



The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 2.3

The Spiritual Group

Spiritual Relationship



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The Spiritual Group

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Chapter 2.3

The Spiritual Group



Spiritual Relationship

The spiritual group provides the context for the spiritual student in relation to humanity and the broader spectrum of life and consciousness. Individuals may develop to some extent without substantive group context, but conscious evolution in consciousness can only occur through some (proper) spiritual group in some broader context.

In a sense, it is the group that evolves, and not so much the individual members per se, though each contributes to that evolution. Similarly, it is the lifewave that evolves, and not so much the various groups within that lifewave, though each has a role to play and contributions to make.

The Spiritual Group

The spiritual group is, properly, the contextual relationship between the spiritual student and the spiritual path. While the student in incarnation inevitably and eventually turns inward in approaching the soul or higher self and while that soul or higher self serves as the inner relationship of the student to the path, the spiritual group provides the broader context of the path and the qualified connection between the student and the lifewave (humanity) in which he or she works.

The human being in incarnation is an expression and component of the lifewave, humanity. On the highest level of human expression (the monadic level), the distinction of individual human beings is virtually non-existent. On the lowest level of human expression (at the level of the coarse human personality) are vast numbers of relatively (more apparently than really) independent and separative human beings in manifestation. Between these two levels is the middle ground of the soul, and on that level, coexistent with and not really separate from the soul, is the hierarchy of spiritual groups in the proper sense of groups of souls. In this sense there is little distinction between the soul of the individual and the soul group or spiritual group on the level of the soul (spiritual groups in manifestation, on human personality levels, are another matter altogether).

The spiritual group in this higher, soul-level existence, provides the common thread of qualification in the context of the spiritual path, as in most cases all of the members of a soul group are more-or-less at the same level and committed to the spiritual path. Those who are approaching the path, as souls, are simply loosely affiliated with one or another of the seven ray ashrams but have not been incorporated into one or another of the spiritual groups in this sense, even if there are karmic relationships with one or another of the various groups. But those who have been incorporated, through approach, qualification, and integration at the soul level, then become expressions of that group. Thus, incorporation conveys both qualification of the soul by the group and expression and representation of the group (energy) (quality) by the soul through its personality, to whatever extent it is capable.

The spiritual group is a wave of relative pioneers within the human lifewave. The human lifewave serves as the basis of brotherhood, but the spiritual student does not (cannot) function entirely independently of his or her respective spiritual group. The soul lives in the context of the group. The spiritual student or personality-incarnation of the soul is an expression of the soul, more-or-less-responsive to that soul, or at least striving to become responsive to that soul. So even an apparently isolated spiritual student has a soul and therefore a relationship with his or her soul group. But more importantly, each spiritual student has, by virtue of that relationship, compatriots along the way, some in incarnation, some others not so, some in proximity, some others not so. Thus a community exists for each spiritual group in manifestation, whether or not, and to whatever extent, that group is cohesively manifested (focused) in space and time.

Spiritual groups in manifestation (and any group that approximates or seeks to manifest as a spiritual group) vary substantially in expressed common character, temperament, and values (quality of consciousness). Three of the aspects or components of the spiritual group in manifestation are brotherhood, community, and the teacher (the relationship of the student to his or her mentor(s)).

« Commentary No. 204

Group Character

The spiritual student is tasked with understanding his own (personal) (individual) nature on its various levels (and interactions) as well as human nature in general. One of the interesting features of human groups is their tendency to take on many of the individual human characteristics. The many lessons concerning human nature are frequently found reflected in human groups of various types and sizes. Thus the student is encouraged not only to understand himself, but to observe and analyze group behavior and character as well, that the student might more easily and more intelligently cooperate with constructive forces on various levels and through various groups.

There are a number of variables that can be considered in an analysis of any group. The size of the group should be taken into consideration, for the size of a

group very strongly affects the internal and external group dynamics (along with some of the other variables). Human groups can range in size from a few persons, through nation-states and races, to humanity as a whole. The size of the group contributes to its manageability and potency. The membership of the group should also be examined, for the group nature rests ultimately on the nature of the individuals who form the group (analogously, in the human being, the various aspects and constituent elements of the personality and their relationships with each other). The purpose of the group usually reveals how the membership is related to the group. Group goals and objectives play an important role in attracting the membership and holding it together.

Other group variables of significance include quality, maturity, strength (potency), stability (of membership), level of consciousness (as well as variety and consensus), flexibility, diversity (of membership), frequency (of association), freedom (of the membership), formality, and complexity. The overall quality of the group may be head-centered or heart-centered (or balanced) and allied to any one or more of the seven rays. The maturity of the group is especially important; the strength (potency) for good is related to the group's dependability, stability, and overall maturity. The level of consciousness is also quite important in this respect.

Depending on maturity and the level of consciousness, a group might be reasonably well-integrated (coherent) and spiritually responsive (as a group). Groups of significant duration (nation-states) (races) are qualified each by a personality ray and a soul ray which may substantially interact with the group character (and contribute to its formation). The internal structure of a group also plays a considerable role in the determination of the group character. How the various individuals relate to each other (and to the group goals) affects the various qualities and characteristics that the group manifests. External relationships (alignments) (forces) also (usually) affect the group character.

As all of these variables are considered and the nature of the group determined, the various attributes of the group can be discerned (such as humility, openmindedness, awareness, moderation, goodwill, reasonableness, practicality, adaptability, confidence, kindness, harmlessness, friendliness, impersonality, clarity, etc.) (of course these qualities may be as much a part of the analysis). Much can be learned concerning human nature and the effects of certain

characteristics in the field of human experience, and much of that understanding can be applied to constructive efforts and interactions. What is learned about group dynamics and group character will well serve the spiritual student, for increasingly, spiritual students must work together in a coherent and mature fashion on personality levels and on group levels.

« Commentary No. 260

Group Consciousness 1

Group consciousness in the higher sense (in contrast with mass consciousness) can only be experienced through the soul, and consequently requires that the student achieve a considerable degree of self-consciousness (in the higher sense of soul consciousness). Due to the continuity factor in human evolution (where levels of consciousness overlap to a certain extent), the student who can achieve some degree of alignment with the overshadowing (indwelling) soul can also experience a certain degree of group consciousness.

Like soul consciousness, group consciousness is not objective; it is highly subjective and requires the involvement of both the abstract mind and the intuition (buddhi). Group consciousness is actually a function of realization (understanding) on group levels, where individual thought-forms cannot exist. In a sense, group consciousness is the exercise of a group mind (a group mental organism), except that it does not function on concrete (objective) levels. Only subjective energies (abstract mental impressions complemented with buddhi) can exist within the group consciousness. Those impressions are actually energies (ideas) unresolved into thought-forms. However, the group can precipitate concrete (massive) thought-forms on objective levels, provided the group alignment persists. The group can be highly evocative (creative) in providing needed energies for humanity. Group meditation (on concrete mental levels) provides a stepping-stone (training ground) for the participants and simultaneously provides an important link in the energy chain.

Group consciousness depends on the intelligence and individual capabilities of all the members (of the aligned group) and it depends markedly on the ability of the members to pass beyond their individualities into the deeper union of the

group. It also requires a natural harmony (energy relatedness) so that the group can function as a single entity (subjectively).

The group consciousness can be characterized as an interdependence of the group mind-soul and the various (blended) participants. The participants remain independent in the sense that each member can function as a localized (individual) consciousness (on group (abstract) (soul) levels), but they are dependent in the sense that each member contributes to the group effort and actually merges with and draws energy from it. Thus the enlightened individual who experiences group consciousness can be fully aware on both individual and group levels simultaneously; but individual thought-forms cannot be created or related to simultaneously with group consciousness, for that would quite necessarily separate the individual from the group alignment and drop the individual focus of consciousness down onto concrete mental levels (where subjective group alignment (and soul consciousness) is impossible).

With ordinary human consciousness, the individual is absorbed in mass (mundane) consciousness. With some degree of mental self-mastery, the student can intelligently interact with the mass consciousness, but with soul consciousness and group consciousness (in the higher sense), the esoteric group can evoke a considerable (constructive) energy flow with respect to the mass (human) consciousness. Group consciousness can also be extended to an alignment with greater group lives, so that even broader (universal) rapport is possible. Also, once the esoteric student has learned to achieve group alignment on subjective levels, he can guide the (resident) group potency in any meaningful (compatible) application (realization). Thus, the group energy serves as a considerable and potent reservoir that the esoteric student can draw upon and contribute to (impersonally) in spiritual efforts.

Group Consciousness 2

Group consciousness in the lower sense is a matter of group unconsciousness or collective mass consciousness. Much of the conditioning of humanity as a whole (and of the human (animal) body) is conveyed through this lower group consciousness. The lower group consciousness also conveys lower instinct, which is the product of humanity having passed through the animal kingdom.

But group consciousness in the higher sense is something else altogether, a matter of all human souls being linked together as an undifferentiated whole (on some level) and distinguished as soul groups (on another, albeit somewhat lower level). In the first case, the entire race is an evolutionary entity. In the second case, each soul (ray) group embodies one or another of the seven rays for humanity as a whole. In achieving conscious awareness of this higher group consciousness, the spiritual student first recognizes the character and quality of the soul, then that of the soul group, then that of humanity as a whole. But achieving awareness of the higher group consciousness is not the same thing as actually (consciously) participating in that consciousness. In order to achieve that (participation), the student must pass well beyond the ordinary (human) (personality) consciousness, overcoming much of the conditioning, overcoming the illusion of separateness (actually, not merely intellectually), and actually transcending the ego (personality) (intellect).

One of the attributes of (higher) group consciousness is the facility of seeing or perceiving through the eyes (senses) of other group members. This is not a willful matter, for willfulness precludes any such experience. This is also not a matter of invasion of privacy, for the experience (expression) is a matter of cooperation at the soul level, for it can only occur where two souls are linked together (more correctly, where a group of souls are linked together, by virtue of character and quality (substance) (never merely by virtue of circumstances)). And it is not a matter of individuality, for any sense of individualness precludes the experience. In fact, the facility of collective (higher) perception, consciously or unconsciously, precludes the ability to clearly distinguish between the individuals involved. There is a lower form of this, through astral and etheric means, where there is the possibility (danger) of imposition, but in the higher

means there is never any merely psychic facility and not any possibility of imposition.

