we allow our affections to blind us to the way in which we can become truly helpful. A child often thinks its mother does not love it because the mother does not give it everything it wants. The truest love is to help the soul to grow; selfish love panders too often to the body. [Page 224]

THE DECISION OF THE MONAD

The Master finally observes that the Monad, which is the God within us, decided to grow, and the sooner the lower bodies harmonise themselves with the inflexible will of the Monad, the sooner shall the will of God become accomplished. The Monad creates veils of illusion in order that it may gain experiences in

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all the kingdoms of God's nature, and the veils so created strive to maintain their existence even when their value has disappeared. By a process of imagination they strive to believe themselves to be the reality instead of being only the perishable forms. It is from time to time necessary to retire within oneself so as to break off that association with the lower bodies which so frequently causes us to believe that these are the only realities. It is for this reason that meditation is so valuable, and I would recommend readers to adopt some such scheme as that I outlined in an earlier chapter. But remember that the reason for such meditation is that we may increasingly learn to distinguish between the God within and the vehicles through which that God within works, and thus learn to give to every part of ourselves its true proportion and value. **[Page 225]**

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SIX POINTS OF CONDUCT (Concluded)

THE last of the Six Points of Conduct is CONFIDENCE. We are told that we must trust the Master. "If you have seen the Master, you will trust Him to the uttermost, through many lives and deaths". This, I believe to be a phrase of Alcyone's own — feeling the magnificent inspiration of the Master's presence, the words burst forth from him in gratitude. For the Master, once known, is as a rock against which all ignorance and all doubt are shattered. But though many of you may have been privileged to have seen one or other of our great Masters, perhaps you cannot remember Them so far as physical plane memory goes, and it would, therefore, be more difficult for you to bring down into this world the knowledge of what They are. But, as we are told, we must try to realise Them. We must try to remember that They are in fact our Elder Brethren, and that They watch over us with far more loving tenderness and care than we can possibly realise. If we cannot feel Their physical presence, or if They do not seem to be watching over us, it is that we may learn to rely on the God within us and to trust to ourselves. We are [Page 226] continually in the presence of the Masters; we should continually be relying on Them; and we should never forget that that which They are, we, too, may become. The Divine spark is in each one of us, and we have the duty of relying as much on the God within as on the God without. Therefore is it that the Masters sometimes seem to be far away from us, although, in reality, They are nearer to us than our nearest friend or most loved relative. If we, in the physical brain, are ignorant of Their individual existence, we must nevertheless think of Them and try to remember that in Their perfection is the promise of ours. Thinking reverently of Them, we, in fact, pay reverence to ourselves — to the God within us. We must be continually thinking of Them, trying to do that which we think They would wish us to do. In this way we create a link between Them and ourselves, and through the channel thus made They are able to help us. This is what is meant when it is said that if you do not trust the Master "even He cannot help you". Remember that the Masters never intrude Their help upon people who do not want it. Free-will belongs to us all, and if we do not want any help it is not obtruded upon us. In other words, if we do not make our share of the channel, They will not make it for us. So if we want Their guidance and direction, we must show that we want it by making a channel towards Them through our endeavour to become like Them. [Page 227]

TRUST IN THE MASTER

We are also told that we must trust the Master. You may perhaps wonder how it is possible to trust Those whom you do not remember to have seen. As a matter of fact, the Masters are, in reality, the embodied examples of what we ourselves shall one day become. Once They were as we are now. And by Their strength and unwavering determination to help the world, They developed the God within Them until He shone out undimmed by selfishness and separateness. Having fully awakened Their Higher Selves, They are now ready to help us to awaken ours, so that in trusting Them, we are, as a matter of fact, trusting ourselves. All that is best in us They are, and much more, and in reality there is no separation between the God within and the God outside us. Every kindly action we perform, every effort we make in the direction of unselfishness, every means we employ to develop our mental, emotional, and physical bodies for service, are so many signs of our trust in the Master. If we trust our Higher Selves, we trust the Master. "Unless there is perfect trust, there cannot be the perfect flow of love and power". This means that unless we are determined to give up all selfishness for the sake of helping the world, we shall not be as younger brothers to the Elder Brothers of humanity. We must strive to become one in nature with Them, if there is to be the uninterrupted flow of love and power from Them to us. Every selfish thought,

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every indulgence of the lower nature, [Page 228] is as a little barrier which intercepts the stream. To trust the Master means to know Him to be that which in our heart of hearts we hope some day to become. We, therefore, think of Him as living the ideals towards which we can only aspire, and we must try to use our imagination in discovering what They might say, or do, or think, under the various circumstances in which we find ourselves in the lower world. To trust Them, therefore, means to know Them as living examples of the Higher Self in man, in whose form and nature we must strive to fashion ourselves.

THE GOD WITHIN US

We are also told to trust ourselves. To many this will seem a strange piece of advice. "You say you know yourself too well? If you feel so, you do *not* know yourself; you know only the weak outer husk which has fallen often into the mire. But *you* — the real you — you are a spark of God's own fire, and God, who is Almighty, is in you, and because of that there is nothing which you cannot do if you will". I know how difficult it is to believe this, because we identify ourselves so much with our lower bodies that we continually think that we are the lower bodies. When we say, "I think", or "I feel", or "I do this or that", we identify ourselves with the feeling, with the thought, with the act, although we are continually being told that the lower bodies must be servants and not masters. We have continually to realise [Page 229] that the God within us is trying to work through these lower bodies, and it is in the difficulty of getting control over them that the confusion arises. The *real* you, as the Master says, is "a spark of God's own fire", and "God, who is Almighty, is within you". When you say, "I cannot", it means that the lower self is, for the moment, getting the upper hand again. Feelings, thoughts, actions, pass away; only *you* remain. That, indeed, is the test. All that grows stronger day by day, and becomes more and more permanent, is likely to be the sign of the God within you beginning to dominate the bodies which He has put forth in order to come into contact with the various experiences these lower worlds afford. All that gives you an increasing power of love, an increasing power of unselfishness, an increasing power of service, is the God within you; the rest which, from time to time, seems to dominate you so entirely, not only will not last, but cannot satisfy you long. The more you help others, the more you want to help. The bigger your love grows, the more you want to love. But there are many desires which cease to exist the moment they are satisfied. In fact, most of the desires you have are but the toys with which God trains you to distinguish between the real and the unreal. He shows you, by letting you have the things you want, that the real you does, not really want them, for after a time they cease to satisfy. Thus, by gradually turning away from one thing after another, by a process of exclusion, you find out what it is that alone can give permanent peace [Page 230] and happiness. It is for this that you live in the world, and alternating joys and sorrows lead you gradually to concentrate your efforts on that which endures. If you did not have these, you would not make any effort. They are signs of the God within you struggling to know Itself, to know Its powers, to know Its divinity. It is continually saying: "No, this is not what I want, for there is no lasting happiness in this". The God within you *must* grow, but from time to time it may think that this, that, or the other, is permanent happiness, and therefore part of its very nature. It experiences that which seems to be permanent, grows tired, finds that the apparently permanent ceases to have power to satisfy, and so learns that that, too, is not the goal. Little by little, it draws near to the realities of life, and finally reaches the comparative perfection of the Master who has learned the nature of at least many of the certainties which make Divinity.

