



The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 2.4

The Spiritual Student

The Middle Ground



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The Spiritual Student

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Contents

		Page
Chapter 2.4	<u>The Spiritual Student</u>	1
The Spiritual Student	C 124	2
Encouragement	C 51	3
Between Light and Dark	C 53	5
The Deepening	C 71	7
The Impersonal Life	C 171	8
The Middle Ground	C 422	10
Pledge-Fever	C 852	12
The Esoteric Student	C 936	13
Section 2.41	<u>Dharma</u>	16
Dharma	C 1022	17
The Dharma of the Disciple	C 60	18
Obligation	C 425	20
Dharma and Karma	C 518	22
Responsibility	C 1161	23
Section 2.411	<u>Commitment</u>	26
Commitment	C 311	27
The Crisis of Commitment 1	C 718	28
The Crisis of Commitment 2	C 719	30
The Path and the Rules	C 720	32
Determination	C 1162	33

		Page
Section 2.412	<u>Adherence</u>	36
Adherence	C 1163	37
Adherence and the Path 1	C 621	38
Adherence and the Path 2	C 622	40
Adherence and the Path 3	C 623	42
Adherence and the Path 4	C 624	43
Section 2.413	<u>Transformation</u>	46
Transformation	C 910	47
The Death of Self	C 179	48
Personality Transformation 1	C 390	50
Personality Transformation 2	C 391	52
Personality Transformation 3	C 392	53
Meekness	C 1270	55
Section 2.42	<u>The Dark Night of the Soul</u>	57
The Dark Night of the Soul 1	C 1025	58
The Dark Night of the Soul 2	C 1026	59
The Dark Night of the Soul 3	C 1027	61
The Dark Night of the Soul 4	C 1028	63
Section 2.43	<u>Spirituality</u>	65
Spirituality	C 971	66
Psychism and Spirituality	C 975	67

Chapter 2.4

The Spiritual Student



The Middle Ground

The spiritual student is (lives through) the middle ground between the bulk of humanity and personality-centeredness on the one hand, and the spiritual hierarchy and the self-realization of the soul on the other. From the standpoint of conscious evolution, the spiritual student is one who evolves in consciousness, bridging between the higher and lower aspects of consciousness.

The spiritual student is the true pioneer among human kind, gradually and semi-consciously awakening to a higher reality, embracing the path in its various aspects and dimensions, and through higher, collective consciousness leading humanity onward and upward. But the path is difficult and the challenges many. The path is a lonely place, yet also filled with joy.

The Spiritual Student

The spiritual student is a student of life who has made a subjective commitment to the spiritual path of deliberate evolution. The spiritual student may be a seeker, an aspirant, a probationer, or a disciple, for each who lives upon the path is a student. A student is one who studies and learns from the experiences of life, whether or not the learning process is formal or informal, conscious or unconscious, attentive or casual, objective or subjective. The spiritual student seeks to learn (evolve) the lessons of life consciously, thus speeding up the unfoldment and expansion of consciousness while simultaneously contributing to the experience and developing consciousness of humanity. The learning process is really never-ending; the scenes and the circumstances change (deepen), but throughout is maintained the position as a student.

The spiritual (metaphysical) (theosophical) (esoteric) scholar is simply a spiritual student who applies a greater than average effort toward advanced or more comprehensive studies. The scholar is a student of somewhat greater intensity of effort or completeness. There are places upon (within) the path for both the student and scholar, though the emphasis upon the path is on wisdom and service (expression) more so than knowledge and self-invoked experience. Among the immediate goals of the spiritual student are self-transformation (improvement) and effective (selfless) expression of the inner life. Thus the student is concerned both with the depths of the internal life (the subjective world) and the extent of the external life (the objective world).