In another sense, the group evolves as a whole, through collective (higher group) consciousness. For one who is functioning in alignment with the soul, to perceive in the lower worlds is to afford the collective group to perceive as well (the distinction being moot). It means that the personality presence (and ego) is largely absent (non-existent) (respectively). It means that the person is so qualified (purified and refined) in the lower consciousness that there is no real (substantive) impediment to the higher consciousness functioning through the lower vehicles. In this way, the disciple is able to serve the race (humanity as a whole) and the group (at the soul level) through experience and expression. Such students evoke and convey considerable higher energies through their daily lives.

Another attribute is the loss of distinction of exactly whose experience is concerned. One naturally draws upon the experience (current and past (and even future)) of all group members and the group as a whole. Thus, at this level, it matters not that an individual lacks certain experiences or talents, when the needed experience or talent is within the group and can be evoked as needed (non-consciously).

« Commentary No. 323

Group Approach

Along the spiritual path, (substantial) esoteric progress can only be obtained in group formation (on soul levels) (in relation to an esoteric group (order)). The particular esoteric group (to which a soul is related by character and quality) (or to which a soul is beginning to relate) can be approached (directly) via the soul (which involves overcoming the relatively independent personality) and (where available) via a related outer (exoteric) group. Where such a qualified outer group is available, the individual is obliged to work through that group as much as possible.

The approach to the outer group should be both objective and subjective, as the individual works through the soul in linking up with the esoteric group via the

(corresponding) exoteric group. The availability of an appropriate outer group does not preclude the (necessary) soul alignment; in fact, the role of the outer group includes assisting individual members to achieve that alignment.

Assistance to outer group members is subordinated to the overall needs (service) of the group, but those needs are normally addressed coincidentally with the opportunities (involvement) afforded the members. Unaligned individuals (the majority of spiritual students) (not formally or consciously aligned (on soul levels) with any particular esoteric group) often work with one or more exoteric groups until they can recognize their inner (soul) loyalties and relationships and can align themselves with their proper esoteric (exoteric) group. Even after such alignment, individuals may continue to work with various exoteric groups (building bridges), but as an extension of and in cooperation with the group to which they are formally (properly) related. Independent (unaligned) activity is not as effective (as aligned work), but useful work (service) can be performed by isolated (aligned, interdependent) individuals, and useful (preliminary) work can be performed by unaligned individuals.

No (true) esoteric group is manifested as an exoteric group. The primary responsibility for the functioning (activity) of a related exoteric group rests upon its incarnated (esoteric group) members (representatives). An important (practical) aspect of such an outer group is that it remain properly aligned with the esoteric group (order) and therefore remain relatively free of the associated personalities. The vast majority of (spiritually-motivated) (exoteric) groups are not aligned with esoteric groups due to (relative) personality-centeredness. Outer groups of various forms and degrees (qualifications) provide valuable experience (training ground) leading (hopefully) to compassion, patience, understanding, cooperation, etc., as well as meaningful service. The approach of an individual should not depend entirely upon an outer group (which may not be properly aligned), but should depend principally upon the soul relationship.

Due to the considerable quality inherent in an esoteric group, the various esoteric groups are themselves coherently (interdependently) (cooperatively) aligned with one another, even though many differences exist between the various groups (i.e., each esoteric group has a distinct character, temperament, area of expertise (and commensurate responsibility), etc.). Exoteric groups are not normally as well-coordinated due to the complexity of outer existence (in the

lower worlds) and the need for diversity. The inner (subjective) (qualitative) alignment of esoteric groups is far more important than that of their outer counterparts and unaligned outer groups. The approach of an individual to an esoteric group (via the soul or via an outer (aligned) group) must necessarily be on group terms, not on the terms of the individual (personality).

« Commentary No. 629

The Group and External Environment

The mature (mentally polarized) spiritual group is an oasis of qualified (purified, refined) energy within the surrounding milieu of outer world experience. The group serves as an outer plane sanctuary that is conducive to the proper alignment of personality and soul leading to the real sanctuary on the inner planes. The external world (environment) is the arena of relatively coarse energies, glamour, illusion, loudness, and intense sensual experience. Although the external environment offers a broad spectrum of opportunity for experience (lessons), the members of a mature spiritual group must be vigilant in their effort to qualify their involvement in the external environment.

This qualification is necessary to minimize the disquieting impact an individual might have on the group environment. Most spiritual students find interactions with the outer world both appropriate (e.g., for sharing light energy) and compelling (e.g., to provide for physical support), but as the group member interacts with the outer world he needs to be wary of whatever negative influences these interactions might have on the quality of the aura and the maintenance of spiritual poise. Absorption in mundane relationships or activities can have a very negative effect. The coarseness (loudness, agitation, excitation, etc.) introduced into the group environment by a group member who has allowed himself to become absorbed (albeit only temporarily) in the outer world can have minimal to sometimes shattering effects on the group.

The group member (or any spiritual student) should attempt to minimize unnecessary external activities. Not only is an active outer life draining on the resources of time and energy, but it can introduce unsettling complications and confusion. Wherever possible the outer life should be simplified and all outer

activities evaluated for relative merit in the context of the group good and the spiritual path. As well as simplifying and foregoing much external activity, the group member (spiritual student) should exercise discretion in relationships, deliberately choosing not to cultivate or pursue relationships that may prove unnecessarily distracting or absorbing.

Those relationships with significant emotional content are particularly to be avoided. This does not imply that the group member should eschew all relationships in the outer world, but merely that relationships be approached in a more impersonal (rather than personality-centered (attaching)) manner. Much pure heart quality (kindness, compassion, sympathy, etc.) can be shared with those around us without attachment or absorption.

The group member should be consistent in adherence to the preliminary discipline and values of the spiritual path. There really is no such thing as a "vacation from the spiritual path" once the student is committed. The student's conduct in both the outer environment and the sanctuary of the group should be relatively similar, and excuses should never be made for behavior that varies markedly from one environment to the other. In the earlier stages, the student may find himself facing the dilemma of being drawn to the group environment (and associated spiritual quality) while at the same time being seduced and drawn away by the lure of the external world and mundane experience. Eventually, a point will be reached where the student must stop indulging in the milieu of outer world experience; this point is passed only as the inherent appropriateness of the inner life and concomitant inappropriateness of outer life indulgence is embraced. Thus, life within a mature spiritual group can provide valuable lessons (challenges) (stimulation) for the spiritual student in refining and balancing his interactions with the external environment.

Group Identification

As the spiritual student gains momentum along the spiritual path (or path of approach) there will ultimately come a time when he will feel impelled to associate himself with other like-minded students for participation in group work (endeavor) (assuming he has no compelling obligations that prohibit such close association). Quite often spiritual students express a need to “find their group” (the exoteric (outer, physical plane) group corresponding to an inner plane esoteric group (functioning under the auspices (sanction) of a Hierarchical (or peripheral) Ashram) to which they believe themselves to belong). Whether the student is indeed associated with a group depends to a large extent on his place on the spiritual path.

All individuals are members of particular groups on the inner planes. Each is associated (in a general sense) with the particular ray group by which his soul is qualified. Each is further associated with a particular soul group (based on a shared individualization experience) and probably one (or more) karmic groups (based on shared historical experience). Very few, however, are members of a proper esoteric group. A student must be at the level of a probationary disciple or beyond before his soul (not personality) can be considered affiliated with such an esoteric group. Those on the path of approach (aspirants) are generally in the process of gravitating toward a group (or groups) that may be appropriate to their later potential and ability, but are not considered members of such groups. Thus, for the majority of students, there is no specific group (as yet) for them to identify as “theirs.”

Once the recapitulatory process has reached a certain stage, a disciple will very naturally be drawn to the exoteric group (and corresponding esoteric group) to which he may be of most service in that incarnation. Generally, this group will be the exoteric instrument of the esoteric group to which he belongs. It is not uncommon, however, for a disciple to be called upon to work with a group other than his own for an incarnation, particularly if he has specific needed abilities (there is much cooperation between the Ashrams) or if other members of his esoteric group are not in incarnation at that time. In any event, the disciple will

simply recognize the quality of the appropriate group, and gladly devote himself to the opportunity to be of service through group work.

Whereas the disciple is guided primarily by responsiveness to soul prompting (intuition), the aspirant (on the path of approach) will generally not find group identification such a natural (straightforward) process. There may indeed be much seeking (and time and effort spent) before an appropriate exoteric group is found. Unfortunately much of this seeking may be more a matter of glamorization of the path and the ego's desire for self-importance than a genuine product of a service motive. Where the aspirant has some degree of sensitivity, he may be attracted to certain groups based primarily on a recognition of shared experience (karmic) with other group members. This is not necessarily inappropriate, but the aspirant would do better to focus impersonally on the philosophy, character, and quality of the group (leaving predominately personality attractions as much out of the focus as possible).

In the matter of group identification, the spiritual student should exercise (learn) discretion. He should endeavor particularly to distinguish the glammers associated with each group (and the glammers of his own making). He should seek to honestly know his motive for seeking a group, and to refine and purify his own life, thus making himself a fit vehicle for service. With true aspiration and a sincere desire to serve, an appropriate opportunity will come.

« Commentary No. 631

Group Integration

There are many qualities that contribute to an individual's suitability for work with a mature spiritual group. Probably the most significant of these qualities relate to the expression of (development of) certain elements of the three rays of aspect and to the individual's polarization.

A necessary first ray quality for successful group association is a basic ability to utilize (focus) the will, particularly as it is reflected through the seventh ray in the form of discipline and, more specifically, self-discipline. When a candidate

lacks self-discipline, there will be many problems in adherence to the various practices and principles of the path and group life. The other necessary first ray quality is humility, meaning the essential ability to see oneself honestly. Self-honesty (humility) is vital for establishing proper group relations (rapproch) and for serious spiritual work. Second ray qualities needed for group work (group life) relate to truth and impersonal love.

The group member must love truth, fostering a sincere desire to know the truth despite whatever challenge that may pose to the ego. He must have such a reverence for truth that his words and actions are in harmony with the truth that he perceives (thus, in honesty he can be trusted by the group). The ability to understand and channel impersonal love is essential to mature service work. To love impersonally is the key to conquering self-centeredness and foregoing desire for individual development (while focusing on group good (the work to be done) (service to humanity and God)). The third ray qualities particularly required are a degree of intelligent understanding and adaptability (open-mindedness). Especially to be wary of is the tendency to narrow-mindedness and crystallization that can effectively impede learning.