We are told to say to ourselves: "What man has done, man can do. I am a man, yet also God in man; I can do this thing, and I will". In other words, what the Master has done, I can do, for I am God in man. If there be Masters of the Wisdom, I can become a Master of the Wisdom, for there is but the One Life in

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us all, though it may be at varying stages of unfoldment. That which is the One Life in the Master, is also the One Life in me. Life in Him may be more perfectly unfolded, but only because He has gone further along the path which [Page 231] I myself am treading. It is most important that we should all feel our identity with those in front of us, just as we must feel our identity with those behind us. But the difficulties are innumerable, and this is not to be wondered at when we think of the immeasurable glory of the goal. Little efforts may bring forth little successes: greater efforts may bring forth greater successes. But the difficulties of the Path lead man to perfection, and only by the measure of the difficulty can we at all gauge the magnificence of the goal towards which we are striving. We can therefore, in a sense, be glad that the difficulties are as great as they are, for if the obstacles be many and difficult to surmount, there must be a result at the end well worth all the efforts we may have had to make. Let us, therefore, not think so much of the intervening difficulties as of the result at the end; let us remember that in us lies the power to overcome all obstacles, however great. Difficulties are insurmountable when we do not want to surmount them. It may be that in any particular life there may be difficulties which we cannot overcome, and we may have to reconcile ourselves to this. A man may, for example, have certain bodily defects which prevent him from playing games, or he may have certain mental deficiencies which prevent him from being clever in certain directions. But that is all from the past. In the future he can become whatever he desires to be if he uses the Divine Will that is in him. [Page 232]

THE NATURE OF DIFFICULTY

I do not wish for a moment to suggest that the task is easy. It is not. And the reason is that there are two conflicting forces — one, the creative, and the other, the preservative. There is the force of growth, and the force of inertia. Now we desire to be active, now we desire to rest. Now we are full of energy, now we are tired. If we did not know what it is to be tired, we should not understand to the full the joy of energy, and if we did not know what it is to be full of activity, we should not appreciate the contrast of rest. But there is always the tendency to overdo things; sometimes to be over-energetic, sometimes to be too lazy. And we are continually playing between the two — sometimes over-emphasising the one, and sometimes over-emphasising the other. Best we need; energy we need; but we must rest when we need to rest, and we must be active when we ought to work. We must not be at the mercy of either. It sometimes happens that when the difficulties seem too much for us, we become inclined to let everything go, and rest. This is, of course, exceedingly natural, but we forget that, in reality, no difficulties can be too much for us, for, indeed, there are no difficulties which we have not made for ourselves. Every difficulty you and I have is a lesson from which we have to learn something we do not at present know. The moment we *will* to surmount it, we can overcome it, and then, ceasing to be in the form of a difficulty, it becomes [Page 233] a force for action. That which seems so difficult to climb becomes, when we have climbed it, a place from which we can see far more clearly than we could see before. Those who are on the summit of the mountain see far more clearly than those who are in the valley. It is, no doubt, tiring to climb the mountain, but the view from the top is generally worthy of the trouble of the climb. The Masters are at the top of the mountain, and we must trust to Their assurance that the view at the top is worth seeing. We see the joy on Their faces, and we must try to realise that the difficulties before us are as nothing compared with the joy at the end. [Page 234]

CHAPTER XIX

LOVE

WE now come to the most important of the Qualifications, although it is placed last in the book, that of LOVE. I have heard our leaders say that each world or system has its own distinguishing note, just as an individual has his own distinguishing characteristic. I have understood them to say that so far as this world is concerned, its dominant note is love. However this may be, it remains true that, provided an individual has in his character a strong touch of love, it does not very much matter if he has a large number of weaknesses which are continually obstructing him. As the Master tells us, if the quality of love is strong enough in a man, "it forces him to acquire all the rest, and all the rest without it would never be sufficient". This means, that if you have the love nature well developed in you, it will gradually become purer and purer until it cleanses you entirely from selfishness. From the love of the one we gradually proceed to the love of the many. From the love of our own work, our own occupations, we grow into a love of work for the world and for its service. People sometimes think that those who [Page 235] desire to serve the world must get rid of all personal affection. I often hear people say, that they are trying to rid themselves of all affection for their families, for their friends, so that they may learn to serve the world and follow the Master. They forget that it is only *through* love of friend and love of family that we learn how to love the world as the Master loves it, and we do not sufficiently realise that personal affection need not disappear — indeed should not disappear — even when our love is so strong that it embraces the world. The Masters Themselves have Their personal affections. They have, we are told, Their favourite pupils, and Their little circle of special friends. And why should They not ? True, They would not allow Their personal affections to interfere with Their duty to the world, nor would They permit Their personal ties weakly to countenance wrong lines of action. Their love, whether for the individual or for the world, is a strengthening love — a love which gives, not a love which demands. This is the true basis of all love, and is its purifying factor.

SELFLESS LOVE

So many of us, in loving our friends, demand that they shall love us in return, and perhaps we expect from them all kinds of attitudes and services in return for the love we give them. This may be natural in the early stages, but the grasping nature of love is love in its selfish aspect. Love should be as a great [Page 236] river of force, ever flowing outwards, and indifferent as to its effect so far as any return is concerned. Love in its lower aspect is desire, in its higher aspect it is will, as the Master points out. Many people in the world demand return for their love, and are hurt if no return is given. This is like demanding payment for a present, and shows that the person has not yet begun to purify his love. People who really know how to love say that there is so great a satisfaction merely in pouring out streams of love, that there is no inclination to consider the nature of the return. The lesson of love must certainly be begun with the individual. If there is anyone whom you love intensely, make a practice of deliberately brushing on one side any tendency to think of the result, so far as regards yourself. Try to avoid the least expectation of return, or even the slightest hope. Do not spend an atom of your energy in thinking about what he or she feels about you, devote all to the process of outpouring. You have no idea, probably, unless you have tried this, how complete a satisfaction there is in the mere giving. Every now and then one lapses into the desire for some kind of return, but by contrast this desire seems sordid and poor, and one is thankful to be rid of it. On the other hand, there is continual interest in discovering new ways of loving, and the fact that you gradually grow more impersonal as to the return, is the starting-point for the spreading of your love among the many instead of confining it to the one or to the few. If you are deeply interested in work

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of any kind, you will find yourself [Page 237] beginning to love people for the contribution they make to the work in which you and they are engaged. You feel that they are comrades in a common cause, and that feeling of comradeship soon develops into feelings of pure affection. You feel that they are working for the same cause in which you yourself are engaged, you feel that they are with you in the difficulties and in the dangers, and the unity thus manifesting soon shows itself in its aspect of love. There will always be, of course, those who are specially near to you, and there may be truth in the assertion that each soul has a special affinity. I do not know about this, but I do know that on the basis of the affection for the few is gradually built up the power to love the many. And the secret of it all is in expecting no return.

If you are always looking for a return it must be from the one or from the few. You cannot expect a return from the many, and so there is a barrier between you and the possible affection for them. They cannot give to you the return which the few can give you for the love you pour upon them, therefore it is useless to love them ! This is the inevitable conclusion to which those come who want payment, in some form or other, for their affections. I know it sounds brutal to put it in this way. People will reply that they do not want payment, they only want recognition. But true love demands no recognition; it is satisfied with its own being, and with the joy of its outpouring. The river is happy in its flow towards the sea. So you will understand [Page 238] that by making your love for anyone independent of that individual's attitude towards you, you will lay the foundation the Master wishes you to acquire as regards the whole world. And when you reach the level He has reached, you will probably find that the love you have for the world has not made you forget your affection for the individual; on the contrary, individual affection has been the basis of it all, and will be cherished by you with the deepest of happiness.

THE DESIRE FOR LIBERATION

You will notice that this fourth Qualification is stated by the Master to be often translated "as an intense desire for liberation from the round of births and deaths, and for union with God". That is to say the idea of love has been given a personal aspect, as if through love in its more restricted aspects freedom were to be gained by the individual from the round of births and deaths. But, as the Master points out, this is the selfish way of looking at love. "It is not so much desire as *will*, resolve, determination. To produce its result, this resolve must fill your whole nature, so as to leave no room for any other feeling. It is indeed the will to be one with God, not in order that you may escape from weariness and suffering, but in order that because of your deep love for Him, you may act with Him and as He does. Because He is Love, you, if you would become one with Him, must be filled with perfect unselfishness [Page 239] and love also." Truly, we are often quite eager to escape from weariness and suffering, but while in the earlier stages we desire to escape from these in order that we may enjoy peace and rest, later on we wish to get rid of these feelings of personal weariness and personal suffering, so that we may be free to help others to get rid of them too. This is the peace of the Master. He is able so wonderfully to help in bearing the burden of the world, because He no longer needs to bear that burden Himself. It may be that, if He wished, He could cut Himself off entirely from the world, having gained liberation. But we are told that if a Master were to do this, He could only be free for a certain time, that, sooner or later, He must return to share the world's burden. For there is the one great Unity which binds us all together, and we must grow together through pain into joy. As a matter of fact, of course, while those who have reached the level of the Master are at liberty, if They so choose, to take a long period of rest, They deliberately renounce that rest because of Their love for the world. And you must not forget — I do not hesitate to repeat this over and over again — that this beautiful love for the world has grown out of Their unselfish love in the past for an individual or for a few.