When an individual becomes a spiritual student, the ordinary learning processes (and the field of experiential and expressive life) are changed as the forces which provide the circumstances and lessons of life are transformed. Prior to commitment, the force of karma is relatively gradual and gentle; after the individual has embarked upon the path, the rules of life are changed (and continue to change) (by degrees) to increase the time-effectiveness of experience. The standards and expectations are increased as karma becomes a much more potent (evident) force in the life. Considerable karma is expected to be fulfilled in a relatively short period, so that the student might be free from limitation,

and at the same time, be able to constructively channel and express the higher consciousness. Thus life becomes a rather enhanced learning experience.

In the totality of being, the spiritual student is an onlooker, a perceiver, and an actor. The onlooker is the spiritual monad or virgin spirit which is not limited by involvement in the lesser worlds. The perceiver is the intermediary (the soul) which subjectively translates the experience of the actor (the personality) and encourages the right expression of the personality in the lower worlds. In one who is not a spiritual student, the relationships between monad, soul, and personality are not so direct, so that considerable time is required between incarnations for the assimilation of experience. The spiritual student, however, is expected to assimilate much of the experience en route, sacrificing much of the time between lives.

The real emphasis in the spiritual life is the cultivation and expression of spiritual quality. Human spirituality pertains directly to the quality of consciousness and the relationship of the individual to the group life (humanity). The spiritual student is concerned far more with humanity and consciousness than with appearance and matters of mundane (limited) (individual) consequence. The spiritual student is not considered to be special, for the mission of the student is to be helpful from within the lifewave.

« Commentary No. 51

Encouragement

Life upon the spiritual path is not an easy life. When the aspirant begins to take responsibility for his own progress and evolution, he sets forces into motion which bring new intensities (energies) into his life. These new energies are the challenges and responsibilities of the path, experiences and opportunities to be fulfilled. The intensity of karma to be worked out in each lifetime is increased considerably until all has been completed. The path becomes increasingly more narrow, and difficulties and pressures abound. It is easy for the spiritual student to be discouraged, for the path is somewhat lonely and the pressure of the illusion of separation is great. As sensitivity increases, the student can

become even more discouraged by the imperfections of personality and the imperfections and glammers of the external world.

But the spiritual student can ill afford to dwell in a discouraging way, for fear and depression are enemies of the soul; they interfere and hinder. Rather, the aspirant needs to recognize and appreciate the good in the world and the good within himself. The human being (soul) is a noble creature, being a reflection and a differentiation of divinity. It is only the illusion of the lower world which obscures the spark of divine life from the objective vision. God is everywhere, immanent within all lives. If the student believes first in God (and especially in the God within), then confidence will come and the student shall not lack encouragement.

Seeking encouragement from external events leads to disappointment. Seeking encouragement from within can sometimes result in false hopes and subsequent disappointment, for the masquerading mind can fabricate false energies. Encouragement should not be sought. True encouragement can only follow the student's unselfish concern for others (humanity). As the aspirant forgets himself, then encouragement shall always be with him. He who depends entirely on the Christ (God) within finds strength and confidence equal to any task.

Many upon the path become disappointed with their own lack of (apparent) progress. But the progress of the soul is mostly subjective. Indications of progress in the objective life normally come long after progress has been made. The positive efforts of the aspirant and disciple are not in vain. For though the rewards may not come for years or even lifetimes, the rewards are significant and considerable, and well worth the effort expended. Seeking to see the effects of one's work and progress only hinders and has no place in the life of the disciple who is free from the glammers (and self-importance) of personality. The disciple seeks no recognition; he seeks no reward; and he makes no claims. Though the disciple recognizes that the rewards are real, he is preoccupied with living the spiritual life as best he can, doing the work that is before him to do. The disciple chooses to do right because it is right to do right, rather than because of the rewards (for humanity) that come.

The student whose values are moral, ethical, and spiritual needs no incentive to live a joyful, helpful life. Such a life is natural, spontaneous, and lasting. Encouragement comes through knowing oneself (the soul) and in knowing God. The student finds encouragement (without seeking) as he lives in the eternal now, neither basing happiness on past events nor in future possibilities or expectations. Especially during these times of planetary tension, the encouragement received must be shared. In a sense, it is the dharma (responsibility) of the disciple to encourage mankind toward constructive evolution, that humanity will someday achieve a maturity comparable to that of the great ones who have already graduated from this human school of experience.

