

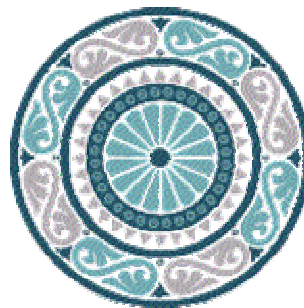


The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 0.4

Articles 2

The Spiritual Path



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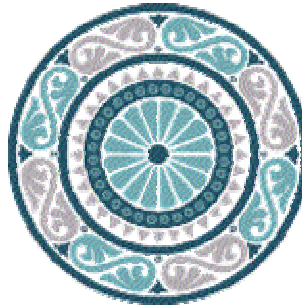
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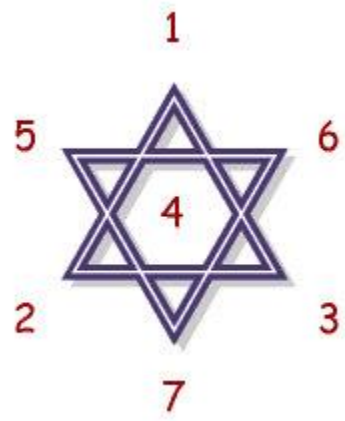
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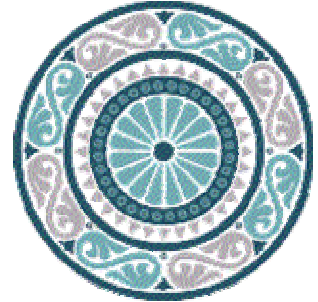
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Chapter 0.4

Articles 2



The Spiritual Path

The spiritual path refers to that part of evolution in consciousness that is undertaken more or less consciously and deliberately, as the student awakens gradually to the underlying metaphysical realities and commits himself or herself to conscious evolution. The real commitment is made by the soul, which then enlists the cooperation of its personality. The formal spiritual path begins with that (higher) commitment in the context of affiliation with some soul group. There are various paths of approach, in preparing the student for the formal path. The path itself consists of several stages, namely probation, discipleship, and initiation. All involves progressive self-mastery. All involves service to humanity.

The Spiritual Path

Discerning What is Real

Much of the publicity associated with the formal spiritual path is quite distorted and misleading, however well-intended it may be. It is personality-oriented and often provided by unqualified persons. Those who are qualified are generally impersonal (trans-personal, universal) in their focus and involved more in non-public activities.

Most of the people who are attracted to the formal path in this public context are drawn by the glamour of the path and by their own personal interests. They are attracted to the personalities involved, to the mystique of the path, and frequently for ego gratification through a feeling of being special (or superior) in some way. Some see the path as a way to solve personal problems and obtain the external things they desire. Others are kind-hearted but are only interested in dabbling. While aspiration and an interest in helping others may be present in many of these people, their expression of service is usually colored by self-focus and a sense of self-importance (self-deception).

The true attraction to the spiritual path comes from an inner soul prompting, from humility, quality of consciousness, valuing higher truth, a recognition of unity, and a sincere desire to serve God and humanity.

Part of treading the spiritual path involves developing the inner awareness and discrimination as to what is real and what is unreal (not truth, glamour, illusion). This is a continuing process as one is ever evolving and eventually recognizing higher, more inclusive truths and seeing through limiting and distorted concepts and ideas. Truth is relative. And truth is absolute.

Therefore discerning what is true about the spiritual path is part of the process of approaching the path itself. Interestingly, the majority of the people who think they are on the formal path, are not. And even those who are actually on the path frequently think of themselves as much farther along than they really are. Humility and impersonality are of vital importance in all spiritual

undertakings so as to enable the student to realize the truth and avoid self-deception. Actually, the place of the student is not really that important if he is relatively free from glamour (illusion on emotional levels) and illusion (distortion, untruth on mental levels) about himself and the path, for then he can work and serve effectively and be of use spiritually no matter what his position.

Just what is the formal spiritual path? It is the path of conscious, accelerated evolution in consciousness (and service) eventually leading to human perfection and liberation (after which evolution continues in other ways). The bulk of humanity evolves gradually towards human perfection (which is a relative perfection) but some souls choose to achieve in fewer lifetimes what would normally take many, many incarnations. It is the soul that makes the decision to tread the spiritual path, which then must seek the cooperation of the personality. That entails a major challenge of the path.

There is only one spiritual path, but within it there are endless differentiations, encompassing numerous methods. However, there are certain general requirements in consciousness and experience that all students must meet to achieve graduation or liberation.

The formal spiritual path has four stages: (1) the paths of approach, (2) the path of aspiration and the path of probation, (3) the path of discipleship, and (4) the path of initiation, including both minor and major initiations.

These stages lead to self-mastery, with each of the formal stages having progressively higher, increasingly difficult prerequisites. So much is required on the rigorous (formal) spiritual path, much more than a lot of the publicity about the path would imply. Those who provide public information about the path sometimes have little idea how much there is to know and to be and to do. They have little realization of the most difficult of spiritual responsibilities, assignments, and evolutionary pressures that must be faced.

They have little appreciation of all the many virtues to be developed, the great depth of impersonal (inclusive) love required, and the encompassing, high development of the mind needed, which then must be subjugated to the will of the soul. And they have little understanding about the total service requirements to God and humanity. While the aspirant is largely concerned

with his own progress, the disciple on the path is much more concerned with the spiritual work to do. Progress then comes as a natural result.

The word disciple is related to the word discipline, and self-discipline becomes the keynote of the path. All that is notably coarse, dross, impure and limiting in one's personality (the physical, emotional, and mental bodies) must be largely overcome and purified (a long process) before one can enter the path of discipleship (where refinement continues). Personal energies (self-interest) and attachments, which distort one's perceptions and conclusions and prevent soul alignment and true spiritual realization, must eventually be transcended. The impersonal (universal) perspective of the soul must be developed to achieve spiritual understanding and awareness.