THE EVIL OF GOSSIP

The Master makes a suggestion to us with regard to the way in which we may gradually translate our [Page 240] love for the one into a love for the many. It is obvious that, with regard to anyone we love, we should be always trying to help them in every way, as well as taking care *never* to do them any harm. And these two aspects of love must not be confined to the individual, but must dominate our attitude with regard to the outside world. So far as the duty of doing no harm is concerned, the Master gives three examples of doing harm which are very common. First, gossip. "See what gossip does. It begins with evil thought, and that in itself is a crime. For in every one and in everything there is good; in every one and in everything there is evil. Either of these we can strengthen by thinking of it, and in this way we can help or hinder evolution; we can do the will of the Logos or we can resist Him. "Obviously, we cannot have evil thoughts with regard to anyone we love, but we often have evil thoughts with regard to other people, and we must try to think of the way in which we truly love the one, so that we may reproduce the features of that love in our attitude towards the many. "In every one and in everything", as the Master says, "there is good", and if we think of the good in an individual we strengthen the good in him, while if we think of the weakness, we strengthen that weakness. Try to imagine that good and weakness are continually struggling within a man's nature, each trying to elbow the other out of the way. What we have to do is to try to make good so strong that it gradually edges the weakness right out of the individual's [Page 241] nature altogether. The good in a man thus becomes so big that there is no room left for weakness, and we make the good part of a man's nature bigger and bigger as we think about it. I have noticed this, particularly in the case of Mrs. Besant. People sometimes say that she is very easily deceived because she always idealises people. I believe it to be true that she sometimes is deceived, although I have a shrewd suspicion that she is quite aware of the extent to which she is being deceived. But I am quite clear that the fact that she does idealise people helps those people enormously, for in the process of idealising them she is strengthening all that is best in them. It is as if she were pouring her force into the better nature of those with whom she comes into contact so that it gradually pushes the weaknesses out of the way. No doubt the weaknesses come back, because the man's own nature is not yet strong enough to give them their permanent *congé*. But their power has been broken, and, if only the individual would take advantage of this fact, it will not be so difficult for him to complete the ascendancy of his higher nature. The fact that Mrs. Besant idealises people forces them to show the better side of their natures, at least while they are with her. This tendency begets a habit, and if an individual really means business this little beginning of a habit is of enormous importance to him.

That which Mrs. Besant does on a very big scale, we can do on a smaller scale. If an individual is to be trustworthy, we must begin by trusting him. [Page 242] Trust needs two people, one to trust, the other to be trusted. We must do our share with regard to others and trust them to the very greatest possible extent, because in so doing we strengthen in them their power to be trustworthy. The Master points out that if we think of the evil in another, we not only intensify evil in our neighbourhood, but we strengthen the evil in the individual about whom we are thinking, and create within ourselves a greater capacity for evil thought. It very often happens, of course, that the evil we think does not in reality exist, and then our imagination is a temptation in the way of the individual about whom we have thought wrongly. As the Master says: "Your wicked thought tempts your brother to do wrong, for if he is not yet perfect you may make him that which you have thought him". Thus, if we gossip about people it is evident that we are filling our neighbourhood with evil thought and so, as the Master points out: "you are adding to the sorrow of the world".

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The Master explains that, in addition to thinking evil things, whether in reality they exist or not, " the gossip tries with all his might to make other men partners in his crime". It is curious how people enjoy meeting together to talk over the defects of others, entirely oblivious, it would seem, of the fact that there are other people elsewhere meeting together and talking over their defects also ! You must not imagine that others spare you if you do not spare them. So, if you have been gossiping unkindly about, other people, the next time you walk through [Page 243] the streets and meet your friends, just remember that they may have been saying all kinds of cruel things about you, as you have been saying all kinds of cruel things about them. I have not much time myself for gossip, but I have gossiped a good deal in the past, and when I began to consider the evil of it, I used, deliberately, after having fallen into a little period of gossip, to imagine the various friends whom I met to have been also indulging in the same failing. No doubt I ought not to have imagined this about them, but there was one advantage about it, namely, that it made me very uncomfortable, for I began to wonder what kind of things they said about me, and then whether, perhaps, after all, those things might not be true ! Then I determined that in my own nature I would try to avoid giving any foundation for such gossip, and so, by degrees, I found a disinclination within me to gossip about other people. The best way to avoid gossip is to have no time for it. It is only lazy people who gossip, and if you occupy yourself with healthy work and with healthy amusements, you will not care for gossip. "Never speak ill of anyone; refuse to listen when anyone else speaks ill of another, but gently say: 'Perhaps this is not true, and even if it is, it is kinder not to speak of it.' " [Page 244]

CHAPTER XX

SINS AGAINST LOVE

THE second sin to which the Master refers is the sin of cruelty, and he divides cruelty into intentional and unintentional cruelty. As regards the former, one can hardly imagine, as the Master says, that anyone could be deliberately cruel to any living thing, but you will remember, nevertheless, that in olden times there was the Spanish Inquisition, under which people were tortured because their consciences did not agree with those of their torturers. You must also know that there are people in the world who deliberately give pain both to human beings and to animals in order that they may try to find out the source and cure of various diseases. And, as the Master says, many schoolmasters deliberately give pain to their pupils. I wonder to myself whether it is possible to say of these people that, behind the deliberate cruelty, there is a good intention. In some obscure sort of way there may possibly be a good motive behind the cruelty, but it is so ignorant and so distorted a motive that there can be only an infinitesimal amount of good connected with it. I should not like to say that inquisitors and vivisectors and schoolmasters are wholly bad when they commit [Page 245] acts of deliberate cruelty. Rather are they at so low a stage of moral evolution that they are only to a limited extent responsible for their actions. But the actions being so vile, the reaction of them is, as we know, a terrible one, and if they know in their hearts that they ought not to do such things, then their karma is indeed heavy. As the Master points out, it is useless to say that such and such a practice is the custom: "A crime does not cease to be a crime because many commit it". I know that because there is the halo of custom surrounding these brutalities we are apt to try to excuse them. After all, we say, with regard to the vivisector, at least he is trying to benefit mankind. But it is a selfish mankind that is willing to benefit from the suffering of others. Mankind has no right to inflict suffering on others in the vain hope that health and happiness may come to itself.

VIVISECTION

You may be told that certain discoveries in vivisection have resulted in securing definite immunity from a particular disease. To that I always reply that however much you may stop up one avenue there must always be another avenue for the working out of karma if karma remains. The dirt that you prevent coming out from one pore of the skin must find its way out through another. What the vivisector cannot prove is that, though one form of disease may be less frequent, disease as a whole is also less [Page 246] frequent. We have our scourges in one form or another as much as people had them in bygone centuries. And even though some diseases have disappeared there are new diseases which have taken their place; perhaps, indeed, they may be the old diseases with new names. Be that as it may be, the question is a question of morality and duty. Even *if* the torture of an animal could give mankind release from suffering, mankind can have no right to excuse such torture. If the animal voluntarily chooses to inflict upon itself the torture, that may be another matter; but so far as I am aware, animals are not consulted before they are vivisected. I do not want to put the matter in the shape of a question as to whether we really gain the benefit we are supposed to gain. We do not want to gain so-called benefits in that way. We would rather have our diseases than ruthlessly compel animals vicariously to suffer on our behalf. The giving of pain is one of the great sources of karma: the more pain we give to animals, the more our karma binds us to this world of sorrow and whatever conditions of health we may think we derive from the infliction of torture, these are overwhelmingly outbalanced by the diseases and sorrows which will surround us from that very infliction of torture.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

As regards schoolmasters, there again the argument is that it is the custom. "Spare the rod and spoil [Page 247] the child", is the hackneyed phrase. If you and I are to try to follow the Master we must free ourselves from those dark glasses of superstition with which the average individual veils realities from his eyes. Many people will tell you how much better they are for the fact that when they were children corporal punishment was administered to them. I always reply to such people that we do not know how much better they might be than they are, had their teachers and parents refrained from administering corporal punishment to them. The argument is, of course, silly. The infliction of pain merely has the result of evoking fear. We are told that sensible discipline, of which corporal punishment forms a part, hardens the nature. It is from that very hardening of the nature that the world is suffering at the present time. We do not want to harden the nature; we want to soften it and make it sensitive; we want to make it capable of far deeper sympathy than it is capable of expressing at present. Blows may possibly steel a man's heart to indifference as to the results and effects of competition with his fellow-man, but we ought to-day to have passed the stage of callousness; we ought at least to be beginning our entry into the stage of cooperation. We do not beat flowers in order to make them grow more beautiful: on the contrary, the more we surround them with tenderness the more beautiful they become. A child is also a flower, a more beautiful flower even than those forms of life which we call flowers. Corporal punishment can very rarely be administered without anger. It may be so [Page 248] administered in exceedingly rare cases, but we cannot allow teachers as a whole to inflict corporal punishment simply because a few people may be able to administer it without suffering from excess of emotion. I say deliberately that the average teacher cannot avoid a trace of anger while he is caning his pupil, and such trace tends to infuse into the punishment the vulgarity of a personal quarrel. In many countries corporal punishment is seen to be unwise and it has accordingly been abolished. In England and in India, unfortunately, the old procedure still remains; but we are doing our best to get rid of it and to give the young child an opportunity to grow as the flower itself grows.