« Commentary No. 53

Between Light and Dark

The descent of the soul into a series of physical incarnations is a transition from a world of light (the world of the soul) (atma-buddhi-manas) into a world of darkness (the world of the personality) (the physical, emotional, and lower mental planes). The path of descent is involution, from unconsciousness to self-consciousness. The path of ascent is evolution, from self-consciousness to group consciousness. The ascent of the soul from the lower worlds toward liberation (enlightenment and freedom) is the transition from darkness into the realm of light. The coarse lessons (experience and development) of the lower worlds are learned mostly in the darkness which is the illusion of separation from God, and all that constitutes maya, glamour, and illusion. The finer lessons of the lower worlds are learned as the individual struggles towards the light, seeking understanding and perfection (freedom) (completion).

The darkness (unenlightenment) of the mundane world is, at first, inevitable; for the soul (personality) (mind) in incarnation is blind to the world of light until eyes (symbolic) are developed through which the higher realms can be seen or properly realized. Any sudden transition from light into darkness (or from darkness into light) will result in temporary blindness. First the incarnating soul (personality) must learn to see in the dark (self-consciousness). Having learned to see and to function in the lower worlds and having learned the lessons of the three lower worlds, the soul must learn to see again in the light.

A task of the aspirant or disciple is to be able to see, to experience, and to express himself in the world that is dark, while continuing his struggle to perfect the ability to walk (see) in the light.

Enlightenment does not come through the negation of darkness. Enlightenment comes as the student recognizes the value and relationship of the darkened world to the world of reality, as the physical, emotional, and mental worlds are conquered, and as the illusion of darkness is transmuted (internally) into a greater reality. As the student makes progress upon the path, the inner light will grow accordingly and begin to irradiate the world (emotional and mental atmosphere) around him. But throughout the incarnation, the spiritual student must live in two worlds (or more accurately, between two worlds, one of light and one of darkness).

As the spiritual student deepens himself further and begins to link up with others upon the path (functioning in group alignment), the combined illumination of the group and the effectiveness of the individuals (as well as the networks between groups and links between individuals) does much to clear away (transmute) the atmosphere of glamour and illusion (darkness) that was created partially by an unenlightened humanity (and is somewhat inherent in the building blocks of the lower worlds).

Thus aspirants and disciples can not only achieve personal illumination, but can (will) (must) also contribute to the ascension of humanity. Much can be learned (and shared) by the student who is aware of living in two worlds and who recognizes that many degrees (shades) of darkness (perspectives) exist. There are many ways of looking through the fog (darkness). Darkness is ignorance (the unreal) (illusion). The light is wisdom (reality). From the darkness man is led toward the light. From the unreal man is led toward the real. From death (illusion) man is led toward immortality. From the state of separation man is led toward union with God. Between light and dark, humanity evolves through the ascension of consciousness, ever onward and upward.

The Deepening

The process of deepening involves spiritual activity in which the student seeks to build and maintain his momentum upon the path. This deepening implies inner experience and inner (mental) effort. The student must continue to seek to understand himself on successively deeper levels. Until a student knows himself consciously and fairly completely, he cannot really be honest with himself. Over the course of many lifetimes, the personality becomes confused by the illusions of objective manifestation. And so, along the spiritual path of liberation, the spiritual student must free himself from the subconscious (and sometimes conscious) illusions and self-deceptions that have been created within his personality consciousness.

The average person knows himself only superficially, understanding only the bare surface of his being (on personality levels only). But the spiritual student is expected to understand himself in considerable depth in order for him to become aligned fully with the path. The secrets and mysteries of life that remain esoteric and therefore unspeakable are hidden within. And it is only as the student deepens himself that his inner resources become available to him and the understanding of the path (and associated mysteries) becomes possible.