The path of enlightenment and service is a continuous, progressive test. And the testing and the work go on amid the noise and activity of modern life, for the spiritual student must meet his outer worldly responsibilities or dharma as well as his inner ones. He does not seek to escape his duty, for the path requires that all dharma and karma be fulfilled in good order.

The spiritual path lies within oneself. There are many outer books, publications, groups, speakers, and schools which may or may not be helpful in the lower stages of the path. (In the higher stages only the soul can provide the needed assistance). The serious student must be able to recognize inwardly through the light of his soul the basic principles of the path and be able to discern what outer information is valid and helpful. The myriad of public information makes it difficult and challenging to discriminate the real from the unreal, but it is just this challenge that will help the aspirant to the path begin to develop the very needed sense of discernment required for spiritual work. With humility, impersonality, and determination as his co-travelers, the serious aspirant will eventually find and know the joy of treading the spiritual path.

Approaching the Path

The bulk of humanity is slowly evolving and becoming more responsive to evolutionary and spiritual pressure (energy). Within humanity, there are many, many men and women of goodwill in the world today, kind-hearted, well-meaning, and sincere in their practice of whatever religious, metaphysical, or philosophical approach they take. Even though these people are good people, who love God however they view God, and who are perhaps involved in humanitarian work, it does not necessarily mean they are on the formal spiritual path.

Out of this group, some (a relative few) may eventually begin to take the steps to approach the formal path. Within the human lifewave, those on the (formal) spiritual path are the pioneers or forerunners in human consciousness who have progressed more rapidly than the bulk of the lifewave. This is quite natural, as within every lifewave some lives progress more quickly than others, while most lives evolve at the intended rate, and some are not able to keep up.

Each group serves its intended purpose, the first group initiating the way and acting as pathfinders, the large middle group following, and the stragglers acting as a balance on too fast a pace, preventing unqualified development.

The (formal) spiritual path is found within oneself and is open to all who are able to respond. No one is chosen for it, rather one's soul, as a result of its progressed quality of consciousness, simply (hears and) responds to the inner call of the path and naturally "chooses" it. The soul by virtue of its developed quality commits itself to the spiritual path and then begins the process of gaining the personality's commitment. The personality alone cannot commit itself to the path, for that major commitment is in the realm of the soul (the higher self) alone. A personality commitment (of the lower self) by itself would not be lasting without the energy and support of the soul.

While everyone is meant to live and be as spiritual as he is able to be, not everyone is meant to travel the formal spiritual path of accelerated enlightenment and service. Within the human lifewave, the normal path of

evolution for the bulk of the lifewave is itself evolving. More is required of man to keep up with the average pace of the lifewave than was ages ago. The accelerated, formal spiritual path (and its requirements) is also evolving. As an example of both factors, much of what was once esoteric (inner, hidden) knowledge is today exoteric (outer) knowledge, available to all.

A person must know himself through meditation and reflection to know what is appropriate for himself. Certainly the good works and spiritual efforts of all people are strongly needed and appreciated for humanity, whether it be expressed conventionally or through the formal path. Wherever one finds himself and under whatever circumstances, he can contribute to the progress of humanity and to his own progress, for all (the one humanity) benefit from each person's efforts.

Those who are drawn to and eventually qualified to tread the accelerated, formal path (disciples and initiates) face the most challenging spiritual assignments and responsibilities and work under the most strenuous and demanding evolutionary pressures. Only those souls (and associated personalities) who are qualified and consciously committed to the path could handle those pressures and assignments. Only those souls could safely and effectively work with the types of potent spiritual energies contacted. And only those qualified personalities could be trusted for occult work and training.

Paths of Approach

The first preliminary stage of the formal path is called paths of approach. There are many outer ways and means (books, publications, speakers, groups, service, study, etc., aided by meditation) by which a person may initially approach the formal path (as a result of soul prompting). Much time and effort (and a number of incarnations) may be spent by the seeker exploring the many various approaches. At first his interest may wax and wane to a high degree depending on personality conditions and environment. At times, crises, pleasures, or outer responsibilities of daily life may seem to overwhelm and distract the seeker as he is absorbed in his personality life. But soul prompting eventually returns him to his task.

In the beginning, a seeker may move with enthusiasm and expectation (personal energies) from speaker to speaker, from book to book, group to group, and from one school of thought to another. Usually his search is mostly an outer one, filled with glamour and sometimes a high interest in phenomena which does call his attention to life beyond the physical senses, but which can seriously distract and ensnare him if he becomes too absorbed in it. The seeker also has his quiet, reflective, meditative moments, too, as he becomes more responsive to his soul. As time goes on, the seeker gains momentum as well as information and insight that will eventually be distilled and synthesized into useful spiritual teachings and understandings.

The Path of Aspiration

All true paths of approach eventually lead to the path of aspiration, (the first part of) the second stage of the formal path. As soon as there is a conscious interest in the formal spiritual path and in the conscious development required to make and receive a formal commitment to the path, a person becomes an aspirant. As ever in spiritual matters, one's motive is important. If a person is attracted primarily because of the glamour of the path or for ego considerations, he is not a true aspirant.

The path of aspiration can be divided into two categories: that which is mystical or heart-centered, and that which is occult or head-centered. The mystical approach is characterized by devotion, love, and aspiration. The occult approach is mental, characterized by light and understanding. In the beginning, an aspirant's nature is usually notably mystical or occult. However, eventually the serious student must develop and balance both aspects of himself.

The aspirant studies the (outer) esoteric philosophy, discerning with the aid of his soul what of the public information about the path is valid and beneficial. The (inner) guardians of the path become aware of the aspirant because of his increased quality of consciousness but no attention or energies are given until the aspirant has made considerable progress. There is much outer teaching already available for the path of aspiration, and the aspirant must learn the basics himself, of course always (albeit distantly) guided by his soul, the God within.

Sometimes a student in the preliminary stages of the path will seek a guru (outer teacher) to personally direct him. This was once the traditional way of learning for this phase. But even if a goodly amount of basic knowledge is learned, the student-guru approach has the problem of the student being dependent on an outside teacher instead of developing his own (soul) self-reliance and beginning self-mastery. This approach is also personality-centered, often with devotional attachment to the teacher, rather than focusing on the teaching.