The polarization of consciousness of the individual relative to the group is also quite significant. While there are many (philosophical, theosophical, metaphysical, etc.) groups for a spiritual student to work with, relatively few are mentally polarized. The majority of groups are composed (predominately) of emotionally polarized individuals whose collective consciousness (the group's consciousness) is therefore necessarily polarized on the astral (emotional) level. Only those (outer) (exoteric) groups which are mentally polarized can be chartered by an esoteric group (thus the need to carefully qualify the core membership to protect the polarization of consciousness and the group's charter). Emotionally polarized groups (and individuals) are simply not stable enough to safely and effectively channel the occult energies involved, nor would such groups be able to bridge (align) successfully to the abstract mental or buddhic planes to respond to the guidance of an esoteric group. Appearance to the contrary is generally an indication of the ability of an emotionally polarized group (individual) to draw on the often deceptive contacts and energies from the astral plane.

The individual with mental (or buddhic) polarization can generally be assimilated into a mature mentally polarized group more rapidly than an emotionally polarized individual, but for the emotionally polarized there exist real opportunities for substantial encouragement and assistance in integration of the personality (the keynote of mental control) within the group environment. While it would be ideal for a spiritual student approaching a group to have already mastered much of the quality of the rays of aspect, in most cases there is much work (refinement) to be done toward mastery. In the final analysis, the student who succeeds in group integration is one who is steadfast (not merely casual or superficial) in his commitment to the spiritual path and service.

« Commentary No. 1031

Spiritual Groups 1

In the higher sense, spiritual groups exist at the level of the soul and form the structure (depth and breadth) of the spiritual hierarchy or inner government. In the lower sense, spiritual groups are manifested at the personality level, each with some degree of alignment with the character and quality of the group in its inner, higher sense.

At the higher level, spiritual groups are organized in relationship to the hierarchy. At the lower level, each spiritual group is manifested according to the charter of the higher group and to some extent according to the needs, abilities, and interests of the members in incarnation. Some groups are manifested in a well-focused manner, being relatively distinct in space and time and composition and character. Other groups are manifested in a less-well-focused manner, with more subjective coordination of its participants (members and representatives). At the higher level, the coherence and position (quality) of a group is readily apparent. At the lower level this is not necessarily so, as spiritual students in incarnation are not necessarily or even generally all integrated as personalities nor aligned with and responsive to their respective souls. Thus groups in manifestation vary rather widely according to apparent character, temperament, and values.

There are two major distinctions for the various spiritual groups in manifestation, both of which have a bearing on the character and quality manifested by the group as a group and through its members. The first distinction is whether or not the group is sanctioned, i.e., existent at the level of the soul and therefore sanctioned by the hierarchy by virtue of its place within the hierarchical scheme, while the second distinction is whether or not the group in manifestation is more-or-less personality-centered. A sanctioned group has a more direct connection or relationship to soul levels and is therefore substantially more potent (in the spiritual sense, not necessarily in the physical, emotional, or intellectual sense). Since very, very few people in incarnation are anything other than personality-centered, and this is true as much for spiritual students as it is for humanity as a whole, the vast majority of spiritual groups in manifestation are likewise personality-centered.

A sanctioned group may be personality-centered and therefore less potent or it may have some degree of transcendence of personality-centeredness and therefore be relatively more potent (responsive) (effective in expressing spiritual quality). An unsanctioned group is personality-centered and cannot be other-than-personality-centered. If there is a soul connection in evidence (rather than merely latent), then a group exists in the sense of a sanctioned spiritual group. The challenge for most (sanctioned) spiritual groups in manifestation is simply to provide a forum for spiritual growth and spiritual expression (service) in some area of endeavor. The challenge for relatively advanced groups includes as well the encouragement and opportunity for overcoming the relative personality-centeredness. Unsanctioned, necessarily personality-centered groups, may be relatively sincere and approaching the path, or they may be personality cults or special interest groups without regard for the broader context of the spiritual path in its more proper sense.

Indications of the character and quality (e.g., degree of personality-centeredness) of a spiritual group may be discerned from the expression of the group through its members. Claims of sanction are simply not made by anyone who is consciously a member of a sanctioned group. The real issue is to what extent do personalities dominate (weaken) the activities of the group?

Spiritual Groups 2

Many spiritual groups exist within the framework of humanity in manifestation. All generally serve the purpose of evolution in consciousness in the sense of providing encouragement to the bulk of humanity (or some segment thereof) in the direction of evolution. Some spiritual groups are relatively externalized (objective) and well-integrated with mainstream (more ordinary human) activities, working more directly with progressive issues, while some other spiritual groups are relatively subjective in nature, working along more subtle lines of encouragement. The various groups serve in various ways and through various means, depending on their respective charters, character, temperament, and values (composition).

Some groups are focused primarily on spiritual growth and on attracting people to the spiritual path. Some groups are focused primarily on training qualified students. Some groups are focused more directly on particular issues pertaining to evolution in consciousness. Some groups are more focused along cultural, geographic, and/or religious lines. Some groups serve particular functions within humanity (and hierarchy). Some groups are predominantly karmic in nature (i.e., members are more directly linked by karmic considerations than by common quality in consciousness). Some groups work with other kingdoms and lifewaves, serving to bridge between them. Some groups work primarily with spiritual students of other groups, in the sense of encouraging specific transformations (e.g., overcoming personality-centeredness).

Some groups work primarily on physical levels, with or without being fully externalized. Other groups work on etheric, astral, and/or mental levels, with respective energy in some context or application. Some groups work diversely (geographically or otherwise). Some groups work primarily locally. Some groups have a relatively uniform composition (i.e., all of the members having similar character, quality, temperament, and values). Some groups have considerable compositional diversity (i.e., having a balance of members of varying (ray) talents within some spread of character, quality, temperament, and values).

Some groups manifest through an informal network of members. Some groups are much more formal. Some groups have a collective but geographically diverse composition and character. Some groups have centers or communities of focused activities. Some groups are relatively spiritually immature in manifestation (being rather personality-centered but nonetheless sincere). Some groups are relatively spiritually mature, without being weakened by the presence of substantial personalities. Some groups are relatively extroverted and have a relatively active focus. Some others are relatively introverted and are more contemplative in nature. Some groups provide a balance between activity in the world of human (personality) endeavor and the periodic withdrawal from the distractions of the outer world. Some groups have very large and highly visible memberships. Some groups (equally or more significant) have relatively few members and remain obscure.

In every case, (sanctioned) spiritual groups serve some purpose within the context of the spiritual path and the field of humanity. And in every case, (sanctioned) groups contribute to humanity beyond the near-field of their apparent endeavors. The key for the spiritual student is to grow and serve effectively within the context of the spiritual path, with or without being fully conscious of the group connection. The spiritual student properly embraces the group context, and, in subjective alignment with the group, participates in its work.

Section 2.31



Brotherhood

The lifewave (humanity) is a whole on the highest levels of consciousness. As the heart develops and unfolds, there comes realization of that oneness through the sense of brotherhood. That brotherhood is all of humanity (and all of life).

Brotherhood

Although humanity is linked in countless ways through karmic relationships, there are even more fundamental relationships which draw humanity together, which provide a potential for the (collective) (unified) human organism (lifewave) to achieve its intended place in the (overall) consciousness.

The basis of these relationships is the brotherhood or fellowship of man (humanity) and the continued fellowship of life. The brotherhood of humanity has always been a reality on the level of the soul, in the passive subjective sense, where the distinction of one soul from another is recognized as an illusion of objective existence. The evolutionary intention for humanity can be viewed as the achievement of that brotherhood, on the level of the soul, in the active (conscious) subjective sense, where each soul has fully achieved a quality of consciousness and a rapport with humanity that passes beyond the recognition of the illusion of individual distinction.

The reality of brotherhood is found first in the common source of all life, as all lives can be traced back through intermediate stages to an original common creation. Thus the essence of humanity (on the level of the soul) is a common source of life which sustains an existence and progression. Moreover, many intermediate bonds are found which link humanity to all other life, on every level of consciousness. Another reality of brotherhood can be found in the conclusion of humanity (which already exists) (outside of time and space) where all of humanity participate directly in the communion (fellowship) (rapport) (on the level of the soul) that passes beyond humanity (as the distinction of humanity is no longer pertinent). Between the source and the (relative) conclusion is the qualification of brotherhood, to be recognized and realized, a qualification that serves also as an evolutionary force.

An intermediate (intended) achievement is the evolution of mundane humanity (on the personality level) to the conscious realization and manifestation of a sense of brotherhood (the reality of brotherhood is actually a common sense), not merely for humanity, but for all of life (and form) (and the sense of equality one with every other life). A superficial sense of brotherhood based upon personality

relationships (friendships) is not sufficient; to have any real meaning, brotherhood must be unconditional and involve the energy of the soul manifested through an aligned personality. In this sense, brotherhood is a mutual realization of higher fellowship (communion of souls) (communion of the one soul), a realization unencumbered by the personality or mundane energy. True brotherhood (on any level) is the culmination or product of a number of elements of experience; the realization of brotherhood emerges naturally as a consequence of experience and the gradually evolving consciousness.

This sense of brotherhood is important to the waking-consciousness of the spiritual student, for it then qualifies the interaction of the student with humanity on both mundane and more mature levels. The sense of brotherhood includes the manifestation of a number of human qualities coincident with the spiritual temperament. But the sense of brotherhood also provides an awareness of distinction between aligned and unaligned humanity (between those who are relatively consciously aligned with the soul and those who are relatively absorbed by the mundane life). The student can recognize the God (Christ) (soul) within all, regardless of alignment, but the student must also learn to interact with unaligned humanity (on personality levels) without being absorbed. With impersonality (respect for the God within), the love of the soul can be a force of encouragement for humanity (toward realization of brotherhood).

« Commentary No. 320

Brotherhood and Service

As the heart unfolds and the sense of brotherhood emerges within the consciousness of the student, a natural tendency arises for the student to become increasingly concerned about the welfare of others, rather than his own. The service motive can be quite strong, and where that motive is coupled with understanding and discretion, the student becomes a relatively potent force of encouragement and helpfulness (cooperation). But where that understanding and discretion are lacking, the individual may approach others (humanity) from a perspective (and practice) of missionary zeal and its attendant imposition.