SOME FORMS OF TORTURE

As for the Inquisition, we do not now, as a rule, inflict personal torture on those whose consciences are at variance with our own. I say, "as a rule", because, during the present war, a certain number of people have had truly conscientious objections to military service and have been subjected to iniquities which remind us of those which stained the Inquisition of the Middle Ages. Perhaps this is to be expected when the whole world is angry and the brutality of fighting has gained undisputed sway over the minds of men, and these conscientious objectors are such martyrs as were the early Christians in Rome, or those who endured suffering at the hands of the Inquisitors for the sake of their faith. [Page 249]

We have added to the list of tortures many forms which were unknown in the earlier days. For instance, there is the torture which the orthodox inflict on the unorthodox — a torture which often takes the form of cruel ostracism. There is the torture of contemptuous superiority which many rich people inflict upon the poor. There is the torture which men inflict upon women when they proudly think that only those of the male sex can understand how to govern a country. There is the torture which the people of one faith inflict upon the people of another faith, as, for example, the attitude of the Christian missionary to faiths other than his own. Then, as the Master tells us, there are those who go out intentionally to kill animals and "call it 'sport'" In some cases, no doubt, the intention may be good, but intentions do not always alter facts, and it is no excuse for cruelty to say that it was committed with a good motive. You and I must

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continually judge for ourselves, and must not be content with the customary judgment which the average individual accepts. Many people take their opinions ready-made. Most people hardly bother to think for themselves at all. They are surrounded by certain definite thought-forms; they live in those thought-forms, and very often imagine that they themselves are thinking them. All too often when some one says "I think" he ought to be saying, "I have fallen into the clutches of a thought-form and the opinion I am expressing is the result ". [Page 250]

KARMA DISREGARDS CUSTOM

You will recollect that in an earlier part of *At the Feet of the Master* we are told to realise very clearly that ourselves and our bodies are separate. We must also understand that because a thought comes into our minds it does not follow that we have thought it. It does not follow that because we live in a house, *therefore* we have built it with our own hands. We may speak of "our house" ; it may be "our house" because we have made it our house, but it is not our house in the sense that we have created it unless, possibly, we have designed it for ourselves. The Master warns us that "Karma takes no account of custom"; also karma takes no account of the fact that, in reality, we are mainly occupied with soaking in other people's thought-forms, and in giving them out as our own. We *have* to learn to think for ourselves and, above all, not to accept an idea, or a belief, or an opinion, because it makes life easier for us if we accept it. Of course, it is always easier to travel at the same rate at which the stream is flowing. But you and I are people who intend to get on a little faster, and who must be willing, therefore, bravely to endure the curious phenomenon of a stream which, though actually moving in the same direction as ourselves, seems as if it were opposing our progress. However fast the stream may be moving, if you are moving faster than the rate at which it is moving, it appears as if the water were flowing in a direction opposite to that in which you are [Page 251] going. In many cases people oppose you, not because they themselves are not evolving, but simply because you are evolving more rapidly than they; their rate is slower than your rate and therefore seems to be opposed to your own movements. We *must* think for ourselves, and accept nothing which our own judgment, made as independent as we can make it, fully and unhesitatingly accepts. Persecution is, of course, the inevitable result; but, as we know, the blood of the martyrs — whether physical, emotional or mental blood — is the foundation of the church that is to be.

The Master reminds us that when opportunity offers we must have the courage to speak against these cruelties, however much other people may believe in them. The time has now come when certain of these cruelties should cease to exist, and the only way they can be destroyed is for those of us who realise their valuelessness to proclaim the truth of which they are the distortions, the truth which is to take the place of the evil. Those of us who are trying to follow the Master must remember that we have the duty of proclaiming the truths we know, at whatever personal risk, or, at least, of proclaiming such truths as, in our judgment, the world is ripe for. So much for intentional cruelty.

UNINTENTIONAL CRUELTY

We are also told, however, to be on our guard against unintentional cruelty. As the Master tells [Page 252] us, people are often so full of thoughts about themselves that they do not think sometimes of the pain which, no doubt thoughtlessly, they inflict upon others. The Master gives various examples of this, which you would do well to study and think about. Remember that long after you have forgotten your unintentional act of cruelty, its result may still be lingering in the individual upon whom you have inflicted

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the pain. A careless word, a look of indifference, apparently studied neglect, without any deliberateness behind any of them, may often be the cause of many hours, and possibly days, of suffering to those whom you have so treated. No doubt it is true, as the Master tells us in an earlier part of the book, that these people should remember that we may not have been thinking about them at all. But that is these people's business; *our* business is to be careful and not careless. This means that we must always be deliberate in what we do, in what we say, in what we think. We are all of us more or less careless, and in our ignorance we often cause unintentional cruelty.

When we realise the importance of giving as little pain as possible, we shall try to gain control over our various bodies — physical, emotional, mental. We may forget, but, as the Master says: "Karma never forgets, and it takes no account of the fact that men forget". To those of us who want favours for nothing, karma may seem very cruel; but a dirty wall does not become clean simply because a coat of whitewash is spread over it; sooner or later the dirt begins to show [Page 253] through, and if we then give another coat of whitewash, it is only a question of time for the dirt to show through again. If karma were to forget, we should go on forgetting too; we should go on forgetting our unintentional cruelties, and out of the forgetfulness would come the idea that we had never committed the cruelties. Were karma to forget, we should never learn. So, indeed, the memory of karma is the greatest of its blessings, for it obliges us to remember too, and so at last to learn the lesson and to profit from its strength-giving power.

"If you wish to enter the Path, you must think of the consequences of what you do, lest you should be guilty of thoughtless cruelty", says the Master, and while I know how difficult it is to think of the consequences of what we do, nevertheless that is the lesson we have to be continually learning. It is a hard lesson, but a very necessary lesson. After a time, when we have truly learned to think of the consequences of what we do, we shall see that only kind and helpful actions are worth doing. In other words, we shall see that the service of others means the greatest happiness for ourselves, and that is the lesson the Path is continually impressing upon us. [Page 254]

CHAPTER XXI

TESTS OF LOVE

THE remarks of the Master with regard to superstition are of extreme importance at the present time. We must always remember that in looking forward to the coming of the great World Teacher we are looking forward to the advent of One who will usher in a New Age to replace the Old Age outworn. Even in the midst of this great War, indeed, because we are in the midst of this great War, we are taking stock of the kind of life we habitually lead. We are learning the lesson the Master indicated in an earlier part of the book, when He said that "karma takes no account of custom". We are finding that there is a far deeper truth in the legal maxim that ignorance of the law is no excuse for its breach, than we have hitherto been willing to recognise. Ignorance and indifference are seen to be fatal defects. The War has taught us this lesson. The War has taught us that the life of every citizen, however humble, is valuable to the State, and that we may neither be ignorant of, nor indifferent to, the kind of life he leads, lest we imperil the welfare of the community. We have discovered that innumerable customs which, hitherto, have seemed to have little harm in them, [Page 255] are, in fact, seen to be injurious when brought against the background of a great emergency. We are beginning to realise that it will no longer do to allow riches and poverty to dwell side by side, with the poor hating the luxury of the rich, with the rich contemptuous of the struggles of the poor. It may take us long to work out the nature of the true relation between the two but at last we are up against the problem, for in the agony of the nation the poor have proved to be no less its comforters than the rich. We are beginning to see that the reign of brute force must cease, and with it the superstition that women are inferior to men. In the nation's agony we have seen its women to be indispensable, and we are forced to the conclusion that there must be equality of citizenship since the State demands from each an appropriate service. The destinies of the State are in the hands of its men, women and children, and the elders must together determine the conditions under which the nation's youth shall grow to their maturity. Further, we are beginning to realise that difference of religious belief does not deny an identity of goal, that difference of colour does not mean difference of quality. In a word, we are, by degrees, shaking off certain superstitions which now stand between us and a realisation of the common brotherhood of mankind. The very word "superstition" suggests both that we are still dominated by, and that we should be standing above, these lower stages of the ladder of evolution which we are so slowly climbing. [Page 256]