While outer encouragement may be appreciated and may be offered by a variety of sources, any assistance should be viewed with discernment, discretion, and detachment (no lower emotional attachment). Today the formal spiritual path has evolved to the point where there is an abundance of outer material about the early stages, and now the student is expected to teach himself the basic teachings, directed by his soul (his own real teacher), thus cultivating needed inner self-reliance and discernment.

The challenges of the path begin immediately. Much of the aspirant's accumulated karma from past lives must begin to be fulfilled in more rapid fashion to free him for spiritual work. Normally karma is fulfilled relatively slowly, with earlier lives producing more karma than can be worked out, so it accumulates. When one aspires to the path, this triggers the more rapid facing and fulfilling of past karma, until eventually as a disciple, most past karma has generally been met and new karma is fulfilled almost instantly.

Aspirants must come to realize that aspiration alone is not enough to travel the spiritual path. Many aspirants are well-intentioned, but weak-willed. Eventually they must develop greater determination and move beyond the path of aspiration.

When the aspirant learns and understands the basic principles of the path and overcomes any major obstacles due to his karma or character, he enters the second part of the second stage of the formal path, the probationary path. He becomes the probationary student. This means that the student has developed enough potential for making an eventual proper commitment to the spiritual path (after much more self-improvement has been achieved). At this stage (probationary student), the guardians of the path begin to offer impersonal

encouragement and an overall qualification and testing. (Personality-centered attention, which is a glamour of the path, is not really an appropriate expression). Now the probationary training and emphasized self-discipline and refinement begin.

« Article No. 28

Probation 1

Physical Purification

The path of aspiration and the path of probation, which make up stage two of the formal spiritual path, usually take many lives to complete as the student must transform much within himself. With each new incarnation, a recapitulation process is necessary to overcome enough of the coarseness of the personality to reclaim the earlier achievements (spiritual progress). In the beginning this is difficult as the self-indulgent personality resists the will of the soul, but gradually the recapitulation process becomes easier.

The path of aspiration leads to the path of probation, a path of purification and preparation. This involves the purification of the physical, emotional, and mental faculties (bodies) of the probationary student and is known as the preliminary disciplines. Bodies of coarse, low vibration cannot respond to higher spiritual energies which are of a purer vibration. Therefore all that is coarse and dross must be eliminated. The three competing bodies must then be integrated into one unit, the personality, so that the personality may eventually be aligned with the soul.

The self-centered, reactive personality will by its nature resist all efforts to change. The casual student will give up the battle, but not the serious spiritual student. He will determinedly move on towards purification, refinement, and self-control. Until the student masters all the preliminary disciplines, he cannot be trusted by the guardians of the path, for he is not yet qualified to contact and channel the potent spiritual energies of the path effectively and safely.

Physical purification is a main aspect of the preliminary disciplines, with a large focus being on one's diet. All flesh foods (meat, fish, and fowl) must be

eliminated from the serious student's diet, as well as all alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. Only those drugs which are medically necessary are allowed, but even so, they have a dulling and distracting effect on the physical body. Consuming the above items nourishes a coarseness in the physical body, lowers the energy balance of the etheric body, and creates roadblocks for personality integration and control. All have disruptive effects on higher levels as well.

Vegetarianism is important to the serious spiritual student for several reasons. Flesh food (meat, fish, or fowl), with its animal vibration, hinders spiritual consciousness and self-mastery. A spiritual student can go only so far on the path with a flesh diet. Eventually the change to vegetarianism must be made, in order to progress further. Karmically, the plant kingdom provides the food for the human and animal kingdoms, but this is not the responsibility of the animal kingdom (except as animal by-products like milk or eggs). Consciousness in the animal kingdom is too high for it to be appropriate for human use. Ingesting flesh with its lower physical vibration lowers the human vibration and stimulates the lower (animal) aspects of the human physical vehicle. However, just because someone is a vegetarian doesn't mean that he is necessarily spiritually oriented, but at some point all serious spiritual students do become vegetarians for spiritual reasons.

The diet may be gradually adjusted (e.g., substituting cold-blooded fish for warm-blooded meat, as fish are less evolved and therefore less detrimental to human consciousness), but eventually the dietary disciplines simply must be voluntarily accepted and practiced, as prolonging the entire change strengthens the resistance of the personality and threatens one's success.

Alcohol, including beer and wine, as well as smoking, have a detrimental (dulling, distracting) effect on spiritual consciousness, and alcohol definitely weakens and undermines the self-control (self-mastery) which the serious spiritual student should be working hard to achieve.

Maintaining an appropriate weight is necessary also because over-eating and being overweight burden and dull the physical and etheric bodies and affect one's consciousness; and being underweight may mean a lack of vitality. Occasional fasting can be helpful in achieving physical transformation. Pure

and nutritious food, moderate exercise and sunshine, fresh air, sleep and cleanliness all encourage vitality and fitness for spiritual work.

Purifying the physical appetites and desires also includes moderating and eventually transmuting the sexual desires. (This is in contrast to the relatively unrestrained sexual activity currently being expressed by much of humanity with its resulting karmic problems (consequences)). Suppressing the sex drive is not the goal for the spiritual student; rather, the sexual impulse is to be sublimated so that it is refined and the lower creative (sexual) forces are uplifted into higher creative spiritual areas. Instead of wasting this creative (propagative) energy, it can then be used by the soul for more appropriate (spiritual) uses. Sublimation frees the serious student from sexual need, from indiscriminate release of this force, and from distracting and absorbing physical and emotional sensation.

The serious spiritual student doesn't need to become and remain celibate, for the natural purpose of human sexual activity is (sensible) procreation, to provide opportunities for others to incarnate. And this is certainly appropriate for even highly evolved married spiritual students. Rather, the serious students must begin to gradually liberate themselves from sexual need (a limitation), and move to sublimation through mental discipline and the appropriate spiritually constructive release of accumulated creative energies.