The central issue concerns the responsibility of the individual with respect to others, and the extent to which sincere helpfulness becomes imposition and an impediment to the others' self-fulfillment. Individuals with strong (political, religious, philosophical) beliefs often feel a (self-imposed) (personality-centered) need to share those beliefs with others, even to the extent of trying to change the beliefs of others. Spiritual students, on the other hand, are encouraged only to share their beliefs where they are welcomed, while allowing others to think for themselves and to draw their own conclusions (thereby taking conscious responsibility for their own actions (decisions) (conclusions)).

An imposed belief is at best transient and superficial, as it cannot be properly integrated (assimilated) unless it is coupled with the individual's own realization and understanding. With increased maturity (wisdom) (discretion), the tendency of the spiritual student to promulgate his beliefs (philosophy) is transformed into a sense of helpfulness without imposition, of respect of others' beliefs and values. The student is then in a better position to encourage by virtue of character and temperament more so than beliefs.

This concept of helpfulness (service) without imposition extends also to personality cultivation (reformation). Externally-imposed personality reformation is not at all effective compared with self-imposed reformation. The role of the spiritual student is to encourage without imposition, to stimulate self-reliance and a sense of (individual) (personal) self-responsibility. A person cannot learn lessons for another; one can only learn lessons for oneself. But a person can encourage others to learn (think) (progress), without imposition and without (the illusion of) authority. Keys to understanding (philosophical principles) (experience) can be shared as appropriate (upon invitation), but the realization (understanding) can only come (naturally) from within (as merited). It is the responsibility of the individual to exercise the various keys (opportunities) according to ability and experience (consciousness). All confusion and misunderstanding is self-imposed; confidence and realization are (self-imposed) products of individual consciousness.

Real (spiritual) progress implies a continuous process of personality refinement and the proper exercise of mental (and intuitional) faculties. Personality problems are virtually (hopefully) inevitable (helpful) (providing needed lessons and opportunities for growth). But personality problems are directly only the

responsibility or concern of the person so tried. Indirectly, others (sincere well-meaning individuals) may be concerned, and may even be helpful (encouraging), but it is not normally the role of spiritual students to be directly involved in the problems and affairs of others. Brotherhood does imply helpfulness (love) (compassion) (respect for karma), but that helpfulness (service) should be offered (with discretion) in a relatively impersonal fashion and with considerable respect (consideration) for the persons so concerned. The presence alone is often all that a spiritual student can (or should) provide.

« Commentary No. 357

Rapport

Rapport is defined as a relation marked by harmony, conformity, mutual accord, and affinity. Rapport can be perceived in many ways, according to level of consciousness, extent, depth, etc. On the personality level, a simple (superficial) rapport exists where two or more personalities have some common thread or relationship which results in mutual understanding or conformity along certain lines (i.e., specific areas of knowledge or activity). This rapport may be essentially physical, emotional, or mental, or some combination. A deeper rapport exists where two personalities have a broader basis for mutual understanding, where there is a complementary relationship as well as a broad commonality. A rapport on personality levels, albeit substantial, does not necessarily (or even generally) indicate a rapport on higher (soul) levels.

A rapport between souls may exist according to the same general principles as a rapport between personalities, except that the harmony, conformity, accord, and understanding are much more refined and subjective, rather than objective. All souls experience some degree of rapport with other souls, due to the basis (intrinsic consciousness) common to all souls, but a greater (deeper) (closer) rapport exists where the character, maturity, and quality of (soul) consciousness is similar. A rapport between souls does not necessarily (or even generally) indicate a rapport on lower (personality) levels, for personalities are not necessarily (and are not generally) in rapport with their respective souls. But where a rapport does exist between souls, and between the individual

personalities and their souls, then a rapport will normally exist also between the personalities, to the extent that the personalities remain qualified.

Of considerable importance is the attainment and maintenance of the rapport (alignment) of souls and personality, that the greater rapport (energy) of the soul may be manifested through the responsive personality. One of the more significant achievements of elevated and qualified human consciousness is the realization (actual achievement) of a deep rapport with the entire spectrum of life (and consciousness and matter). Such a rapport is based upon a realization of (and conscious participation in) the underlying basis (intrinsic commonality or unity) of all life. The esoteric student learns to draw upon that intrinsic unity in establishing a rapport with life at any level, whether it be mineral, plant, animal, human, or otherwise. With such a rapport comes an understanding of how all things (regardless of level of consciousness) are essentially equal.

Such a rapport can only exist where all of the participants are responsive to the common energy (quality). Rapport (on some meaningful level) with subhuman and superhuman life-forms is generally easier to achieve than with human personalities, for rapport with human personalities is normally precluded by the illusion (arrogance) of independence, while greater (and lesser) lives are less distracted along these lines. But where the independent (and self-centered) nature of the personality is overcome, where the higher qualities are embraced and properly incorporated in consciousness, then the individual can begin to achieve a meaningful rapport with other lives.

The great beauty (joy) of an esoteric group (of souls) (on soul levels) is the complete rapport that exists between all of the participants (members) and the group, and between the group and all other lives on that level (subhuman, human, and superhuman). On lower levels, that rapport (inherent understanding) can be reflected in the participant personalities to the extent that they embrace the character and quality of the esoteric group (and the more general character and quality of the spiritual path).

Individual Rapport 1

Living in a serious spiritual community (or being actively associated with a spiritual group) can provide potent opportunities for the establishment of rapport (primarily on mental levels) between individuals. There is further opportunity for the participation in an intuitive rapport or meditative rapport, but on this level is more properly a case of rapport between the individual and group (energy) rather than between individual members (as individuals).

In the context of the spiritual group, individual rapport is not simply a matter of fondness or comfortable cooperation and mundane responsiveness (although these may be consequences of a deeper rapport, they more often are merely apparent and not indicative of anything deeper). Similarly, knowing another's values and being able to predict (to some extent) another's responses to situations does not imply that a rapport exists. The individual rapport that members of a spiritual group or community seek is primarily the result of the establishment of a relationship of direct, honest communication. There are four basic requirements for the establishment of such a relationship.

The first requirement is that both individuals have integrated (or very nearly integrated) personalities. Where the personality is clearly not integrated (lower vehicles not firmly under the control (self-control) of the mind) there is no stable (workable) personality energy. The non-integrated individual tends to be quite changeable because he is to a large extent the slave of whichever of the lower vehicles happens to be in control at the moment. Often such an individual is (unknowingly) confused about his thoughts and feelings since there is no stable, unified personality energy; there is only the whim or desire or emotion of the moment to dictate action or response. Non-integrated personalities are quite capable of emotional rapport (due to the emotional polarization of the non-integrated personality) (and actually more easily so than integrated personalities), but emotional rapport is of little value in a more mature spiritual relationship. While it is possible for individuals who are not yet (quite) integrated to be party to very helpful, encouraging, and cooperative mundane relationships within a group context, the establishment of a real (mental and intuitional) rapport is not quite possible.

The second requirement is that the individuals seeking a rapport understand to some extent each other's character, mental capabilities, and ray make-up. The thinking processes and abilities of individuals vary considerably. For one person to expect (assume) another to think (reason, deduce) in a similar manner to himself, without regard for the differences that exist in mental capacity or mental processes (both developed and resulting from ray influences), leads often to a judgmental and critical approach to relationships. Such unreasonable expectations (assumptions) preclude further understanding and may result in one individual attempting merely to impose his thinking processes upon the other. Where individuals have a healthy understanding of and respect for each other's current abilities (inabilities) there can exist a potent environment for establishment of a (proper) rapport that is not pressured by expectation or unreasonable assumption.

The third requirement for establishing an individual rapport is that the participants are actively seeking to know themselves and to make self-honesty a keynote in their lives. One can only be honest in a relationship to the extent to which one is able to be honest with oneself, to face the ego in an impersonal and reasonably detached manner, and to open oneself to the reality of the personality condition in consciousness.

« Commentary No. 704

Individual Rapport 2

When both individuals seeking mutual rapport (1) are integrated (or very nearly so), (2) understand to some extent each other's character, mental capabilities, and ray make-up, and (3) are actively seeking to know themselves (be honest with themselves), they must further embrace a fourth requirement, that of a firm commitment to honesty and direct communication in the relationship.

Any attempt (conscious or unconscious) to deceive, evade, or misrepresent one's true thoughts (to the extent that the individual is aware of what his thoughts are) represents a breach in (and stress upon) the relationship (any lack of honesty (self-honesty and otherwise) tends to undermine the integrity and substantiality (vice superficiality) of the relationship). There needs to be the

willingness to face up to the tensions or energy stresses that may arise in the relationship via direct communication and a vigilant maintenance of an environment of truth (to the extent to which truth is embraced). As more among humanity develop telepathic abilities, the concept of "privacy" of thought (so frequently presumed to shield deceptions or other inappropriate thoughts) will fade (privacy in specifics will remain, but the more general thoughts and feelings will ultimately be apparent to all, much like one's physical (and to some extent emotional) characteristics are now (normally) apparent) (e.g., the existence and nature of deception will be known, but the specifics may not be).

The need for mental control, purification (right thought), and honesty will take on added significance, for it will become impossible to continue to "hide" within the privacy (barrier) of the mind. Within a mature spiritual group, the thoughts (or quality of thinking) (motive) of each member are known (to some extent) by each of the others. The barriers between minds and hearts of group members are diminished, and therefore reflect (on the personality level) the nature of the soul (soul relationships). There are no barriers between souls; there is only complete freedom (which actually replaces privacy) in open unity.

All members of a serious spiritual group are expected to eventually achieve a rapport with each of the group members. The inability or unwillingness to do so indicates that an individual still has a more considerable effort before him in terms of integration and/or refinement before he can be more fully trusted to assume certain responsibilities within the occult or even more mundane aspects of the work. There is further a group rapport (on mental levels) (a synergistic relationship comprised of all of the individuals relationships and group energy) which is enhanced and strengthened as members achieve rapport with each other and the group energy. Within the group rapport there are no secrets to be hidden away and no aspects of one's life so personal that they cannot be openly and comfortably discussed (should the need arise) in an effort to enhance harmony, restore balance, provide encouragement, and understand lessons which are to be learned. Inherent in such group rapport is a mutual trust in the discretion of each member not to violate the confidence of members to others outside of the group.