Deepening involves a number of inner and outer efforts that should be applied on a daily basis. Any one of these efforts alone will be of some benefit, but it is as all of them are applied in a serious (dedicated) daily program that the full benefits (of understanding) can be obtained. These daily tasks include meditation, study, observation, and self-analysis. The entire process has meaning for the beginning student (aspirant) as well as for the advanced student (the committed disciple). A program of consistent and serious daily meditation is quite essential for any real progress to be made on the path. Meditation is the medium of relevance, for meditation conditions the other efforts and sustains the momentum that is built up. It is only with some determination that the student can apportion enough of his daily attention (and therefore energy) to his spiritual task. The meditation period(s) should therefore be a determined effort, and one that consciously strengthens the overall program of deepening.

The inner work, however, should be complemented by outer work. A program of study in the philosophy or in related subjects helps in the deepening effort by training the mind to dwell upon thoughts of spiritual value (taking the mind off of thoughts of purely mundane value). Knowledge and experience are prerequisites for understanding. Reading and studying in the philosophy provide a foundation for thoughtful and meditative contemplation. Through the efforts of meditation and through the work of putting into practice what is understood, knowledge and experience are assimilated. Observation of oneself and one's surroundings assists the students in developing awareness, discernment, and understanding. The student should frequently (if not continually) examine and evaluate his thoughts, feelings, actions, motives, responses, and his overall disposition (on as many levels as can be perceived).

The spiritual path requires progress, and progress requires momentum (to overcome spiritual inertia). It is not how much or how far a student progresses in a given time that is important, but that he has progressed. Though the student may not be aware of his own progress, he can assume that the effort expended with reasonable intention (right motive) will result in some progress. As the aspirant frees himself from the lower values, he builds a path of effort based upon successively higher values, as he further deepens himself.

« Commentary No. 171

The Impersonal Life

The life of the spiritual student through the various stages of probationary effort and discipleship is properly considered to be an increasingly impersonal life. The impersonal life is as necessary and as vital to the spiritual student as the personal or personality-centered life is to the development of the individuality (in the form of the personality). But why should the impersonal life be so (relatively) important to the spiritual student? For the simple reason that the soul is so very impersonal, its nature being that of impersonal love. Through conscious and deliberate union with the soul, the waking-consciousness seeks to participate in (and share) that impersonal love.

The impersonal is that which is not personal, that which exists without reference (deference) to the personality. Impersonal activity is that which does not engage the (independent, separative, or uncontrolled) aspects of the human personality or the emotions. Or in other words, the impersonal life is a life that is centered in the soul rather than the personality, but a life in which the personality is utilized in a practical, disciplined, and spiritually responsive way. Such a personality must be properly and naturally integrated, purified, uplifted, and aligned with the soul. This is in direct contrast with the personal life in which the personality reigns (uncontrollably) supreme as the center or focus of waking-consciousness. The personal pertains to a particular person or individual (as an end in itself) and to the lower human aspects of existence. To be personal (personality-centered) is to be imprisoned in the world of self-sustaining glamour and illusion; to be impersonal is to be free from the limitations of (petty) personal existence.

Impersonality can be easily misunderstood, so it is essential for the student to properly embrace the impersonal life as well as to use the proper approach to impersonality. Impersonality should not imply or suggest coldness or indifference. The right (spiritual) approach to the impersonal life is one of genuine warmth, compassion, and interest (but not to the point of emotional or mental absorption or distraction). The impersonal life is actually transpersonal and super-personal (and spiritually meaningful).

The typical (beginning) heart-centered aspirant is warm, caring, and entirely personal. The typical head-centered aspirant is cold, uncaring (selfish), but still almost entirely personal. In either case, the student must gradually transform the personal nature into the impersonal nature. And as that transformation proceeds, the student will necessarily come closer and closer in consciousness to the reality of the soul, and the impersonal energy of the soul will resonate with the spiritually responsive personality, and radiate through that aura in an impersonal way.