All the physical purifications should be approached with reasonableness and common sense. For someone approaching the probationary path for the first time, progress will come more slowly and greater effort will be required. But as momentum is built in this and future lives, progress is expedited. Once the preliminary physical disciplines are achieved, they no longer need be a major focus for the serious student. However, the preliminary disciplines also include emotional and mental refinement as well. By developing greater self-control and self-mastery in all areas of life, the serious spiritual student gains greater spiritual opportunities, enlightenment, and growth.

Probation 2

Emotional and Mental Purification

The path of probation, the second part of stage two of the formal spiritual path, involves the preliminary discipline. This includes the purification of the physical, emotional, and mental bodies of the spiritual student. Physical purification is concerned with the elimination of all flesh foods (meat, fish, and fowl) from one's diet as well as alcohol, drugs and tobacco. It also includes moderating and then sublimating (transmuting) the sex drive.

As physical purification begins, then the serious spiritual (probationary) student starts working on emotional and mental purification and preparation. Today Western society glorifies the emotions which results in unrestrained expression of coarse, unrefined feelings and desires. The base emotions and desires are the fuel and direction for the self-centered, self-indulgent, separative personality. This is harmful enough for average man, but it is particularly so for the serious spiritual student. Rather his goal is emotional (astral) purification. The emotions must be calmed, stilled, and controlled.

Then they can be purified and uplifted to be expressed (not suppressed) as aspiration and impersonal, inclusive (universal) love and joy. Negative emotions such as anger, hate, fear, and jealousy must be transmuted, as well as personal desires, selfishness, reactivity, and glamour. Glamour, which is illusion on emotional (astral) levels intensified by desire, can be a real stumbling block. Pride, self-importance, and self-interest are just a few of the self-deceptions to overcome, as glamour reappears in ever more subtle ways.

The refinement of the emotions does not imply passivity, nor does it include the opposite extreme of excitement. The middle ground of being spiritually poised and balanced is the student's aim, for then he is undisturbed by emotional eruptions, and his calm and purified emotional body can be used by his soul for spiritual purposes. The rarefied soul has no rapport with the vibrations of coarse emotions and desires and therefore soul contact is impeded. Thus in spiritual work, a calm, pure aura (emotional body) is a prerequisite.

How does one purify the emotional (astral) body? The student looks to the next higher plane(s) and calls in the efforts of his mind in conjunction with his soul. The mind is the instrument of discipline in both physical and emotional refinement. The strong and disciplined mind impresses and reinforces the needed goals upon the physical and emotional bodies, and should be used meditatively by the student to daily direct the pure white light of the soul through the bodies to aid in purification and transformation.

In Atlantean days, the emphasis for average man was on emotional (astral) development. Today in the Aryan Epoch, the emphasis for average man is and needs to be on mental development, even though most of mankind is still enamored with the emotions (is emotionally polarized). As humanity progresses, it will respond more to spiritual purpose and shift its focus to the mental plane, and the developed mind will then become the effective instrument of the soul. For serious spiritual students, today the area of emphasis is the abstract mental plane and the intuitive (buddhic) plane (mental and intuitive polarization) reached via alignment of the purified, integrated personality with the soul.

Frequently casual spiritual students become ensnared by their focus on the astral (emotional) plane and their excessive interest in psychic phenomena. Sometimes this motivates them to attempt (lower) psychic development as they mistakenly equate that with spiritual development.

But astral (psychic) impressions are extremely potentially misleading or untrue compared to intuitive impressions from the higher, intuitive (buddhic) plane achieved by soul alignment. In Atlantean days, most everyone was psychic, as astral awareness was common, but it didn't and doesn't mean that someone who (was) is psychic is necessarily spiritual. Astral or (lower) psychic awareness is not one of the higher spiritual gifts, even though today many sincere and well-intentioned psychics give "readings" (which are often distorted or untrue) in the hopes of helping people. Astral awareness was generally closed off for man in this Epoch that man might develop his mind without distraction, and that he might move on to the higher (impersonal) spiritual intuition. Eventually the psychic abilities will be redeveloped as simply another tool for the spiritual student, but to focus on them excessively or prematurely

now would distract and preclude development of higher spiritual faculties. And real danger such as instability or insanity can result from premature opening of the chakras (psychic centers).

As the mind is developed and used, it too must be disciplined and purified. The probationary spiritual student focuses on mental discipline to control and purify his thoughts and to prevent his concrete mind from becoming too independent and unresponsive to the soul. As the mind (mental body) grows stronger, the concrete mind (the lower mind) tends to be overly critical and separative. It forms opinions, mind sets, and attachments that invite illusion and prevent it from realizing higher, more inclusive truths. An open, unbiased, well-developed, and well-controlled (concrete and abstract) mind is a necessary tool for spiritual growth and illumination. A weak, scattered mind, or one that is full of unkind, critical thoughts, or closed to new ideas and concepts can be of little help in the study and improvement of self, or the study and application of the esoteric philosophy.

The probationary student must train the mind to overcome concrete-mindedness and to be able to think abstractly and correlatively. His goal is not intellectualism, rationalism, or being able to recite many facts (though he will know many), but rather to see the big picture and correlate the pockets of knowledge for higher understanding and realization. This happens through soul contact and that is achieved only when the bridge is built from the developed, purified abstract mind (the higher mind) to the soul.

The student must use observation, study, and daily meditation (concentration, visualization, and contemplation) (20 to 30 minutes minimum) to develop the mind and build the link between it and the soul. He can program new mental habits into the mind. And then he can use his mind to avoid absorption in the mundane happenings of daily life, remembering instead the elevated spiritual perspective no matter what he needs to be doing outwardly. Retrospection at the end of the day helps the student review each day's living to make improvements. But actually, the serious student should program and qualify himself so that ideally he is always aware of his physical, emotional, and mental states and any inappropriateness so as to make an immediate adjustment. This will insure that he is living (practicing) the highest spiritual expression he is capable of and thus be in harmony with his soul, the God within.