One of the real encouragements of life within a spiritual group is that of rapport. Establishing such rapport may be a considerable challenge (learning opportunity), particularly where personalities are dissimilar. As members rise above the personality level and become more responsive to the quality of the soul, true friends (comrades and fellow pilgrims on the spiritual path) are recognized and appreciated for the role that each plays in the greater group (soul) context.



Section 2.32



Community

The immediate evolutionary background is the community in which the student lives and works, both in the mundane sense and in the spiritual sense. The community provides more effective relationship between individuals and the lifewave. Although the student may rise above the common trends of consciousness (e.g., overcoming absorption in mundane, personal, and secular matters), he or she remains a member of the community.

Community

Community is defined as a more-or-less-unified body of individuals, people with more-or-less-common interests living in a particular area or otherwise linked together through association, communication, and other forms of interaction. There are two spiritual aspects to community, the spiritual component of an otherwise ordinary (general) community and the spiritual community per se.

Communities in the ordinary sense are (almost invariably) predominantly personality-centered in nature, but may vary greatly in the relative quality of overall consciousness (from relatively coarse to relatively civilized). Spiritual communities are also (almost invariably) predominantly personality-centered in nature, with some exceptions, but with (hopefully) more substantial spiritual quality than is evident in the larger community as a whole. Advanced spiritual communities exhibit much less personality-centeredness and are self-governing through consensual meritocracy and consensus of quality rather than in any autocratic or democratic sense. Most (proper) spiritual communities afford the opportunity for each student to rise above and beyond his or her (normal) personality-centered nature.

An ordinary community is defined by various cultural, economic, geographical, political, religious factors, with or without any noticeable spiritual component or emphasis. However, each community has a spiritual component that reflects the quality and character of spiritual consciousness exhibited or manifested, however subtly, by the community. Where there is a generally widespread and healthy regard for community (common) values (and where those values are sensible), then that spiritual component will be relatively strong, indicating that the people are somewhat responsive to the forces of evolution.

A spiritual student who happens to live in a particular community has some responsibility for manifesting spiritual quality in the context of that community. The community contributes to the consciousness of the spiritual student, to some extent. And the spiritual student likewise contributes to the consciousness of the community. The existence (and subtle manifestation) of spiritual students within a community is a relatively important aspect of the

community. And there are always (some) spiritual students in every community, although quality of consciousness may vary substantially and the community may very well inhibit or otherwise condition the spiritual student to some extent. More importantly, the spiritual student is a force of encouragement wherever he or she may live. That encouragement is conveyed generally through the character, temperament, and values of the student (i.e., through a spiritual lifestyle, ethics, morals, etc., without imposition).

A spiritual community is generally a community within a broader community, with the spiritual community being either the spiritual component of a community or a distinct (geographical) community within some larger context. A spiritual community may take one or another of various forms, have some degree of integration, have some overall character, temperament, and values, etc. Spiritual communities provide (internal) encouragement among the various participants (residents) (students) as well as (external) encouragement in the sense of the effects of the spiritual community on the general community and the role that the spiritual community may play in the larger context. The value (effect) of an integrated spiritual community substantially exceeds that of the collection of individual (spiritual) students.

« Commentary No. 308

The Spiritual Family

The bulk of the human evolutionary path is dominated by experience and the bonds of karmic relationships. But once the soul has committed itself to the spiritual path, the path becomes dominated by quality (character) rather than karma (as karma is fulfilled and the individuals are free to express themselves in a higher group context). The bonds between souls are these bonds of quality (which are, in a sense, bonds of karma transformed into quality). An original karmic group (soul group) evolves as its members evolve and to the extent that the members are aligned with the character of the group. Occasionally, members of one group will be drawn to another group, as the quality or character of the member changes (distinctly) relative to the group. Occasionally, individuals will be drawn together for karmic reasons and the karmic bonds (mutual experience) may lead to development along similar lines (of quality),

thereby transforming karmic bonds into the higher order (quality) (magnetic coherence).

Where bonds of quality are achieved or maintained, either through the character of the original soul group or through magnetic transference to a more appropriate group, a true rapport among individual souls can be achieved, resulting in a conscious rapport among the corresponding (aligned) personalities. Where such a rapport exists among souls in incarnation, the soul group might be considered to be a spiritual family (from the perspective of the incarnated personality). Some members of a soul group (spiritual family) may very well incarnate together and form close, natural associations along personality lines, or at least recognize each other (on some level).

The attention of the individual (personality) is naturally drawn to the members of the spiritual family (who may or may not be members of the family of the personality). In the case of an esoteric group (where the majority of the soul group members are committed to the spiritual path), the recognition will be more conscious and more mature (less personal) (mentally polarized rather than emotional) and the relationships achieved will serve the group interests (upon the path) rather than individual interests.

The concept of soul mates or twin souls is sometimes used to refer to two or more members of a soul group who are particularly close (similar in terms of quality or vibration). This concept (properly) has naught to do with physical or emotional relationships (or personal love), but refers (properly) to members of a spiritual family who have worked together objectively and subjectively over a long period of time (many incarnations) and who have achieved a rapport (and an alignment, personality to soul) that transcends the ordinary relationships among souls. These soul mates are not necessary to the completion or fulfillment of any individual (though the spiritual family does provide a great deal of encouragement), since the soul is (ultimately) complete in itself (or, in a more esoteric sense, only complete to the extent that it is perfectly (and fully consciously) aligned with the entire lifewave).

The concept of soul mates can be extended to the entire spiritual family (esoteric group) (and humanity), as each member constitutes a soul mate to every other member. The spiritual family is a brotherhood (fellowship) of souls,

united by the bonds of quality, to the extent that the individual consciousness merges with the group and as the individual participates in the subjective life of the group and becomes a conscious extension (agent) of the group. Members in incarnation who are properly trained and capable, can easily link up with the group (and its particular members, on soul levels), share in its thoughts and activities, and help to manifest its energy in the lower worlds.

« Commentary No. 497

Spiritual Community

A spiritual community is a group of people with common spiritual interests (values) living together with some degree of (group) integration. Spiritual communities can serve any one or more of a number of purposes, at one extreme being wholly concerned with individual development and training (along spiritual lines), at another extreme being wholly concerned with service to humanity (and the path) along some particular line of service. Spiritual communities (i.e., that are spiritually oriented (rather than personality-centered)) serve the plan (path) directly or indirectly to the extent of their quality and maturity, which is the extent to which they contribute constructive energy (inductive encouragement) to some larger community (region).

Spiritual communities should contribute to the local equilibrium (without mundane absorption). Thus care should be taken to maintain good community relations with the surrounding peoples. The spiritual community should avoid emphasis on differences between the spiritual lifestyles and values and those of the mundane community, but recognize the common interests and values (i.e., remain non-separative). At the same time, the spiritual community should avoid personality-centeredness so that a balance can be maintained between cohesion as a spiritual community (and the values that that implies) and maintenance of (healthy) mundane community relationships. In order to maintain that spiritual cohesion (orientation), the group must remain relatively neutral in mundane (popular) (political) (timely) issues, preferring emphasis on spiritual matters.

The relative quality and maturity of a spiritual community (group) is a rather significant factor in the relative success or effectiveness of the group as a spiritual community. Many spiritual communities play a bridging role, being able to attract (naturally) those who are approaching the path and provide pertinent encouragement. Other spiritual communities are more specialized or naturally attract more serious students who are already trained in much of the basic discipline and philosophy (theosophy). The size of a spiritual community is not particularly important, although the more serious communities tend to be quite small compared with the more gregarious (social) communities. In some cases, a serious (less gregarious) spiritual core group exists within the framework of a larger, more gregarious (relatively) spiritually-oriented community. Such a core group is necessary for a (larger) spiritual community to maintain any spiritual momentum, since mundane (social) absorption is as much a threat to the spiritual community as it is to the individual student.

The degree of group integration (cohesion) is also a rather significant factor in the effectiveness of a spiritual community. The more socially active communities tend to be poorly integrated in the spiritual sense, but likely to sustain a considerable (personality) (social) rapport among their members due to the common values. The more serious communities require a much higher degree of integration in the spiritual sense, being less personal and less social, while having a (much) greater rapport on spiritual levels. This implies (and requires) a withdrawal from mundane and personal matters and the resulting freedom to devote the bulk of one's time and energy to spiritual matters (meaning necessary (practical) mundane endeavors are properly qualified).

The spiritual community provides a considerable opportunity for individual development and training in the context (and higher purpose) of group consciousness and service, just as living directly in the mainstream of humanity without the benefits of spiritual community serves as an equally significant (albeit distinctly different) opportunity for experience and service.

Spiritual Lifestyles

A number of different spiritual lifestyles (living arrangements) afford a range of opportunities for experience and development and service. Much depends on the individual circumstances (karmic obligations and relative freedom to pursue spiritual matters). The traditional family environment affords considerable opportunities, particularly for the relatively sensitive spiritual student (who is thereby afforded the opportunity of facing the stress of balancing the (worthwhile) mundane obligations with the compelling needs of the student's emerging spiritual nature). Living alone is another potent (albeit different) opportunity (e.g., for refinement, study, meditation, etc.) (although development achieved under stress is more substantial).

The lifestyle implied by a spiritual community can vary considerably, from a loose association of traditional families and friends, to cooperative living, to communal living (or some combination). Although advantages exist for both a loose association on one hand and a fully-integrated communal community on the other hand, the preferred arrangement for a spiritual community is more cooperative than communal. A cooperative community (group lifestyle) (living arrangements) implies some (considerable) degree of (cooperative) living with largely traditional spiritual (family) values and subjective (spiritual) interdependence (rapport). Communal living implies wholly integrated living quarters and a greater social context (with its advantages and disadvantages). The monastic (communal) community is the most potent, but it is also the most demanding (having greater qualifications for participation).

Cooperative living implies working together and sharing responsibilities, but with some (considerable) degree of individual privacy (privacy is important to spiritual growth (self-mastery) but too much privacy impairs the group rapport and community potential). Communal living implies less privacy and greater interdependence in the objective sense. Cooperative living affords the needed privacy, but (properly) emphasizes the subjective interdependence (in addition to the moderate, objective interdependence). The spiritual community itself implies group or organizational ownership of (group) property (resources), in addition to personal effects (property). Both cooperative and communal living

imply that each participant contributes (time, energy, money) to the maintenance of the (spiritual) community and the objectives (service activities) of the community.