The spiritual student should be concerned with truth and reality, and as the individual becomes more impersonal, greater truth can be realized. This is so simply because personality-centeredness (self-centeredness) distorts the truth in practically every conceivable way. Even groups can manifest or sustain a dimension of personality-centeredness or impersonality, and thereby contribute

to the relative clarity, quality, and meaningfulness (of the effort). Groups that are personality-centered exist primarily to sustain and entertain the personality; and yet, personality-centered groups are definitely appealing (to personality-centered individuals) and may therefore be utilized in some constructive fashion. Impersonal groups serve altogether different aspects of spiritual purpose, and are (fortunately) not very appealing at all (except (unfortunately) to those who fail to recognize the impersonal nature).

« Commentary No. 422

The Middle Ground

The middle ground between the mass absorption of humanity and the prerogative of the creator is the arena par excellence of the esoteric student. The masses of humanity are generally bound in the realm of effects, being predominately absorbed in the glamour and illusion of objective (material) (personal) existence and largely reactive to external forces (thereby having relatively little free will). The creator of this world (universe) is (relative to this world) equally absorbed, but in the realm of highest causes rather than the realm of temporal effects. The spiritual (esoteric) student, however, is one who has overcome the lower illusions to some extent, and who has entered the middle ground between the higher causes and their effects.

The spiritual student in media res as far as causes and effects are concerned is in a position to interact with things (forces) (energies) (consciousness) much more so than in either of the other two realms. The potential for significant experience, growth, understanding, and service is much higher where there is a conscious interaction with things and an awareness of subsequent effects than is the case of the simple (reactive) experience imposed by karma in the form of external forces (the bulk of humanity lack awareness or understanding of the cause and effect relationships so conveyed as circumstances and situations). Reactive experience tends toward rather slow (limited) growth in consciousness and understanding. Mature, interactive experience which is predominately mental and intuitional tends toward more substantial growth, for awareness allows more immediate near-term assimilation of experience than does reactive experience.

The principal keys to interactive experience are therefore conscious awareness and the ability to consciously embrace the entire experience. In the reactive case, the individual is largely unable to think about the experience with clarity and understanding; the perception tends to be heavily biased and absorption in mundane (personal) worldly issues tends to close the mind to understanding the cause and effect relationships. A sincere but rather pragmatic approach to experience tends to limit the conscious experience to only (the immediate) part of the causal chain. A more broad-minded and interactive approach can embrace the alternate paths and implications (from past, parallel, and subsequent events) and allow more meaningful conclusions in consciousness.

The middle ground allows the individual to be relatively detached from the mundane, personal, and worldly forces (and relatively free from the substantial bias that those forces imply) so that true (deeper) (conscious) realization is possible. The middle ground also affords to the individual (personality) the character, quality, and guidance of the soul and that of the soul group. But in order to achieve that middle ground (place in consciousness), the student must invariably sacrifice much of his mundane, personal, and worldly values and make a substantial commitment to the path, to the soul, and to the lifewave (humanity). And, of course, the student must learn to function consciously on mental levels.

The arena of the esoteric student affords a considerable amount of free will, subject largely to the individual's consciousness (maturity) (capability) and the qualifications of the evolutionary plan of which he is a participant. Of particular significance are the places (levels) of convergence of forces and the associated mechanisms. The esoteric student, working always within a chartered group (service) context, is inherently involved in the balance (balancing) of evolutionary forces, within the relatedness of the middle ground.

Pledge-Fever

Pledge-fever is a phenomenon associated with the spiritual path of accelerated, conscious, and deliberate evolution in consciousness. It is, fundamentally, a karmic condition, evoked by the soul as a consequence of its decision (realization) to evolve more consciously and deliberately.