SUPERSTITION INVOLVING CRUELTY

For you and me, however, as would-be apprentices in the Master's training school for world-servers, there must be an even keener discrimination between the essential and the non-essential. If we desire to learn to lead, we must not allow ourselves to be lost in the crowd: we must make our way through, so that the crowd may see us. The Master specially draws attention, as you will notice, to the superstitions which involve cruelty. All superstitions involve more or less cruelty, but there are certain superstitions which we ought to be able to get rid of at once. The superstition that woman is not the equal of man involves very definite cruelty to the State, and we must work against it, even though we cannot abolish it all at once. Further, the cruelty of sacrificing animals in the course of religious ceremonies, and "the still more cruel superstition that man needs flesh for food", are superstitions that we can deal with individually. No doubt it is customary in certain parts of India for animals to be sacrificed during the course of religious ceremonies. It is customary in many parts of the world for people to eat meat. But those who are trying to avoid being blinded by custom will endeavour to look each habit in the face in order to judge for themselves whether or not the habit is right for them. You will remember how the

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Master said that "though a thousand men agree upon a subject, if they know nothing about that subject their opinion is of no value". [Page 257] Millions of men agree that meat eating is reasonable, and possibly necessary. But you and I must ask ourselves the question: "/s it?" Never mind whether it is necessary or reasonable for other people; our business for the moment is to decide whether it is necessary or reasonable for us. From the Master's instructions on the subject, we know that it is not.

ATTENTION TO PRINCIPLES

As I write these words I am thinking of the hundred and one arguments people will use to excuse their inattention to the Master's directions. Most people wish to become apprentices in the Master's school, and at the same time to avoid all training. They want to become athletes without undergoing even any physical discipline, and they are silly enough to imagine that because they can find excuses for not going through the discipline, the results will be the same as if they had trained themselves and had observed the discipline. They will tell you that vegetarianism is all very well for people whose circumstances permit them to be vegetarians, but there are occasions under which it is wiser, and perhaps better for the sake of the work, to follow the ordinary custom. Now I do not for a moment deny that there are critical periods during which it may be necessary to follow custom. I have heard Mrs. Besant say that however averse an individual may be to vaccination, [Page 258] he should not allow a very wise aversion to prevent him from doing his duty to his country in her time of urgent need. If the authorities insist on vaccination, he had better allow them to vaccinate him. There are, in other words, supreme moments when one has to sacrifice one's own individual preparation, and even certain lesser principles, which the world is still too young to understand, for the sake of the common good, and for the preservation of greater principles; and one must gladly face the possible disadvantages accruing from the neglect of certain principles of life in order that one may be free to fit in with the plan the country has made for her protection. The lower kingdoms themselves may have to submit to temporary trouble and unhappiness for the sake of the maintenance of essential principles which can, at the time, be preserved only in ways the world understands and trusts.

But generally times are comparatively normal. It is, as a general rule, best that the individual should live as pure an individual life as possible. It is only during supreme happenings that he has to merge his individuality and his individual principles into the common whole. Certainly when the War is over, each one of us who aspires to be an apprentice *must* endeavour to show to the world how an individual life should be lived. Those who still take part in religious ceremonies, either because they need them or because their example is necessary for the weaker brethren, should set themselves resolutely in all possible ways against participation in, or encouragement of, sacrificial [Page 259] rites. Also, they should be vegetarians. No doubt it is very inconvenient to be a vegetarian. People often say that it shuts them off from the amenities of life, that it makes them a nuisance to their hosts. That is possible. But, surely, we have no right to inflict suffering on some of our friends in order to avoid inconvenience to others. It would, no doubt, be very annoying to cannibal hosts if we were regretfully to express our inability to eat human flesh, especially if no other dish were provided. But a man must have certain principles of conduct, and if we would be apprentices of the Master we must have principles of conduct just a stage in advance of those by which the world guides itself. We know that within a comparatively short time the whole world will be vegetarian (see *Man : Whence, How and Whither*), and it would be well for us to have the privilege of leading the way, realising that leadership invariably involves sacrifice. There are a number of foolish people who will tell you that vegetarians should not eat vegetables because they are lining things. It is curious how people, who have no special principle in the matter at all, want to push others to

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extremes in matters of principle. Having no principles themselves, they insist upon our carrying our principles to impossible conclusions. With regard to this, the sensible attitude is to support your life with the help of that life which is the least sentient. It might be *better* if we could eat rocks since these are less sentient than vegetables, but rocks have not hitherto proved [Page 260] sufficiently sustaining, and we are compelled, therefore, to go one step higher. I know that plants are sentient things, but their sentience is of a far different kind from the sentience of animals.

THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

The Master then refers to India, and animadverts on "the treatment which superstition has meted out to the depressed classes in our beloved India". He observes: "See in that how this evil quality can breed heartless cruelty even among those who know the duty of brotherhood". Those of you who know little about India cannot be aware that, from the occult standpoint, much of India's suffering is directly attributable to her own treatment of those of her own people who are outside the pale of caste. She has treated them as "untouchables", and yet has not scrupled to take the lowest of services from them. In other words, while scorning them she has used them. Such an attitude is one of the greatest crimes against the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. But remember that every country has its depressed classes — those who are oppressed by power in all its forms. Everywhere the poor are depressed. All this is due to the fact that in our present-day civilisation there survives the spirit of brute force. The man rules because he is physically the stronger, and for no other reason whatever. The result has been the depressed classes. Were woman associated with man, the problem of the depressed classes would soon [Page 261] disappear. Only, while woman herself forms a depressed class, nothing can be done. Personally, I feel that if we would tackle the question of the depressed classes, we must first recognise that we cannot do without the equal counsel of woman. One of two courses is open. Either men will have the sense to recognise that brute force is played out, and that true government is impossible without the cooperation of women; or efforts will be made to keep women out of their duty to society. If the later course is persisted in, the world is in for another period of terrible suffering, because woman suffrage does not rest on the basis of justice to women but on the basis of justice to the State. It is not merely that women have a right to the vote; they have a duty to vote. We must face these things clearly, freeing ourselves from superstition.

The Master says: "Many crimes have men committed in the name of the God of Love, moved by this nightmare of superstition; be very careful therefore that no slightest trace of it remains in you". When you read that sentence, think of the Inquisition; think of the evils in your locality thriving under the supposed sanction of habit, of custom, of necessity. Think of the various cruel things that people do on the plea that it is impossible to avoid! them. You will remember what the Master has said about vivisection and about schoolmasters who cane their pupils. Then say to yourself that you will avoid all the cruelty that it is possible for you to avoid, and you will see that there is very much to be [Page 262] got rid of. The position is summed up very beautifully by the Master when he tells us to avoid sinning against love. That really is the whole point. We are often tempted to think that cruelty to the larger self is inevitable for the preservation of the smaller. We think that we must live at other people's expense — I mean, at the cost of other people's suffering. Such an attitude is the result of the elevation of the individual as the supreme object of worship. We must remember, however, that the family is the unit of our life, and not the individual; and that our task is, living as far as we can a life of love in the smaller surroundings, gradually to learn to expand it through the nation as a whole.