Cooperative living implies voluntary commitments, while communal living implies voluntary obligations. In either case, the individual participation depends on adherence to the group values and objectives. In neither case should the individual be constrained or burdened. Individual freedom is important, and the spiritual community should be based on common values, intelligent understanding of group values and objectives, and voluntary adherence based upon (and to the extent of) that understanding and rapport. Personality-centeredness has no place in a (proper) spiritual community. Those who are more personality-centered than spiritually-integrated should remain on the periphery of a spiritual community.

Though communal living is appropriate for some, the traditional spiritual community is more cooperative than communal. The community should serve as a cooperative sanctuary, with largely subjective interdependence and a considerable (intelligent) (effective) rapport. With an effective subjective rapport it is even practical for physically isolated members and associates to participate effectively in the energy and work of the group.

« Commentary No. 509

Cooperative Living 1

In the context of some relatively mature spiritual group, cooperative living affords a considerable opportunity for individual growth and group service. In this context cooperative living means living cooperatively in an environment of spiritual values and group service, where a reasonable balance is maintained between individual privacy and the intuitive group rapport (group integration (cohesion)) required for effective group service, and where the individual interests are largely subordinated to the group objectives.

Cooperative living normally occurs in the framework of three regions: (I) the group environment and the spiritual values implied by the character, quality,

and temperament of the (mystical) (occult) (esoteric) (spiritual) group, (2) the worldly environment and the worldly (personal) (mundane) values implied by the overall character, quality, and temperament of the people of the external community, and (3) the group periphery or transition region (interface) between the group environment (values) and the worldly (world) environment (values). Those members who are properly established in the group consciousness share (to some extent) a group rapport and are principally (largely) involved in that group consciousness, even when functioning outside the physical boundaries of the spiritual community. Those members who are not so properly established in the group consciousness live (in consciousness) in the difficult position of divided and conflicting values, being distracted by the glimmers and experience of the outer world on the one hand, while being simultaneously (naturally) (inwardly) attracted (in principle) to (by) the dharma of the path (the inner world) (group energy) on the other.

Cooperative living allows peripheral members to grow within and adjust to the deeper values (character) of the group while the personality still has significant attachments in the outer world. Wherever a difference in values exists, there results a tension (a force seeking resolution (equilibrium) (harmony)). Thus the peripheral member lives in tension, between the inner and outer values. Those living well within the group environment (consciousness) do not normally experience that tension, since the group values are largely embraced, and since the worldly attractions are weak relative to the individual's commitment (involvement) in the group. But those group members do live with (within) the occult tension (dharma) (the subtle evolutionary pressures) of the group (spiritual path).

Individual growth comes with some degree of assimilation of experience and with some progress in understanding. The group environment (and transition region (periphery)) should provide a field of more meaningful experience than the external environs (for aspirants and spiritual students), since the group environment should be more meditative (contemplative) and the learning process is more one of exposure and realization than one of active experience (the process of exposure and realization implies (for the spiritual student) greater ease of assimilation of (such) experience).

But this opportunity requires the student to be somewhat responsive (not passive) to group energy in order to be effective. The group service aspect of cooperative living is more important than that of individual growth, since it is the group service motive that evokes deeper energies of the group consciousness, not any growth motive. Individual growth should come almost incidentally, as the individual consciously contributes to the work (service) of the group and adjusts his or her personality (naturally) to improve effectiveness (and quality) (which leads to better rapport in the group context).

« Commentary No. 510

Cooperative Living 2

Adjustments for cooperative living are related to the quality and consciousness of the individual relative to both the worldly nature and the quality and consciousness of the group. If the difference in quality (consciousness) (values) between the three (or at least between the individual and the group) is relatively small, then adjustments are relatively easy. But if the difference is large, then considerable adjustments would be needed, and likely those adjustments would be relatively difficult. Those who already share the basic quality and character of a group are much more easily assimilated and are much better able to express that quality and character.

Cooperative living implies that the individual members (spiritual students) will (gradually) assimilate (embrace) the character, quality, and values of the group, not because that character and quality and associated values are imposed, but because that character and quality and associated values are recognized, understood, accepted, and valued as appropriate. The proper group is aligned within the spiritual path and embraces the character and quality and values of the path, to the extent of that alignment (rapport). Personality-centered groups are not aligned with the path, and any degree of personality-centeredness will inhibit that (potential) alignment. Proper groups are not personality centered and are at least somewhat responsive to the impersonal energies of the path. As the individuals progress within the group, and as the group comes more and

more aligned with the path (in terms of character and quality and energy), then the deeper values (character) (quality) can be achieved.

Although individual attention may be afforded in the group context, as appropriate, one should not expect personal or individual attention. Personal interests can still be pursued, as long as those interests are not inconsistent with those of the group. Any inconsistent interests (attachments) merely inhibit the ability of the individual to achieve group rapport. Cooperative living implies considerable freedom, in the sense of being responsible for one's own actions and in the sense of choosing (or seeking) to be aligned with the group, and that freedom implies the (eventual) achievement of considerable self-discipline (self-programming), as cooperative living is embraced as a stepping-stone from (and transformation of) some degree of self-centeredness to some greater degree of group (universal) values and principles.

Ego (self-deception) (dishonesty) (self-centeredness) (self-indulgence) is the greatest impediment to cooperative living (group service). Mature humility (honesty) (love) is the greatest catalyst for bringing about a group rapport. Honesty in communication is particularly important as it affords (encourages) (evokes) understanding (which in turn affords deeper rapport). Consideration (considerateness) (helpfulness) (without imposition) is also quite essential for group cohesion (interdependence) (rapport).

Cooperative living also implies a sharing of the group work (participation in the group energy). Any external employment should not be considered as an independent activity but should be considered as a channel for the externalization (sharing) of the group energy (without advertisement or imposition). Thus all should share directly in the evocation and expression of group (spiritual) energy. Although provision (and respect) for privacy is essential, that privacy should also be considered part of the group (contemplative) environment and not a matter of separateness. The effective group is one which affords individuality and privacy (freedom) at the same time a group rapport is embraced.

Shared Opportunity

Every group or family living experience represents a shared opportunity for particular experience and expression, and particularly so where the group or spiritual family functions in a relatively mature, philosophically-based environment. The opportunity of life within an exoteric (and simultaneously esoteric) group is two-fold. Group life offers both a greater opportunity for service work (primarily) and an increased opportunity for more expeditious spiritual refinement for the involved individuals (secondarily).

As the spiritual student progresses along the path, the call to meaningful service intensifies. The mature student (aspirant) (disciple) becomes increasingly aware of his responsibility (dharma) to serve humanity in the context of the realization (unfolding) of the hierarchical (evolutionary) plan. Participation in group work, through group meditation and various other service endeavors (e.g., publications, counseling, philosophical discussions, occult projection and visualization, etc.), allows the effort of the sincere student to be generally far more productive and effective than would be the case of the student simply working as an individual. The contributions of individuals to a properly balanced and qualified group effort have a greater than merely (linearly) additive effect. Recognition of this synergism stimulates the mature student to (attempt to) improve his potential for meaningful spiritual service through the group (cooperative) experience.

One of the blessings of the spiritual student is to have found the path (work) and then, further, to have the opportunity of shared group potential in the framework of that work (path) (service). On the other hand, one of the more painful experiences for the true spiritual student is to recognize the intensified call for service while necessarily remaining in circumstances that tend to limit his potential for service (opportunity or its lack are nonetheless merited consequences) (every circumstance is an opportunity for service in some meaningful manner on some level).

The shared opportunity provided by the group living in an environment of continuous (subjective, subtle) encouragement for spiritual progress is also a

significant blessing. The student can learn much through observation and experience within and qualified by the quality of consciousness of the group (higher self). The impressions made may be as much subconscious as conscious, but encouraging nonetheless (and of course without feeling any need for encouragement) (one should not need encouragement, one should simply be encouraged). The opportunity of simply living within a group atmosphere (of proper spiritual qualification, tranquility, serenity, positive group endeavor, etc.) is also considerable. This atmosphere represents a potent stimulation for philosophical study, self-evaluation, individual meditation work, group meditation work, and service.

There are also more objective forms of encouragement, as in shared ideas and insights and suggestions for consideration that encourage the student toward a better understanding of himself and the work (context). This generally does not include either praise or criticism, but rather should include impersonal encouragement that does not encourage the illusion of the ego. The shared opportunity of (mature) (cooperative) (spiritual) group life is not something to be taken lightly or entered into casually, for along with the implied opportunities come commensurate responsibilities for contribution and participation (commitment) in group endeavor and considerable challenge for progress.

Section 2.33



The Teacher

The role of the teacher in a spiritual group or community varies according to the character and relative maturity of the group. In discipleship (proper), the role of the teacher is relatively indirect and subjective, a matter of encouragement and qualification rather than direction. The real teacher is karma.

The Teacher

The teacher is one whose purpose it is to teach or share knowledge and to encourage thinking. In the more formal sense, the teacher is one whose major role is teaching; in the informal sense, the teacher can be anyone who teaches indirectly, incidentally to other roles. The main role of a teacher is to encourage (stimulate) learning (development) (self-reformation), particularly in the case of teaching various learning methods and encouraging individual study. The role of the teacher (student) is quite relative; all are in some sense teachers and all are in some sense students.

The primary teacher is karma (experience) (life), as the purpose of life in the lower (human) worlds is evolution (in consciousness) through learning (experience, study, expression, understanding) and sharing (without imposition). Karma provides experience and is entirely impersonal, yet relates directly to each individual according to that individual's particular needs (merits). In providing experience, karma qualifies all events in the lower worlds. The soul plays the role of teacher (albeit subordinate to the law (karma)) to some extent, as the soul interacts subjectively with the karmic force and (subjectively) with the mind and personality-consciousness (to the extent that the lesser self is responsive). The soul is a reservoir of (past) individual and group experience (wisdom) available to the mind (personality); depending on the relative quality of the lower consciousness, the soul can be a very potent evolutionary force. The early and middle stages of human evolution are largely determined by karma irrespective of the soul, while the later stages are increasingly soul-oriented.

The soul (and the soul-group) offers quality (guidance in terms of quality (character) rather than specific personal instruction) via the sharing of appropriate energy (qualification). Karma (and the soul) facilitates (encourages) learning, but the responsibility of learning rests with the individual (mind) (personality) (waking-consciousness).