Discipleship 1

From Probationary Student to Accepted Disciple

Going hand in hand with the preliminary disciplines of the path of probation (that is, the purification and preparation of the physical, emotional, and mental bodies) are the preliminary endeavors. These include practicing (the living of) honesty, harmlessness, humility, compassion, goodwill, inclusiveness, and non-criticalness, as well as undertaking daily meditation and spiritual service.

The serious student should avoid self-indulgence, pride, self-deception, personality inertia, mundane absorption, attachments, gossip, and needless talk (all glammers). He should maintain a balance between his head (occult) and heart (mystical) nature. And he should learn to work cooperatively in some type of preliminary outer service work with other spiritually oriented people. Most outer (exoteric) metaphysical groups, though well-intended and spiritually minded, are personality-oriented and hindered by aspects of glamour and illusion. But they do provide a valuable opportunity for outer group expression, adjustment (learning to cooperate and get along), and service, until the student is more and better prepared and qualified to work with an esoteric (inner) group.

No matter where a student decides to focus his efforts, he should realize that there is no special chosen spiritual group or individual in incarnation, nor is there any special path to God. All are part of the One and all are used impersonally according to their quality and abilities. All are important; but none are especially important. Separativeness (setting oneself, one's work, or one's group apart by feeling especially important or superior) is a self-deception that denies the greater reality of Oneness.

With the encompassing requirements needed for the preliminary disciplines and the preliminary endeavors, and the problem of having an often recalcitrant personality, the path of (aspiration and) probation takes the student many incarnations and is often the longest stage of the spiritual path. After the

probationary stage, however, a greater momentum is achieved. There is spiritual testing, and it demands the efforts of both the soul and the personality to succeed. Of course, none of the disciplines of the path are outwardly imposed. All are inwardly recognized and voluntarily accepted and practiced by the serious student in his quest for self-mastery and spiritual enlightenment.

When the guardians of the path see that the probationary student has fulfilled the probationary training and met certain requirements and qualifications (in consciousness and self-mastery) and is willing and able to make a formal commitment to the spiritual path, the probationary student then becomes the probationary disciple. Thus he enters the third stage of the formal path, the path of discipleship.

The commitment to the formal spiritual path that the probationary disciple pledges is made on the abstract mental plane (the lowest level of the soul) by the student's soul and is eventually realized by the mind of the personality on concrete mental levels. It is accepted on subtle (soul) levels by the guardians of the path who are not active on the lower planes. No true commitment to the formal path is ever achieved by the personality, by mere membership in outer organizations, or through outer means. Nonetheless, the cooperation of the personality is essential to the eventual success of the soul upon the path. While the personality is, initially, the greatest hindrance and impediment, it becomes, eventually, a considerable asset.

The probationary disciple obligates himself to the spiritual path and all of its rules, while some who are already a part of the formal path obligate themselves to qualified students to provide additional training, qualification, and opportunity (which must nonetheless be earned by the student) (all is based on merit). The student agrees to subordinate all of his personality activities to the path, to deal with an acceleration of his own karma and to help offset the karma of humanity.

Concurrently, as the spiritual student has been progressing on the formal path gaining more experience, refinement, and quality of consciousness, he has been magnetically attracted to an appropriate (inner) esoteric group (ashram). This is a natural process which means that there is a magnetic rapport on soul levels (because of a similarity of vibration) of the student's ray energy, quality,

character, temperament, qualifications and sometimes historical ties with that of the particular esoteric group.

An esoteric group (and ashram, its inner energy center) is a group of relatively highly evolved souls affiliated for higher spiritual purposes, usually organized subjectively along ray lines and existing beyond time, space, and the levels of personality existence. It is the subjective unit of service and spiritual evolution of the formal path. The Spiritual Hierarchy of the planet is made up of these ashrams (esoteric groups) and is an ashram itself in the larger sense.

The high spiritual quality (vibration) of an esoteric group acts as a ring-pass-not so that only those students who are properly qualified can approach or eventually move within an esoteric group. Many are the specific qualifications; the list is long and the tasks are demanding, though the list and tasks may vary slightly in emphasis from group to group depending on the esoteric group's charter and area of focus.

Much initial (probationary) spiritual progress can and should be made on the formal path as an individual, but eventually progress can be achieved only in group formation on soul levels via an inner esoteric group. The appropriate inner esoteric group may be approached directly through the soul, and indirectly through a related outer (exoteric) group, if one is available. If an appropriate outer group is in existence, the student is obligated to work with that group and thus receive its encouragement in achieving soul alignment, leading to alignment with the inner esoteric group. The outer group's assistance to group members is subordinated to, but comes naturally with, its service activities.

The vast majority of spiritual students are not formally aligned with an esoteric group as they have not yet progressed to that stage. And the vast majority of outer groups are not aligned with an esoteric group as they are still personality-centered. Unaligned work is not nearly as effective or potent as aligned spiritual work; however meaningful experience and service can be achieved by unaligned individuals and unaligned groups as they endeavor to contribute to the spiritual plan.

The farther along the formal spiritual path one goes, the more narrow it becomes in not permitting inappropriateness, deviation, or spiritual inertia on the part of

the student. For the disciple and beyond, the path is narrow in that a slight deviation elicits an almost instantaneous karmic response. For one not on the formal spiritual path (an individual not committed, who knows less and therefore is responsible for less), the same behavior will not merit the same consequences. His path is much wider and less demanding. But knowledge brings responsibility and a man is held accountable for that which he knows; he is required to live it.

Eventually, with diligent effort, the dedicated probationary disciple finally meets and passes the first major tests of spiritual consciousness on the path of discipleship.

Thus he becomes the accepted disciple and is formally assimilated into the appropriate esoteric group (ashram). This means the esoteric group accepts some responsibility for the disciple, whereas with the probationary disciple, no such commitment is made. The accepted disciple is assigned responsibilities commensurate with his abilities, talents and the needs of the group, and then continues the process of self-mastery, communion with his soul and the esoteric group, and service to God and humanity.