INTENSE DESIRE OF SERVICE

"You must be active in doing good", says the Master. "You must be so filled with the intense desire of service that you are ever on the watch to render it to all around you — not to man alone, but even to animals and plants. You must render it in small things every day, that the habit may be formed, so that you may not miss the rare opportunity when the great thing offers itself to be done. For if you yearn to be one with God, it is not for your own sake; it is that you may be a channel through which His love may flow to reach your fellow-men". I think you would all do well to copy out this passage and to hang it in front of your bed, so that you may be able to see it [Page 263] when you get up in the morning. In the words "intense desire of service", is to be found the most powerful qualification for admission to the Master's training school. The keener the intensity, the surer the admission, and one who, as it were, palpitates with an intensity of desire of service and who is, on that account, ready to go anywhere and do anything, is on the threshold of admission. That very eagerness is the force the Master will be able to use in helping the world, and it will also be the means of helping his pupil to turn away from all the weaknesses which hinder both his own progress and his usefulness in the world. You know how it is often said that to get rid of a weakness it is necessary to have some object strong enough to attract away the attention from the weakness. Attention is the food on which thrive both qualities and weaknesses. If you would get rid of a weakness strive to starve it by depriving it of attention. If you would strengthen a quality, feed it with attention. I believe that, from the Master's standpoint, it is not so much a question as to whether an individual is free from defects, as to whether he has some dominant note strong enough, in the long run, at least, to concentrate attention on itself at the expense of his weaknesses. If I may be allowed a personal illustration, I would say that such self-control as I may possess is, in great measure, due to an overwhelming interest in the science of education. I have an intense desire in some future life to become a great teacher and a great authority on the principles and [Page 264] methods of education. I know that certain weaknesses I possess stand in the way of the consummation of my hopes. I play with my weaknesses less than I otherwise might do, because my desire to become a true teacher demands so much attention-food that there is not so much to spare for the weaknesses, and they have, therefore, to go more or less without; thus they will starve and finally die. If you have a great and uplifting desire, it will demand attention-food. The stronger it is, the more food it will demand, and since you have only a certain amount of food at your disposal in the shape of attention, you must necessarily starve something, and you will starve your weaknesses because self-preservation — using the word "self" in the sense of "Higher Self" — demands that the weaknesses shall go to the wall. [Page 265]

CHAPTER XXII

THE GROWTH OF LOVE

THE Master wants us to be positive and not negative. He wishes us ever to be filled with that outrushing force of love which expresses itself in "the intense desire to serve". I wonder whether you have seen the beautiful motto Mrs. Besant gave to the Theosophical Society's Order of Service. She said that the Order should be "a union of all who love in the service of all who suffer"; and if you were to go into her room in the Headquarters at Adyar, you would see this motto in front of her desk. Only the other day she told me she thought it was one of the most useful mottoes to have about, for it sums up the spirit in which we should live. You must, however, remember that in the words "all who suffer" are included all living things, not merely human beings. As the Master says, you must be "ever on the watch to render it [service] to all around you — not to man alone, but even to animals and plants". There is far too deep a cleavage in the modern world between the human and the lower kingdoms. We are over eager to unite ourselves with the higher, and often imagine that it is possible to reach the higher by standing upon the lower. [Page 266] We think of our own progress, of our own personal evolution, as if these could be accomplished independently of the rest of the world. We think that if we avoid offending, according to the worldly standpoint, certain moral laws, that each inevitable wrong-doing will be forgiven, and that if we are respectful to God. He will be generous to us, I am not for the moment saying that this attitude is not a necessary stage of evolution. The idea of personal salvation has its place in our upward growth, for it helps us to realise ourselves, and we cannot realise the larger unity outside us until, to a very considerable extent, we have realised ourselves as individuals. This is the value of competition and of many other forms of individualised growth and activity which, from certain points of view, seem so revolting. But the world is growing out of competition. The great War of 1914 sounded the death-knell of competition and heralded the advent of brotherhood. We who belong to the new age must live the teachings of the new age. We must try to understand that the process of evolution is the gradual expansion of our capacity to love. There are some who love but themselves, and although the world has reached the stage when it can call such love selfish, it must be remembered that love of humanity must begin in the little home of the individual self. Some love their families. This is a more expanded form of love. Others may love the community to which they belong. Others may love their nation. All these are stages, and the greater includes the less. [Page 267] Finally, there are the great lovers of humanity, who love the whole world because all is an expression of God. But the lovers of humanity are the better patriots for the wider love they possess. The patriot is a better lover of his community than the individual whose affection does not go beyond the particular class to which he belongs. And so downwards. The Master, who loves the whole world, loves the individual all the more; He does not ignore the individual as being lost in the wider love. I lay stress on this lest people should think, as it is inevitable they should think, that a love for the whole world is something cold and unattractive. They imagine that such an individual has done with his family, pays no more attention to it, ceases to be a loving member of it, that he has been through the earlier stages of the growth of his love. It is true that those in whom the love of humanity consciously begins for the first time tend to forget the smaller in the enthusiasm they feel for the larger. It is quite natural. A child will throw away an old toy for one newer and more beautiful. As he grows older, especially when he grows quite old, even the earliest toys of childhood will once again become dear to him. And so it is that while we see in the world the curious anomaly of people who love the whole world often neglecting their immediate families, this does not mean that love for the world inevitably involves the abandonment of all lesser affections. The temporary abandonment is merely due to temporary lack of power of adjusting. Take, for example, the case of Jean Jacques Rousseau. [Page 268] History tells us that he utterly neglected his own children. Yet he wrote *Emile*, in many ways a wonderful exposition of the way in which children should be trained. The more shallow-minded would say that *Emile*

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is valueless, because he contradicted in his own life the theories which he expounded in his writings. The fact is that Rousseau was at an earlier stage of a larger love. In trying to grasp the bigger principles, he temporarily let go of the lesser ones. In the course of a few lives, Rousseau will realise that the love of the whole is based on the love of its component parts and that all his theories will not be really true until he applies them in everyday life.

THE NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING

We thus see how complicated evolution is, and above all do we realise how little cause or reason we have to judge others. The conduct of other people very often strikes us as unwise or wrong, and we rush into criticism. The criticism would not much matter if we did it as a warning to ourselves, but we generally make criticism a stick with which to beat those whom we criticise. Yet we are not true psychologists. As the Master says: "Never attribute motives to another; only his Master knows his faults, and he may be acting from reasons which have never entered your mind". Every individual is a mass of enormously complicated machinery. We find it difficult enough to understand [Page 269] ourselves. It is impossible to understand other people; all we can do is to try to sympathise with them and to help them. The Master brought this out very clearly when He said: "Each soul has its own troubles and its thoughts turn chiefly around itself". It is true, I think, to say that, even when we feel most condemnatory of another, there are sure to be extenuating and explanatory circumstances of which we know nothing at all. A little, insignificant attitude at any particular moment may, looked at by itself, give rise in our minds to criticism, but it is probable that this little attitude has causes, possibly in the remote past, of which we can have no conception. I have no space to give illustrations of this, but you will probably be able to work them out for yourselves. At all events, it would be well for you to remember quite clearly that every time you criticise or think unkindly, you are almost certain to be unjust.

And if we are unjust to those who belong to the same kingdom as ourselves, how much more unjust shall we not be to those members of God's family whom it is still more difficult to understand. The apparent helplessness of animals and plants has led us to take advantage of them and to imagine that because they are helpless, therefore we have the right to do what we like with them. This attitude is a reflection of the individualistic spirit which has for so many years been so dominant in many parts of the world. "The weakest to the wall" has been the principle of conduct of large numbers of people, and animals and plants have correspondingly suffered. [Page 270] We who aspire to be servants of the Masters must remember that God loves equally every kingdom in His divine empire. The time will come when the animal and the plant will once more be friendly to the human being. As it is, the animals generally know who, among those of the human kingdom, appreciate and love them. But the general ill-treatment of the animal kingdom has created the gulf between human beings and animals, and the habitual attitude of the animal must necessarily be one of distrust towards his undutiful elder brother. But as the spirit of brotherhood begins to permeate the human kingdom, we may hope that it will bridge this gulf and draw the warring kingdoms into an alliance similar to that which exists between the superhuman and the human kingdoms.