Many lessons may be presented in the course of karmic experience, but the individual must still (eventually) learn those lessons via assimilation

(incorporation into consciousness). Thus karma (the soul) is an evolutionary force (pressure), but (necessarily) exacting only in the long term. The role of the student (as all human beings are students) is to learn, directly or indirectly, deliberately or incidentally, gradually or more rapidly, as the case may be. The means (methods) of teaching (learning) may vary widely, according to the particular path (ray) (soul group), the nature (character) and maturity of the teacher, and the nature and maturity of the student.

While karma (and the soul) provides intrinsic methods of teaching (learning), the individual may also learn substantially in response to external sources (teachers). In the exoteric case, the teacher is relatively objective; in the esoteric case, the teacher is almost entirely subjective (as the learning occurs via energy processes (presence)). In either case, the individual remains responsible for the acceptance (deferral) (rejection) of a teaching and for assimilating whatever lessons are afforded. In the traditional spiritual sense, spiritual (theosophical) (philosophical) subjects are presented in a formal school (academy) setting and/or via the (guru) teacher-student relationship. The guru-concept involves each (worthy) student having a personal (individual but not necessarily exclusive) teacher and spiritual guide (authority). As the path evolves (and as the standards for spiritual students evolve), the guru-concept is quite naturally replaced by the group-concept.

« Commentary No. 331

The Teacher and the Group 1

The traditional student-teacher relationship is one in which the student and the teacher are (relatively) mutually dependent. It naturally depends upon the relative quality of the teacher and the relative quality and responsiveness of the student. The role of the teacher (traditionally) is to teach, guide, instruct, or otherwise directly influence the student. The teacher may assume some authority, and the teacher may also be a taskmaster. The traditional (student-teacher) relationship is relatively easy to achieve and maintain, and considerable learning and progress may result.

The major weakness of the traditional (teaching) concept is the dependency relationship between the student and the teacher. The problem is considerably

exaggerated in the case of an emotional (devotional) attachment on the part of the student (in the case of disciple-guru rather than student-teacher). In the traditional definition, a disciple is a student (aspirant) who is personally (emotionally) (devotionally) bound to the teacher (guru). Even this relationship can provide considerable learning and progress, albeit at some expense (attachment) (dependency). Where the relationship is more mature, the student may also learn (develop) self-reliance, detachment, impersonality, etc.; but in general, the traditional (spiritual) relationship is relatively personal, centered on the teacher rather than the teaching (albeit the teaching is indeed more important).

In the traditional group concept, the group is a collection of students centered upon the magnetic personality and/or soul of the teacher. The energy flow is predominantly outward, from the teacher to the students, with relatively little response (flow) from the student. There is in the traditional concept only one essential relationship, that of the student to the teacher (and in the higher sense, to the teaching). In the (relatively) current (evolving) group concept, the teacher (senior member) plays an increasingly subjective role, and the group is far better coordinated (interactive) (coherent).

The progressive group (student-teacher) relationship is group-centered and soul-centered rather than teacher (personality) centered. Personal (personality) energy is minimized and several essential relationships are cultivated: (1) the relationship of the student to the group (soul) (teaching), (2) the relationship of the student (group) to the teacher (senior member) (elder brother) (guidance) (teaching), and (3) the relationship of the student to the other (student) members of the group. These relationships are actually much more demanding than those of the traditional concept, though (in the (progressive) group concept) the individuals have more freedom (self-reliance) and there is no dependence on (asserted) authority (the (mature) group depends rather upon (esoteric) energy (quality)). Consequently, the qualifications (ability, quality, alignment, maturity, previous training and experience) for group involvement are considerable compared with traditional qualifications.

The lessons learned via the traditional (teaching) relationship are relatively basic and essential to further spiritual unfoldment (and subsequent service). In the current era the same, basic lessons are learned by the aspirant, generally

without the aid of a teacher. Students (aspirants) are expected to teach themselves all of the basic material and develop all of the basic qualities, in preparation for more serious (group) work. As the path evolves, the traditional teaching methods (for spiritual purposes) are becoming less significant, being replaced by individual study and development in the case of the aspirant, and by (advanced) group methods in the case of the disciple.

« Commentary No. 332

The Teacher and the Group 2

The traditional (spiritual) teacher teaches objectively (directly). In the (progressive) group concept, the teacher teaches (shares) more subjectively (indirectly) and encourages (qualifies) the group without necessarily any direct instruction. Many lessons are afforded students (disciples) in (subjective) group formation that are not available to individuals, but much (effectiveness) depends on the relative impersonality of the teacher and the relative maturity of the group members (i.e., their ability to elevate their waking-consciousness above and beyond the personality). The (advanced) group formation referred to is quite different from the traditional, exoteric (personality-centered) groups that predominate, even along metaphysical and theosophical lines.

The group concept therefore involves only relatively qualified students and provides a framework for continued (and enhanced) self-unfoldment and service. The essential purpose of the group is some particular, appropriate service activity, while the evolution of its members (as individuals and (more properly) as a group) remains secondary, and to the extent that that evolution supports the group purpose. The role of the teacher (in such a group) is to encourage the group in its service (expression) and evolution (in group context), placing the needs (quality) of the group formation above those of the individuals. The (advanced) teacher offers encouragement more by qualification than by any other means, more by example (presence) than instruction, more by questioning and impersonal teaching (of principles) than personal revelation.

In the primary relationship (between the students and the group (soul)), the responsibility for individual integration, adjustment, and alignment is placed on

the student, while the teacher remains to a large extent in the background. The secondary relationship (between the students (group) and the teacher (senior member)) is important only in the sense that the senior member represents the quality and consciousness of the associated esoteric group. The senior member facilitates the transference of energy between the esoteric group and its exoteric counterpart and between the outer (exoteric) group and the surrounding environment according to the purpose (charter) (responsibility) of the group. The tertiary relationship (between the various students (members) (disciples)) is significant only in the sense of cooperation (coherence) (rapport) which facilitates the expression of the higher, group quality. That (qualitative, subjective) rapport, however, transcends the personality nature and is an essential ingredient in the success (effectiveness) of the group.

The energy flow within the (advanced) group is threefold, with each of the members participating actively (via meditation) and subjectively (via quality of consciousness). The lines of force relate all of the members to the group (and to each other) and (via the senior representative) to the esoteric group (and its quality). The teacher (senior member) (elder brother) (presence) may work entirely from subjective levels (impersonally), depending on the maturity (quality) (character) (responsiveness) (circumstances) of the outer group.

The higher qualification comes more from the subjective presence of the senior member than any objective presence. In an even greater sense, even the role of the senior member is transcended, as the character (quality) (energy) of the entire esoteric group may be brought to bear upon the outer manifestation (depending ever on its alignment, responsiveness, and circumstances). In any event, the traditional role of the teacher is considerably transcended in the evolutionary (group) concept, and the students (disciples) become themselves active points of light (love) (power) and extensions of the group energy.

Teachers 1

We all have many teachers and learning opportunities, although few people actually learn consciously and deliberately in the course of life experience because most people are relatively unconscious. The principal teacher is life (experience), engendered by karmic balance, in the context of the evolutionary plan. We learn because we are programmed or qualified to learn by all of the evolutionary and karmic factors. Some are more resistive to learning (more asleep) than others, but eventually become more amenable and responsive to learning opportunities, consciously and otherwise, as the karmic and evolutionary qualifications begin to permeate the substance of the personality.

The true teacher is the soul who (which) overshadows the mind and heart (personality) of the student and who (which) qualifies each incarnation in order to achieve its goals of learning (development) (evolution of consciousness) and service (work within the context of the evolutionary plan). Very few people are responsive to their (respective) soul (or to the soul of humanity) and so karmic qualification must suffice for most people. But as the student learns to listen for and to the voice (silence) (light) of the soul, then (and only then) does the soul take a more active (albeit nevertheless subjective) role in directly qualifying the mind and heart of its personality (reflection) (false self). Then does the soul become the active teacher. Conscience represents an intermediate stage between being unresponsive to the soul and being responsive to the soul. Having a good (strong) (active) conscience implies previous experience and development (and soul qualification).

We are all students and we are all teachers, directly or indirectly. The spiritual student should strive to learn and to serve based upon his or her measure of understanding. The spiritual student should also be a teacher in the sense of facilitating learning wherever the opportunity arises, without imposition. Such facilitation is primarily by way of one's presence (relative quality of consciousness, lifestyle, values, repose, etc.) rather than deliberation. One should only facilitate by deliberation where one is clearly invited to do so (appropriately) or where one is appropriately obligated. One can and should learn directly or indirectly from all appropriate sources, by observation and

evaluation, from discernment and discrimination of sense impressions and other information (potential knowledge) received.

But one must necessarily learn to discriminate effectively both (1) in the particular value of information and learning afforded and (2) in the relative value (validity) of any afforded teachers, (1) because some measures learned are more valuable and useful than others and (2) because much is not what it appears to be and may offer considerable (compounded) deception and relative waste of time and effort (of course one learns (slowly and painfully) from false paths and false teachers, but not very effectively).

Spiritual students (and aspirants to the spiritual path) should prepare (program) (qualify) themselves for learning, learn to learn (a not easily achieved attitude) (i.e., by increased and expanded awareness and by reduced distraction by mundane or personal absorption, desire, etc.), not be concerned about finding or having a (particular) teacher (on the physical plane or elsewhere), and simply focus on learning (growing) and (more appropriately) service. But where a (particular) teacher is appropriate (not merely because the aspirant wants a teacher or thinks it is appropriate), then there are the problems of (1) the validity of the teacher, (2) the qualifications of the student, and (3) the relationship of the student and teacher.

« Commentary No. 672

Teachers 2

The problem of the validity of the teacher is a matter of proper discrimination and appreciation. One must be quite wary of the false teacher, for the student-teacher relationship implies vulnerability on the part of the student and much damage (impedimentally) can be done to the (potential) spiritual progress of the student. Those who claim (sincerely or otherwise) to be masters, teachers, master teachers, etc., in the spiritual path, are not, generally, what they claim to be. Real (spiritual) teachers make no such claims or pretensions, nor do they advertise their presence, qualifications, or availability. Real (spiritual) teachers are known (recognized) by virtue of their overall quality of consciousness (light, love, and power (humility)), not by demonstration or appearances.