« Article No. 31

Discipleship 2

The Path of Discipleship

The path of discipleship is the third stage of the formal spiritual path and has three phases: that of the probationary disciple, the accepted disciple, and the obligated disciple.

Impersonality and detachment are the hallmarks of a true disciple. The disciple has moved from a personal focus concerned mainly with self (self-interest, self-development, self-expression) and the aspects of his personality life (work, family, friends, and outer groups) to an inclusive, impersonal (transpersonal, universal) focus. Impersonality in the spiritual sense does not mean coldness or lack of caring, but rather compassion and concern, although not to the state of becoming emotionally or mentally overcome (absorbed) and distracted. For the

disciple, personal love, the lower emotional expression of love with its limiting attachments, has been transmuted into impersonal love (a higher form) that is universal and unlimited. It is an expression of the soul (the higher self, the God within) and not the personality (the lower self). The soul by its nature is impersonal and focused on unity; the personality by its nature is intensely personal, self-absorbed, and separative. Aligning with the soul and expressing its quality is the way of the disciple.

Detachment frees the disciple from attachment to physical objects and emotional pleasures. The serious student need not forgo worldly possessions in moderate amounts, but living in luxury implies an attachment to physical possessions. Properly, the student is simply a custodian for his material resources and is responsible for their wise use and spiritual direction.

By the time a serious student becomes an accepted disciple, he has benefited from many "teachers" in his lives. In the early and middle stages of human evolution, karma is the major teacher as man learns his lessons from life (karma, the law of cause and effect) and thus progresses in consciousness. As always he is guided indirectly through karmic qualification and by the soul, his own individual teacher; but the soul becomes the really important teaching factor as a man advances onto the spiritual path and becomes more responsive to (aligned with) his soul.

There are also exoteric (outer) spiritually oriented individuals who may serve as teachers as well, and may be especially sought after (though not actually needed) by the seeker in the early stages of the path. Too much reliance on outer teachers can hinder developing one's own means of learning and realization. Ultimately it is the student himself who is responsible for determining if any particular teaching is valid and meaningful. Thus developing one's own discernment is quite significant. The serious student will find ample mature outer materials (books, writings, publications) about the first stages of the path, and by studying, pondering and meditating on these, will teach himself and eventually begin to develop his own inner means of learning as well. In earlier times, the student-guru approach to learning was preponderantly utilized, which is usually quite personality-centered. In this more mature approach (self-teaching), the student avoids becoming emotionally attached to a particular teacher, focusing instead on the teaching, not the teacher.

Today's approach to exoteric (outer) teaching beyond the preliminary stages of the path is a group-centered approach (rather than a personality-centered one), with the outer teacher taking an increasingly subjective role within a group of relatively mature spiritual students. Exoteric and esoteric (soul) group relationships and understanding are fostered impersonally.

The group-centered teacher (senior member of the exoteric group, and outer representative of the inner esoteric group with which the outer group is affiliated) becomes more of a "presence" or energy source of impersonal encouragement (and example) for students. Through the senior member's quality (inductive presence), impersonal teaching of principles, questions posed, and over-all qualification, the group-oriented teacher helps students to find their own answers to questions, encourages service (a priority) and aids in strengthening the soul alignment and the student's link with the inner esoteric group (via meditation).

The mature spiritual student (disciple) may also receive impersonal subjective teaching (encouragement) on soul levels from certain members of the inner esoteric group (senior disciples and initiates) not in incarnation. It is important to clarify the nature of these contacts. Unfortunately the glamour of the path includes the glamour of seeking a contact from a master, the head of an esoteric group or ashram who has achieved human perfection. But the master (or esoteric group) has no personality attachments or interest in the personality life of the student. The master is concerned only with the overall divine plan and the immense spiritual work undertaken, not with the daily (mundane) affairs of a student. Although the master may infrequently offer spiritual encouragement or a hint to consider, he will never tell a student what to do. The student must decide through his own free will what is appropriate and he (not the master) bears the resulting karma for good or ill. Thus the student also develops self-mastery. By the radiance of the student's light will the master know the student and his progress.

Any contact from the master or esoteric group is usually subjective and general, and contact comes only when the student has achieved a high measure of soul consciousness and is well established on the spiritual path (and not so susceptible to glamour). Knowledge of the existence of the spiritual masters,

the spiritual hierarchy, and the divine plan can be an encouragement to the beginning student, but it should not become a distraction or a glamour. The serious student must do what is before him to do (his spiritual and secular dharma), fulfilling all appropriate obligations, serving, refining himself and living the spiritual life.

The primary purpose of the inner esoteric group (and any related exoteric group) is spiritual service in some particular (chartered) way. The progress and evolution of its individual members is a secondary focus. Formal (official) advancement is determined according to group (higher) needs (that is, the needs of the esoteric group, the spiritual hierarchy, and the logos), rather than the desires of the individual. When one is focused on spiritual service, however, individual progress is the natural and inevitable result. Individualistic spiritual ambition (separative personal energy) and demands for advancement or initiation will thwart the very goal the seeker desires. With humility, selflessness, and service, spiritual evolution is achieved.

The more advanced (occult) training on soul levels becomes appropriate after the preliminary (probationary) training and refinement are accomplished. Many are the abilities and qualifications (quality of consciousness) required by the candidate for occult training, and the student is continually tested. Some of the prerequisite qualifications include: being integrated as a personality; a polarization of one's consciousness at the mental (or above) level of consciousness; an appropriate degree of alignment with the soul; mental ability; meditation ability; visualization ability; ability to consciously program (qualify) the personality; achievement of the preliminary disciplines and the preliminary endeavors; potential telepathic ability and subjective awareness; selflessness; and a strong commitment to the spiritual path.

Also among the many qualifications are relative freedom from personality-centeredness, mundane absorption, glamour, and self-deception. Because occult training frequently requires adjustments in the student's aura and chakras (energy centers), considerable purity and stability are needed by the student.