It is the same with plants. Many of you must have remarked that flowers and trees are attracted towards certain individuals. Plants grow the better under the hands of those who love them, and I have often noticed how long plants live, and how happy they seem when in the immediate vicinity of Mrs Besant. People sometimes give Mrs Besant flowers, and when she wears them on her dress they often last for a very long time. In other words, they have found a home and are happy in the home. Some day the world

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will indeed be beautiful, for some day there shall be a loving co-operation between all the various kingdoms of Nature, in which the elder shall do its duty to the younger and in which the younger shall act in loving co-operation with the elder. [Page 271]

CHAPTER XXIII

LOVE AND SERVICE

As the Master points out, love and service are really identical and interchangeable terms. If we love God, we yearn to be one with Him, but, as the Master says: "If you yearn to be one with God, it is not for your own sake; it is that you may be a channel through which His love may flow to reach your fellow-men". That is why the Master tells us that we must love, and therefore serve, all that is in the world — men, animals and plants. Indeed, we must serve minerals too, though the idea seems somewhat far-fetched. But all who truly love Nature are well aware of the wonderful lesson the mineral kingdom teaches us. That minerals are living things we are now well aware, through the researches of that great Indian scientist, Sir J. C. Bose, but all who have an eye for Nature know the effect a beautiful landscape has upon human beings. The grandeur of mountain scenery impresses itself upon the individual soul and makes the lover of nature feel the unity to a very marked degree. The Power of God becomes deeply manifest in the rugged results of great upheavals, and the relentless sea speaks of His inexorable Law. To use a phrase of Professor James, [Page 272] the voice of life's eternal meaning "speaks through every kingdom of Nature", and our business is to develop through love and service the power to hear God's message in the various stages of development of His all-pervading Love.

THE LIVING UNITY

Those who have been privileged to pass through the first of the great Initiations are to a certain extent aware of the living unity. They are able to merge themselves, at least for the time, in the external, and in so losing themselves they gain a feeble glimpse of the image of God. One who has passed through this experience says:

I cannot quite explain to you the nature of the experience I went through on the buddhic plane, but I can tell you of its after effects when I returned to what we call the waking consciousness. When I woke, I was full of a feeling of being self-merged in the external, as if I had been distributed in nature around me and that, therefore, my consciousness lived in all around. Getting out of bed and going to my window, I looked down upon a beautiful lemon grove, the trees of which were ripe with lemons. As I looked, the centre of my consciousness seemed to spread, to expand, so that I was not only "I" but also the lemon grove, and the gardener who was at that moment engaged in plucking lemons. I seemed to have spread and to alternate between the external and myself. Now I felt myself to be the lemon grove, now I contracted into my ordinary self, and I realised that my task was so to live and love and serve that some day my consciousness should be spread in all around me with myself as but a centre. Curiously enough, so complete for the time being was the identification of myself with the lemon grove, [Page 273] that in the person of the tree I seemed to experience the slightest of twinges when my lemons were plucked from my branches. Somehow, it seemed a pity; it seemed as if I were being deprived of that which I had won the right to enjoy. I had brought the lemons into existence and they made me beautiful. They completed me, and there was the slightest of pain in being deprived of the fruit of my labour. Going back to myself, I knew that the tree need not be sorry, for its lemons were its love and its service. But I knew, too, that the tree could not be expected altogether to realise this. The question then arose in my mind as to whether it was fair to give the tree its pain. It came to me, however, that only thus could the

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tree learn its dharma, for trees have their dharma as have human beings, and the little minute of pain the tree suffered was well repaid by the gratitude of those who have learned to be thoughtful. This brought me to the point that we should help the lower kingdoms of Nature far more than we do, were we to be more deliberately thoughtful of them than we are. An act of homage to the lemon tree on eating a lemon may sound in these modern days absurd, but, from the point of view of the tree, there is no absurdity at all. Who knows whether trees will not produce far better fruit than they do, and will be glad for the fruit to go, if they feel that the pain of separation is but a payment in advance for a more vigorous life fed by the gratitude of man ?

The writer pursues this theme into many bypaths, in the course of which he shows how, while sympathy begins with the reproduction of the feeling; sympathised with, true sympathy means the imparting of strength to endure. This, indeed, is what both love and service mean. It is not usually our business or our duty to bear other people's burdens, but it is our duty in the name of a common unity to share with them the strength which shall help them to bear their troubles bravely. [Page 274]

THE ESSENCE OF THE EXPERIENCE

The Master says: "He who is on the Path, exists not for himself, but for others; he has forgotten himself, in order that he may serve them". Note the phrase — "he has forgotten himself". I take this to mean that he has learned to merge himself in others. Only by merging himself in others will he know how to understand them. And this shows to us the value of experience, both bitter and sweet. It is not necessary to pass through all conceivable experiences, nor to sympathise individually with all the world; but it is necessary to have become acquainted with the essence of experience. We must have experienced the essential quality of experience, though by no means necessarily in all the various forms experience assumes. Experience teaches its lessons in various ways, according to the varying temperaments and conditions of human beings, as well as of other forms in which God has expressed Himself. When we have learned the lesson we have understood the process, and it will not be difficult for us to recognise the process through forms of experience through which we may not ourselves actually have passed. The actual experiences through which we have gone give us our individuality, while the essence of those experiences gives us our universality. A great sorrow may teach us what sorrow really is, no matter what the various forms of its expression. If we can take ourselves from "our sorrows" to "sorrow" the lesson has been learned, for, if through our sorrows we learn of sorrow, then we shall [Page 275] understand sorrow in all its forms, for it is the life that makes the form. So we must always try to reason from the individual to the general. When trouble comes to us, we would do well to communalize our feelings, and to say to ourselves that other kinds of trouble bring such feelings to other people. We would do well, too, to realise that all the little difficulties that we have to encounter, and all the excuses we make for ourselves, have their counterparts in the lives of other people. If I do some hurt to somebody, I am generally able to find an excuse or a reason. Similarly, if somebody hurts me, he, too, can find *his* excuse and *his* reason. Each of us can explain, and in the explanation we find either justification or, at least, mitigation. Indeed, the mitigating circumstances we always claim to exist in our own case exist equally in the case of other people. And we would do well to remember that the understanding we ask from others is an understanding we should in turn give to them. But misunderstanding others is as inevitable as to be misunderstood oneself, so, in other words, if we do not contribute to the total world's happiness such share as may be expected from us, we shall have great difficulty in receiving, in return, the share we ourselves need. Do you see what I mean ? If you want to be happy, you must first put happiness into the

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common stock and then draw it out. You cannot be happy independently. It is for this reason that *At the Feet of the Master* may be called a "gospel of happiness", for it is a gospel of love and service, and [Page 276] only as we love and serve do we become abidingly happy. You will have noticed that the Master says that those who are on the Path exist not for themselves, but for others. The indication of that fact will have been apparent in the words which I have quoted from one who himself is treading that Path. He exists for others because he has experienced the unity, and once that unity is experienced it cannot only never be forgotten, but in course of time must increasingly dominate the daily life. We are told that at a later stage the process is reversed; so that the individual draws everything into himself instead of feeling himself merged in the external. I need not, however, deal with this, as it is probable that the majority of my readers have yet to experience that first stage the nature of which I have already described.

"He is as a pen in the hand of God, through which His thought may flow, and find for itself an expression down here, which without a pen it could not have. Yet at the same time he is also a living plume of fire, raying out upon the world the Divine Love which fills his heart". In these magnificent phrases the Master shows how, while each one of us is a channel for the expression of the Master's force, we become at the same time an individual fountain for the water of life. Out of our expression of the unity come to the world the eternal principles of the Divine Life, while out of our individuality these Divine principles assume certain definite forms whereby they may be the more easily recognised by such individuals as naturally respond to the special [Page 277] forms through which we express the One Life. So we are useful in a twofold way. We can send out to the world both the formless and the form. Each one of us has his individual contribution to make to the world's happiness, as well as being able, to a certain extent at least, to send out an expression of general principles. Each one of us can be at least something to all the world, but, as individuals with a special line of activity, we can be very much to the few. [Page 278]

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

IN teaching her pupils, Mrs. Besant lays stress on the different kinds of training which we need for all-round development. If we are to tread the Path successfully, we must not merely utilise and develop our capacities, but we must also replace our weaknesses by strength. Under ordinary circumstances, an individual's duty is to pay special attention to the less developed aspects of his character, so that he may gradually attain that all-round perfection, so characteristic of Those who have reached the Adept level. He who is strong in will but weak in wisdom must, for example, strive to acquire wisdom. He who possesses knowledge but remains weak of character must so strengthen his will as to make good use of the knowledge he possesses. Similarly, with all other characteristics and qualities, the growing must strive in every possible way to acquire a balanced nature in which all qualities are at a certain definite level of expression, while definite weaknesses have entirely been replaced by strength. This is more or less what is meant by general development. It is of essential importance for young people, and might be expressed in ordinary terms by stating [Page 279] that there must be a good foundation of general knowledge before specialisation begins.