The problem (of validity) is a paradox, though, in the sense that those who seek a real (spiritual) teacher generally lack the discrimination and insight needed to recognize such a teacher (master, initiate, or disciple), and those who do have such discrimination and insight for the most part do not need a spiritual teacher in the conventional sense of student-teacher relationship (but only need a spiritual “teacher” in the sense of casual encouragement (which is just as easily imparted subjectively via the soul (for responsive students (and unresponsive students are hardly qualified anyway)))).

In the case of previous association, even emotionally-polarized aspirants sometimes recognize their “teachers,” but generally lack any real understanding of what their teachers really are, how valid they are as teachers, and what an appropriate and proper relationship should be. False teachers are many, and most are sincere (yet self-deceived). Real teachers are very few and generally not interested in teaching, for they are generally too busy “working” (in the sense of spiritual work) to deal with the clutter of unqualified students.

The problem of qualifications is also a paradox to some extent. The aspirant who lacks sufficient qualifications (experience, knowledge, understanding, and ability) has no need for a teacher and has nothing to offer a (spiritual) teacher anyway (for unless a student can contribute to the work undertaken or can learn quickly enough to be able to contribute, the student does not warrant the attention of a teacher (or of the soul)). Such an aspirant must depend on the ordinary course of experience, development, and evolution, until such time as he or she is fitted for spiritual work. On the other hand, those who have sufficient qualifications (experience, knowledge, understanding, ability, etc.) for spiritual work have no need for a teacher either; being qualified, they are at least somewhat responsive to the soul, are working directly or indirectly, objectively or subjectively, with an esoteric group and learn and grow by virtue of their association and spiritual work, not by any (particular) student-teacher relationship. But there may be a grey area, between unqualified and qualified, where a teacher could be useful.

Having a teacher in a proper (valid) student spiritual teacher relationship offers short-term gains at the expense of somewhat undermining the student’s self-responsibility. One cannot really have it both ways; either the student is primarily responsible for (self) discipline, discrimination, exercise, and the

learning process, or the teacher is so primarily responsible (and the student secondarily). Real teachers encourage self-responsibility and prevent or minimize student-teacher dependence, but even so it is necessary (in such a relationship) to subordinate oneself, and few are so capable or willing (and those who are often indiscriminate in the first place).

« Commentary No. 673

Teachers 3

Eventually (hopefully quickly), the subordination is transferred from the teacher to the soul, so that a proper spiritual relationship can proceed unencumbered by personalities. Even with a real (spiritual) teacher (in incarnation or otherwise), one must appreciate that no such person (functioning on physical, emotional, and concrete mental levels) is perfect or without some weakness. So ever, ultimately, the true responsibility lies with the student in all regards.

There are numerous misconceptions in the metaphysical movement concerning teachers, the need for teachers, the student-teacher relationship, etc. For the most part, the need for a teacher is an illusion and based upon the glammers associated with the spiritual path and the emotional polarization of most aspirants to the spiritual path. Students can certainly learn from or by association with teachers, but the relationships need not (indeed should not) be personal. Real spiritual students (and teachers) are impersonal because they embrace the humility and impersonality (and repose) of the soul. Most emotional aspirants are ill-suited (unprepared) for the spiritual discipline, seek a teacher for the wrong reasons (for the glamour of association rather than for true learning opportunity), and contribute very little of a meaningful nature to the spiritual work. But those who are less emotional and less englamoured, who earnestly seek to learn and grow and contribute toward the spiritual work are generally welcomed. Where a "teacher" accepts ill-prepared students there is a cause to question the validity of the teacher and the integrity of the relationships.

Another, less fundamental misconception concerns demand and obligation. Some aspirants believe they have recognized or found "their" teacher and (rudely) demand attention and acceptance, believing the teacher to have some

obligation to the student. Real teachers would reject such students (and their demands) as being rude, unprepared, and unworthy of (unresponsive to) spiritual qualification. No true teacher is obligated to any student unless the student meets the teacher's criteria for acceptance and unless the teacher so chooses to accept such a student (nonetheless qualified) and thereby accepts some obligation (for as long as the teacher permits, which generally means for as long as the student complies with the afforded discipline, exercise, and work and for as long as the relationship is warranted).

Some aspirants presume they will be recognized by the teacher and expect the teacher to accommodate the desires of the student, but in fact, even if recognized, the obligation is for the student to approach the teacher and properly ask for counsel. It is not the place of the teacher to accommodate the student, but rather for the student to accommodate the teacher. This provides all the more reason to insure the relative validity of the teacher and the qualifications of the student, for otherwise the naive student-teacher relationship can be abused.

In the final analysis, the traditional student-teacher relationship is ill-suited to the evolutionary endeavors of the spiritual path. What is far better for spiritual relationships and spiritual work (development and service) is the mutual respect and appreciation (consideration) afforded to coworkers upon the path. Even while some may be better qualified than others and due some further consideration, the central theme or basis for relationship should be dependence upon the soul and qualified relationships between coworkers of the various types and grades (levels of achievement).

Teachers and Self-Will

Throughout the field of theosophy and metaphysics one encounters the notion of the need for a teacher, that one cannot advance properly on one's own. Yet in the relatively more advanced groups, the need for a teacher is not so clear, where the emphasis is upon thinking for oneself and not relying on others to formulate one's beliefs or attitudes. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches, and a time and place for each.

In the first place, where one is unable to think for oneself, where to advance requires external guidance and encouragement, there is need for a suitable and qualified teacher. The bulk of religious experience and practice generally falls into this place (while in the higher forms of religious experience and practice no teacher or intermediary is required). The problem in this instance (the first place) is two-fold: (1) the student (at this place) is generally unable to discern the quality of the teacher, except based upon superficial criteria, and thereby remains somewhat vulnerable and (2) the advancing student is generally unable to discern the time and place of passing beyond such (external) reliance. Karma of course takes care of the former (and even the latter), and a wise teacher will naturally encourage the advanced students to rely more and more on their own abilities.

Eventually, with or without a teacher, one must necessarily learn to think for oneself, developing a sense of discrimination (discernment) (judgment) and a rational basis for one's own beliefs, attitudes, practices, and values. Thus in the second place, one not only needs no teacher but having a teacher is generally a hindrance to self-reliance. On the other hand, as one progresses further in the direction of personality integration and development of the ego, the existence of that emerging ego (and ego-ness) becomes the principal problem that the student must face and overcome. At this point (in the third place) the student becomes again in need of a teacher, either (1) an advanced student-teacher (disciple) (initiate) (master) who is sufficiently wise and adept to "lead" the student onward and upward, drawing the student more and more into the sphere of influence of the student's own soul (and soul group) (and less and less reliant upon the aura of the teacher), or (2) [and ultimately] the soul itself, as the

student begins to rely more and more (eventually entirely) upon the intuition and qualification of the soul (higher self) and the concomitant lessening of the “noise” of the ego (personality) (self-centeredness).

In this third place, the student must overcome the self-will and subject the mind and heart and entire personality to the will aspect of the soul, relying upon whatever measure of intuition has been developed and evoked (given that one can discern between the intuition and the mind-games of the ego). The self-will and the personality (ego) nature must be challenged incessantly if the personality is to become subservient to the higher interests. And in this third place, development proceeds primarily through increasingly refined qualification that is relatively incidental to the (real) work (service) being undertaken.

Ultimately, in an esoteric group, there is a hierarchical structure where authority rests in the senior member (and to which all members are necessarily responsive), but that centralized authority, in an esoteric group, reflects the collective quality and consciousness of the entire group and is thus a matter of inherent (non-deliberative) consensus. There is no place in such a group for self-will of any kind. Those who exercise self-will (in such a place) simply find themselves cast upon the periphery and ignored (for they cannot contribute).

« Commentary No. 1406

Gurus and Disciples

The traditional guru-disciple relationship may offer considerable encouragement to the beginning student (called a disciple in the lower sense of being a disciple of the guru, but not a disciple in the higher, more proper sense of an advanced student), provided the “guru” is legitimate (sincere and talented) and provided the student does not become attached to or enamoured with the guru (the student who is enamoured is simply unable to learn very much).

The purpose of the guru (spiritual teacher) and that of the guru-disciple relationship is simply to encourage the reorientation of the student from the worldly to the spiritual, i.e., the first and more fundamental transformation from a state in consciousness in which the student is entangled in the mundane

(secular) (superficial) world to an enduring state of consciousness in which the student is focused on the spiritual path, without losing sight of his or her worldly obligations (to live in the world without being absorbed in worldly ways). Many prospective students are simply not able to do this without a teacher and/or the encouragement of a community (fellowship) of spiritual students. Thus the guru tends to be an authority figure who provides encouragement for the preliminary discipline and practices that a student needs in order to engage the transformation process.

But many so-called “gurus” are either pretenders or self-deluded. Few are actually spiritually-focused and qualified to be spiritual teachers, though many seem to be (but are not), and many make authoritative claims, seek students, charge for their services, and/or otherwise take advantage of their students naiveté. In some cases it is about money, in other cases it is about power or ego. In some cases delusion. A proper guru does not seek students, only accepts students who are amenable to the spiritual discipline, does not charge for his or her services, and exhibits genuine respect and consideration for his or her students. A proper guru does not intimidate or control his (her) students, but simply offers encouragement and facilitates training and preparation for the student to then actively embark upon the path of self-realization (self-mastery) (enlightenment) (service).

Even a proper guru-disciple relationship depends very much on relative consciousness, i.e., need. A student who truly needs a teacher will simply find a teacher suitable to his or her needs. And a student who is able to find proper encouragement and support without a teacher will simply do so. Advanced students learn to rely on the intuition, and in this sense a traditional personality-centered guru-disciple relationship tends to undermine the student’s focus on the inner self. Thus even a proper (necessarily personality-centered) guru-disciple relationship is temporary and serves a purpose, but allows (indeed encourages) self-determination (not in the sense of ego, but in the sense of the inner self).

The traditional guru-disciple relationship that has been popularized in the west in the last hundred years or so has value, for some, perhaps even for many, but is not the true guru-disciple relationship. For the true teacher is the soul and has naught to do with personalities and the outer teachings of any faith, and is not

about authority in any sense. The best (highest, deepest) relationships between students and gurus are relationships that exist through the soul, i.e., the student relates to the (outer) teacher through his or her own soul, so that the two souls are more prominent than the student-person-disciple and the teacher-person-guru.