Occult training includes working with a variety of potent energies, natural forces and energy manipulations to learn how to control and utilize them for spiritual purposes. It can involve knowledge of how to qualify an object with a

certain spiritual purpose (in harmony with its higher purpose and natural order). It involves using the higher (abstract) mind and the soul in working with perception, imagination, creative visualization, and energy projection, while avoiding the inappropriate imposition of one's will.

Much of the occult work esoteric groups are assigned has to do with creating and sustaining energy patterns in accordance with the divine plan. A great deal of the occult work undertaken by an esoteric student in incarnation involves the evolutionary encouragement of humanity, by indirect and direct qualification. Much of that occurs indirectly (incidentally) as the mature student lives and interacts within humanity and thus qualifies it inductively by his presence and higher quality of consciousness. The direct qualification of humanity (imbuing it with certain qualities and conditions) for spiritual purposes also occurs, and is done by those who are properly trained (serving in and out of incarnation) and working with the evolutionary plan. The spiritual leadership and encouragement given to humanity never interferes with humanity's free will; it simply encourages (induces) progress according to the plan.

With occult knowledge comes power for good or ill. Thus it is so very important that the student be selfless, purified and trustworthy before any serious occult training is given. He must have the lower self well in hand and be in control of himself at all times, lest his efforts go awry with disastrous consequences for all concerned. The results in occult work of even momentary (careless) loss of self-control via negative thoughts or emotions (anger, hatred, resentment, jealousy, etc.) can be highly destructive, from being unsettling to the recipient of the energy, to being extremely harmful or even potentially fatal, depending on the potency of the sender, his link to the recipient, and his motives (deliberate or unintended). Energy follows thought. Even if negative thoughts and feelings (energies) are formed but held within oneself, they will be internally destructive.

Occult training makes one more potent (powerful), but it also magnifies any character faults a student may have. Because the harm and the karma can be great, the occult student qualifies himself to prevent any unfortunate, inappropriate (negative) energies from forming (within or otherwise) or being released, either through carelessness, or as a response to provocation from another person or event. Any coarseness embraced is a vulnerability and is a responsive, magnetic note attracting the coarseness of others, whether

unintentionally or intentionally directed. Purity (light, love, quality of consciousness) aids in the safeguarding.

Sometimes in the case of certain advanced occult (spiritual) work, there is direct qualification of the occult workers by a more advanced (qualified) worker, and direct qualification (warding) of the work itself to protect it and prevent interference. Mantric defenses which call on external and unqualified forces for assistance are not used by esoteric workers. Direct qualification and manipulation of force fields are.

There is a great deal for the occult student to learn and assimilate, and the specialized training is a rigorous, on-going process. According to the student's measure of refinement, abilities, and the needs of the esoteric group, the occult student is assigned responsibilities, often working behind the scenes calling no attention to himself. The stresses and challenges of occult work and spiritual service are many. But great also is the inner joy of working in higher group formation helping to fulfill the divine plan of evolution.

« Article No. 32

Initiation

From Discipleship Through Initiation

By the time a serious spiritual student has achieved the stage of accepted discipleship, he is well established on the formal spiritual path. Before him lies still further development and the phase of obligated discipleship, before he advances onto the fourth stage of the formal path, the path of initiation.

With his heightened quality of consciousness, the disciple is a transmitter of spiritual energy. He is a link in an energy chain from higher planes of consciousness, as he invokes spiritual energy (through meditation, primarily in group formation), receives the energy, steps down its vibration, and releases it for humanity to use on etheric, emotional, and concrete mental levels.

The disciple is the observer in the world of humanity, the eyes and ears of those who are more spiritually evolved and do not descend into the physical world.

The disciple is available (on call) for service at all times. There are no vacations from service, nor any hesitation to serve. And this is done entirely willingly (with right motive) without any thought of reward or recognition. With this attitude, the disciple finds that he is up to any assignment given, and his energies and resources are renewed as needed.

The disciple is not yet “perfect” and mistakes will be made. But the disciple will make the needed adjustments, learn the lessons, and gain from the experience. In this way there is no failure, just continued realization, growth, and service. The disciple does not interfere in the lives or free will of others or impose his ideas, values, or energies on those he seeks to aid. Though he willingly shares his beliefs if requested, he teaches more by induction (presence) and by example (in the way he lives his life). And that is a life filled with love, inclusiveness, harmlessness, goodwill, and wisdom.

In all aspects of his life, the serious spiritual student is required to live that which he knows. There are two grades of achievement associated with every spiritual student (and every person in incarnation). One grade represents the highest degree of achievement ever attained by the individual’s soul in its many incarnations. The other grade or degree is the one that the personality is currently manifesting, and that one is the important one. It indicates the level that the student is actually living at and determines his level of responsibility, opportunity, and trust.

With each new incarnation, the personality must again be overcome and the previous soul progress recapitulated. But this is not always readily accomplished (given the natural resistance of the personality and the varying circumstances in each incarnation), and thus there is usually a gap between the highest level of achievement of the soul, and the lower grade of consciousness currently being expressed (manifested) by the soul and through the personality. That gap needs to be bridged (the quality rebuilt and re-established) before any new spiritual progress can be achieved in the present lifetime.

As the accepted disciple accomplishes this, and focuses on what is before him to do, i.e., serving, refining himself, and living the spiritual life, he deepens and progresses in service and self-mastery. Thus he is able to pass the next tests and becomes the obligated disciple, which is the last phase of the path of

discipleship (from probationary disciple, to accepted disciple, to obligated disciple). This is the first time the disciple is officially counted in regard to the esoteric group's measure (quota) of karma to be offset for humanity and the planetary scheme. It also means that the obligated disciple is now accepted at levels beyond the esoteric group.

With continued growth, refinement and service, eventually the path of discipleship leads to the path of initiation, consisting of both minor and major initiations. Initiation acknowledges the achievement in consciousness (and abilities) of certain significant qualities and attributes for (or toward) human perfection, and vivifies that consciousness. Formal initiation comes only in the context of the esoteric group, without being sought, and with the approval of the appropriate spiritual (hierarchical) authorities. It is conducted on soul levels, and no external organization or individual is able to dispense true initiation of the formal spiritual path.