In the normal course of human evolution, accumulated karma is resolved gradually as circumstances warrant. And since one generally “creates” more karma than is resolved in a given lifetime, one tends to “have” a karmic accumulation. As one evolves sufficiently in consciousness, the process of karmic resolution is quickened somewhat simply by virtue of the person’s ability to learn (i.e., to assimilate, consciously or unconsciously, the experience or lessons of karma). Thus, in the normal course of human evolution, one eventually crosses a threshold in which the karmic balance (accumulation) is gradually reduced rather than gradually increased.

However, when the soul chooses to embrace the spiritual path, striking changes occur in the karmic process and a much greater karmic “burden” is embraced in each lifetime until there is no karmic accumulation. Then one is free to serve effectively (and any new karma is dealt with in near-real-time). But that process of accelerated karmic fulfillment is necessarily a particularly difficult time for the spiritual student, for as the karmic pressure is intensified and accelerated, all sorts of weaknesses and character “faults” are brought to the surface of the personality where they can be dealt with more effectively by the waking-consciousness. This phenomenon is called pledge-fever (and is known by other (comparable) names as well).

Pledge-fever is not limited to students of any particular organization, esoteric, theosophical, or otherwise, nor can it be evoked by the personality (alone). It can only be evoked by or in cooperation with the soul or higher self, and only to the extent that a real commitment is made to the spiritual path. Pledge-fever is a wonderful opportunity for the aspirant, as weaknesses hitherto unrecognized are more easily recognized and overcome, and as these weaknesses are overcome the student increases in spiritual strength (character) (quality) and evolutionary

momentum. However, overcoming such weaknesses is not necessarily quick or easy, and progress may be realized but not consciously recognized, and so the student is urged to be patient (and persistent) in his or her efforts in these regards. It usually takes several lifetimes to overcome a karmic accumulation by these methods (evocation by virtue of being placed upon the path). Thus, in each lifetime there is a recapitulation, as one reaches the conscious recognition of having a commitment to the path, thereby evoking again the acceleration of karmic fulfillment (on the other hand, even without conscious recognition by the waking-consciousness or focus of the personality, the soul will evoke pledge-fever).

There is another phenomenon, a corollary to pledge-fever, that occurs as well, such that in addition to this intensification and acceleration, there is a tightening of the karmic boundaries such that karmic consequences derived from new causes come more quickly and as a result of more moderate imbalance. Normally, the karmic (behavioral) (physical, emotional, and mental) boundaries are broad and one must stray significantly from the "path" before a karmic consequence is merited. But once one is committed to the path, the boundaries are tightened and even the slightest "deviation" warrants karmic consequence. In other words, the standards are much more rigorous for those upon the path, and this, too, is a great blessing, for it helps the focus (upon dharma).

« Commentary No. 936

The Esoteric Student

One of the principles of consciousness is that a person can only actually recognize and appreciate comparable or lesser consciousness, i.e., that is reasonably consistent with that person's own experience. Those who are substantively more experienced in spiritual consciousness generally appear somewhat anomalous, at least to those who are able to perceive them as anomalous. Yet (of course) appearing anomalous is not necessarily an indication of higher consciousness. And intellectualized perception is not reliable in any case. In some ways the various "grades" of spiritual student are not particularly important or significant, but there are ways in which understanding these things, in context, can be quite useful.

Distinctions can be made (perceived) between the aspirant, disciple, initiate, and master, in one sense, between the mystic and occultist, in a second sense, and between the spiritual student and the esoteric student in a third sense. These three "senses" overlap in the sense that the aspirant and disciple are progressing generally along either mystical or occult lines (though the occult aspirant is more properly referred to as a probationary student), while those of "higher" degrees are more and more balanced between the heart-nature and the head-nature. The spiritual student is a relatively broad term that includes virtually all grades, yet implies some balance between head and heart. Likewise, the disciple is a relatively broad term that includes spiritual students other than aspirants and includes esoteric students.