On the other hand, each individual has his own special contribution to make to the progress of the world. We are told that the great Hierarchy which rules us is divided into distinct branches of activity. There are roughly three main divisions — the ruling, the teaching, and the organising. In each of these divisions there are Master-Experts, specially trained for work in the divisions to which They belong. Each Master, if one may reverently say so, has not only acquired an all-round perfection, but has also developed His nature in accordance with the special dictates of His individual being. The music of the world is a harmony, not a single note. The very beauty of the harmony depends upon the many differences which constitute it, provided each separate note be in tone with the spirit of the co-ordinating harmony. Therefore, while each one of us needs to acquire an all-round development, specially strengthening the weaker parts of our nature, we must at the same time remember that, as individuals, we have, each one of us, a special message to give to our surroundings. Within the three great divisions — ruling, teaching, organising — there are many varieties of work, and no one should feel that he has no message to give. It may be that he has not yet given his message, that he is not yet ready to specialise, just as the child is not ready for specialisation. But some day he will know his work, and if he realises that he has special duties to perform, he will [Page 280] be on the watch for them, and so grow the more quickly. Many who read these pages may feel that they really do not know to which line they belong, nor to which special sub-division they belong. Let them keep in mind the fact that they truly have their own special place and special function in the world's service, and that in due course they will discover themselves. Each one of us will become a specialist, either in the near or in the distant future, and the more quickly we learn to modify our exaggerations, to replace our weaknesses by strength, and to bring the various constituents of our nature into harmonious relationship, the sooner shall we discover the special place God sends us into the world to occupy. I have no space to pursue this subject further, or I would suggest in detail how it seems to me the great divisions of activity express themselves in various ways. But I believe that if we look around us intelligently, we can begin to see into what divisions the people we know well are gradually sorting themselves. At first we shall be more often wrong than right, but with experience will come increasing accuracy of judgment. I would add as a final word on this subject that, if I have learned aright, the specialisation I have spoken of extends into the highest regions. I have heard that the dominant note of our own world, for example, is love, expressed in a certain specific way. I can imagine that the dominant note of some other world might be wisdom, while with yet another it might be will, and so on. Whether I am right or wrong, this field of study is [Page 281] exceedingly fascinating, and invaluable

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to those who have to deal with humanity either as statesmen or as teachers.

LOVE THE INSPIRER

In the last paragraph of *At the Feet of the Master*, the Master lays down the nature of the fundamental qualifications each one of us must develop. He tells us that we must gain wisdom, but not for ourselves, rather that we may be able to help. Then we must gain will, so as to direct our wise helpfulness through suitable channels of service. But there must also be love, for without love there can be no true will; while without the will to help there could be no force stimulating us in the pursuit of true wisdom. You notice how the Master makes love the inspiring element. Perhaps this is because the dominant note of this world is love. Having love, the will to serve must inevitably come. And with the will to serve must come a longing to serve helpfully, wisely. I might be asked how it is possible to acquire the quality of love for others. I am inclined to answer that one learns to love others by growing tired of loving oneself. One becomes weary of the smaller self, and turns with relief to the greater freedom of the larger self. Love for others comes from within, not from without. It cannot be imposed upon us. It is impossible to force a child to love other people. But the wise teacher stimulates in his pupils that fatigue which sooner or later arises from [Page 282] loving themselves alone. For some time, it is inevitable that we should care most for our own individual, small selves. It is not only inevitable, it is right; for we can only proceed to the wider from the narrower and we must begin with ourselves. Later on we begin to realise that real happiness depends far more upon our relations with our surroundings than upon the endeavour to get what we want for ourselves, indifferent that the satisfaction of our own desires may be bought at the expense of pain to others. But to realise this means gradual growth. We cannot achieve it all in a moment, and I would, therefore, repeat that the only way to stimulate the love for others is to encourage in all legitimate ways the weariness of loving oneself alone.

THE RESULT OF THE TEACHINGS

I have now come to the end of these studies, and I think that if I were asked to sum up what the results of the teachings should be for any individual, I should quote the two verses given at the end. I reproduce them here:

Waiting the word of the Master,
Watching the Hidden Light ;
Listening to catch His orders
In the very midst of the fight;

Seeing His slightest signal
Across the heads of the throng;
Hearing His faintest whisper
Above earth's loudest song.

[Page 283] The result of all true teaching is far more to produce right attitude than to fill the brain with

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details of knowledge. The best teaching is that which establishes on a firm basis a mind trained to know where to look for the needed knowledge, how to gain such an attitude as shall enable the individual not only to direct his knowledge wisely but, also, sympathetically to understand the thousand and one motives and circumstances which lie at the root of every individual existence. The teachings of the Master should help us to acquire an attitude of kindness and of eagerness to help, while both of these must be sufficiently genuine to make us willing to undertake the necessary training and the necessary sacrifices. It is an attitude which is expressed in the two verses I have quoted, the attitude of listening for the slightest indication as to conduct from Those who may be called the Perfect Servers.

The first verse indicates to us the need for humility, for realising how little in reality we know— however much the world may call us wise. If we would be truly helpful, therefore, we must be ever on the watch for hints from Those who possess the true knowledge. The last two lines of the first verse teach us the most important lesson that we must never lose sight of God's plan for men, however much we may be absorbed in our own individual lives. Our own lives are parts of God's Life, and we can only live our own lives truly when we strive to shape them, adapt them, mould them, to His. Mrs. Besant has often told us how in the background of her mind [Page 284] is always the thought of her Master, with the result that everything she does is influenced and coloured by that dominant thought. We, too, must similarly learn to keep our Master ever in our thoughts, because the Master represents in embodied form our highest selves, is the Messenger of God to our hearts. If we cannot yet think of any special Master, at least we can have the image of one of the earth's Great Helpers ever before us. There are a few living in our midst even now whom we might do well to enshrine in the sacred places of our being. Every one of us should be a hero-worshipper, whether of a hero of by-gone ages or of one living in the world to-day.

The second verse amplifies the first, and it would be well to learn these verses by heart, so that they may as frequently as possible come into our thoughts to remind us of the true motive that should be behind our thoughts, our feelings, our activity. The lines

Hearing His faintest whisper
Above earth's loudest song.

teach us that the lightest suggestion of the Master is of infinitely greater importance than the considered opinion of the world in which we live. Those who would be pupils of a Master must learn to judge for themselves, to think the thoughts the Master would wish them to think, to feel as He would wish them feel, to speak as He would have them speak, to act as He would have them act. Public opinion has its value, but the opinion of the Master is the purest truth for those who know, and above all for the occultist. On the other hand, we must take care not to be too lazy [Page 285] to think for ourselves. Laziness keeps large numbers of people from the feet of the Master, for either they want to be spoon-fed by their elders, and to receive and act on distinct orders as to every little detail of their lives, or they grovel before public opinion rather than take the trouble to stand up for themselves and, if necessary, to brave public opinion and suffer the consequences. No one can become the pupil of the Master who is not fully willing, indeed eager, to suffer in the cause of that which he believes to be the truth, however much he may thereby bring down upon himself the execration of his friends and surroundings.

I would specially warn you against the very common weakness of many good, but not spiritual, people, who go about telling others how they were told to do this and that, how they dreamed this dream, heard

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the voice of So and So, how Mrs. Besant or Mr. Leadbeater has specially advised this, approved that, recommended this course, endorsed such and such an interpretation of an astral or other experience. There are many such well-meaning persons in our circles, revolving placidly in theirs. Let them say what they will, but for yourselves remember Mr. Leadbeater's advice not to become the centre of your circle. People who act as I have described are really striving to persuade others that they are very important people. They seek praise by trying to strut about in garments alleged to have been made for them by personages greater than they. Apart from the fact that in nine cases out of ten their **[Page 286]** remarks are generally gross exaggerations of the little amount of truth which may possibly be in them, our business as apprentices in a Master's school is to prove ourselves by action, not by speech.

I hope that the Master's teachings are as precious to my readers as they are to me. We may read *At the Feet of the Master* many times, but we are only beginning to understand it if we find each time we read it afresh that we are learning something new. He who, having read *At the Feet of the Master*, does not long to read it again and again, has not yet understood its message.