Much glamour and misleading information exist about initiation. Many who don't yet have the spiritual means to understand, nonetheless convey information on the subject which is distorted and fanciful. Much glamour, illusion, and misunderstanding is thus created. However, serious writing on the subject of true spiritual initiation is naturally abstruse to protect it from those who are not yet qualified and purified, and in whose hands such higher knowledge would be dangerous, as great would be the temptation to misuse the knowledge to gain power for personal use, instead of for service. Thus in esoteric writings, there are blinds and veils to protect the teachings so that only those for whom it is intended (who are ready for it) can intuitively and symbolically unlock the key to the meaning. In addition, much about initiation simply cannot be put into words as there are no words adequate to explain, or the concept can only be hinted at or conveyed symbolically, so the knowledge, methods, and secrets simply cannot be passed along to one unqualified.

When a candidate is qualified and fit for initiation, there is a direct contact from the master that draws the individual into the process of initiation. Thus no outer knowledge or special training about the process of initiation is required. The occult training that a mature spiritual student receives is concerned with the work of the path (service), and not preparation for initiation. Paradoxically, service and self-refinement develop the quality of consciousness required for

initiation. But the emphasis always is on continued (ever-expanding, never-ending) service and refinement, with initiation simply a natural and lesser consequence of the larger focus.

In the grand scheme of life (the divine plan), every (true) need is automatically provided for. Thus with any future needs (positions) (opportunities) within an esoteric group (ashram) or the spiritual hierarchy, the fulfillment is provided for in advance. The process is a natural, continuing, and flowing one in which those who are most qualified are, in the course of their spiritual service and self-refinement, naturally prepared by these efforts to take on increased responsibilities, and are thus vivified for the undertaking through the process of initiation.

There are three major initiations in the process of achieving human mastery or (relative) perfection. In theosophical and other metaphysical writings, five initiations are frequently noted. However, the first two initiations referred to are minor initiations of the threshold (not major initiations), which reflect only that one is (somewhat) awakened and beginning or advancing on the preliminary or probationary stages of the formal spiritual path. These first two initiations are not considered formal (major) initiations by the hierarchy. Thus, the third initiation is considered the first major (true) initiation, for then one is truly transfigured and has become a refined, soul-responsive personality.

In the phases of the first two "initiates" (the "physio-etheric initiate" and the "kama-manasic initiate"), the soul is not yet in control of the personality, and a great battle of purification and refinement is still going on. Thus using the word initiate to connote those in these two stages is not really appropriate. Such spiritual students are more properly referred to as aspirants and disciples, depending on their current status.

Since the meanings of words such as initiate, disciple, probationary path, initiation, etc. can vary widely from source to source, it is quite necessary (imperative) that the serious spiritual student understand the context and the meaning of the word as used to avoid assumptions and misunderstandings.

The three major initiations relate both to stages of relative self-mastery and relative mastery of the lower planes of consciousness (the physical, emotional,

and mental planes). With each major initiation, the candidate achieves a certain degree of development and refinement (self-mastery), and a particular level of mastery of certain planes (sub-planes) of consciousness. There can be some variation in candidates' specific abilities, but their overall quality must meet certain basic standards. The candidate must have achieved mastery over the forces of the corresponding planes, i.e. the appropriate number of sub-planes of each appropriate plane. This means he must be fully conscious (aware) of the forces and be able to effectively and consciously manipulate and control them. This is far more than just being able to be on a particular plane (sub-plane) of consciousness or to function there somewhat. While most people can function to varying degrees on the physical plane, few are fully aware of the forces on all seven sub-planes or can consciously control and manipulate them. Therefore, each of the seven sub-planes of each plane represents stages or degrees to be mastered.

Each major initiation also implies achieving some basic mastery on one of the seven rays. The ray that corresponds to the initiation varies, depending upon the ray of a candidate's ashram, the candidate's own ray composition, and the initiation being taken. The energy centers of the candidate are also vivified during initiatory processes. This is achieved safely, quite unlike the ill-considered (dangerous) dabbling sometimes attempted by beginners.

The subject of initiation elicits much glamour and potential for self-deception for those who are not yet integrated and aligned with their souls (whereby light and intuitive insights may be employed). Many outlandish claims are made by the uninitiated, while the true initiate has a great reluctance and no actual need to speak of his own stage of evolution. For him, the lure of the outer world is being or has been overcome and is transcended by an inner awareness of joy and fulfillment. At the master stage (the third major initiation), the initiate moves into the next higher kingdom (of souls).

Thus he continues to serve and evolve with his brothers, as the God within him (that he is) continues its path of unfoldment and service, knowing and merging with the God transcendent (with the lives and Gods and logoi beyond). It is an infinite, eternal spiritual path in the glory and progressive realization toward the One, eternal, all-encompassing, Absolute God.

A revealing, broader perspective hints at the magnitude of the spiritual path. Our seven planes of consciousness in the planetary scheme, including the monadic plane and our highest, the atomic plane or world of God (both far beyond the ken of most people), on a higher turn of the spiral, comprise simply the seven sub-planes of the cosmic physical plane (the lowest cosmic plane). In another correlation, our third major planetary initiation (wherein the master stage of relative human perfection is achieved) is only the first true solar initiation. In addition, one must complete our seventh major planetary initiation before one has achieved the first initiation from the cosmic angle.

Thus the process of evolution continues ever onward and upward, as all spiritual students are simply aspirants and disciples at some level. The masters and high initiates of the human stage endeavor to achieve their next step of service and refinement as do beginning human aspirants theirs. Our solar logos and all within the solar system, are, on a higher turn, simply a center of consciousness in a great cosmic being. All are meaningful, no matter whether cosmic or microscopic, experienced or inexperienced, and all are evolving further according to a great and inspiring divine plan of evolution.