The spiritual student is more or less recognizable by his or her spiritual character, temperament, and values. Those who share or who have shared that character, temperament, and values are simply much more able to recognize comparable spiritual students. The esoteric student, however, is significantly but less noticeably different in the sense that he or she has largely overcome the lower, personality nature, is mentally-or-intuitively-polarized, is relatively impersonal, and lives according to the rules of the path that are not so well understood by others (who have not yet reached that level). The esoteric student is not as demonstrative and so is not as visibly emotional as his (her) successors. The esoteric student sees a broader, deeper picture of life (consciousness) (evolution) and proceeds accordingly, without much regard for cultural conventions and the various notions or expectations of spiritual students, however sincere, who are simply unable to see that broader, deeper context.

Thus, what the esoteric student is, what the esoteric student does, etc., is often and usually inexplicable to the spiritual student (who has different expectations based upon limited understanding). In a very real sense, it is a matter of awakening to a deeper, greater reality, one that cannot be perceived, appreciated, or understood on intellectual levels. Thus the esoteric student is largely misunderstood by the spiritual student (and the world), for he (she) cannot possibly explain the deeper, greater vision in intellectual terms.

In awakening, the esoteric student recognizes the sleep that pervades the waking-consciousness of those who are yet to awaken. The esoteric student remains gentle and considerate, but uncompromising and non-imposing. While generally and essentially superior (greater, deeper, broader, more refined) in consciousness, the esoteric student does not feel or sense or act with any sense of superiority, because the personality of the esoteric student is, for the most part, without ego, without reliance on intellect, etc., and simply does not operate egoistically or separatively in the higher sense.



Section 2.41



Dharma

While the underlying force of karma is applied to all lives and consciousness, the sense of dharma is a distinguishing characteristic of the spiritual student. Dharma provides both the proper motivation and guidance for spiritual practice and spiritual work. Dharma involves commitment, adherence, and transformation.

Dharma

Dharma means many things in its ordinary or secular context, but particularly in the context of the spiritual path. Dharma means (and/or embraces), variously and collectively, conduct, duty, equity, justice, law, responsibility, and virtue. Dharma is also “the nature or essential quality or peculiar condition of anything; that which supports” and that which holds things together.

“Dharma is the collective Indian conception of the religious, social, and moral rule of conduct.” It is one’s duty, responsibility, or obligation. In the higher sense, dharma is that which is encouraged by conscience and the higher self, and in the lower sense, dharma is that which is prescribed or that which is natural to the lower self at whatever level of consciousness that lower self is functioning. In the lower sense (apparent or superficial) dharma may be prescribed or imposed by cultural, family, and/or religious traditions (dogma) and expectations. In the higher sense, (real) dharma is simply realized and embraced, more or less consciously and deliberately, according to the “sense” of the student. In contrast with karma, which is the law of accountability in action and consequence, dharma is the law of appropriateness (conscience) (discretion) (wisdom) and responsibility in action and being. Thus, dharma is an aspect and refinement of karmic law, particularly in the case of the spiritual student.

In the context of the spiritual path, dharma is that which is expected of the spiritual student, according to character, temperament, quality of consciousness, and values. Once the student has actually made a commitment to the spiritual path, i.e., to conscious evolution in consciousness, then dharma is more properly defined (prescribed by the path as guidelines along the way) and the student’s embrace of dharma becomes relatively more deliberate. Dharma thus embraces all of the activities and practices of the path and extends as well to all of life’s activities and practices (and eventually there is no distinction between life and the path).

In a higher sense, dharma is the flow of one’s spiritual life (and as one proceeds along the path all of the various aspects of one’s life becomes spiritually

qualified). To perform one's dharma is to conduct oneself consistently with that flow (i.e., to be oneself in some higher sense). For the soul that is committed to the path, the dharma of the lower self is to align oneself with the soul and with the path, i.e., in acknowledgement of that commitment. Then dharma becomes a matter of living in accordance with the qualification of the soul, in embracing spiritual discipline, spiritual practice, and spiritual work. In addition to individual duty, and like karma, dharma is also a matter of group endeavor. Thus dharma is also a group energy "flow" and collective responsiveness.

In another sense, dharma is "adherence" (that which relates individuals to the path). The extent to which a student adheres to the rules and practices of the path is the extent to which dharma is embraced and fulfilled. Thus, dharma is both that which one is called upon to do and be, as well as that which one does and is. It is both the calling and its fulfillment. At first dharma is a matter of the calling and its consideration. Then dharma becomes a matter of embracing that calling and (progressively) all of its implications. In the final analysis, the spiritual student is his or her own dharma and the spiritual group or community is likewise collective dharma. Dharma is the being of the spiritual student (and group).

« Commentary No. 60

The Dharma of the Disciple

Dharma is a Sanskrit word that implies (but is not limited to) duty. The dharma of the disciple includes many interrelated tasks: identification, purification, alignment, responsibility, awareness, purpose, and service. For the disciple, identification is a conscious process of identifying oneself with the soul and with humanity. The average person identifies himself with the body or with the mind, with his individualistic lower self and with his race or country. The aspirant and the disciple must develop an identification with the higher self and with a higher unity than any objective element or group. The disciple can then know with greater reality what he is and where he is.

Purification is a continuous process for aspirant and disciple alike. Always there exists the need for further refinement of the lower self (the physical, emotional, and mental instruments) to be attained while on the path of ascent.

The early probationary stages deal with the coarse, more obvious needs for the purification and transmutation of weaknesses and limitations. But throughout discipleship this process continues on successively higher levels as well as during each recapitulation of earlier development. Purification also implies discipline and the process of self-analysis.

Alignment is a process which follows the integration of the lower self (personality). When the personality has been integrated and is functioning as a coherent unity with the mind in control, then the mind (and personality) needs to be aligned with the soul, so that the higher self might fully guide and direct the activities and experiences of its incarnation. Alignment requires the regular daily, consistent practice of meditation. Meditation brings the cooperative lower self to respond to the rhythm of the soul and to the spiritual intuition, which consequently contribute further to the spiritual deepening.

Another aspect of dharma is a sense of responsibility, both exoterically and esoterically. In the exoteric world there are a number of responsibilities to be fulfilled (as applicable): to one's spouse, children, family, profession, and to other group relationships. In the esoteric realm there are even greater responsibilities: to the soul and its incarnation, to the esoteric groups on the plane of the soul, to humanity, and to the hierarchy. Neither the mundane nor the spiritual responsibilities should be used as an excuse to neglect the other. The disciple should well be able to live both lives successfully and without neglect. Awareness is a utilization of consciousness, a responsibility of the student to be aware of both the external and internal worlds, to be aware of the mind and the soul, to be aware of the esoteric group, and to be aware of the plan that is to be worked out. Awareness is also a continual process, a process of observation, retrospection, study, practice, and realization. The disciple must continue these functions, ever expanding the awareness of reality (truth).

Purpose is an inherent quality of manifestation. With experience, knowledge, discipline, realization, and aspiration, the disciple becomes aware of his relationship to the purpose of humanity; he knows why he is here, what he is doing, and what he should be doing. Then he adjusts his life accordingly. Realization of purpose leads directly to service. Service is the life's work of the disciple, a natural response to the energy of the soul. The disciple must recognize his talents and his limitations and weaknesses. He must recognize

talents to be developed (in response to needs and the work to be performed), the plan itself (or portion thereof), the immediate work or needs before him, and the opportunities for service. With intuitive insight, the disciple can then contribute further to the welfare and progress of mankind and the greater group.

« Commentary No. 425

Obligation

The vast majority of metaphysical and theosophical students who think of themselves as being committed to the spiritual path are actually merely approaching the path and have made no formal (proper) commitment. Though many are merely attracted through various glammers, there are also many who are sincere and proceeding gradually toward a proper commitment. But that proper commitment comes only when the basic resistance of the personality is overcome, where the personality is no longer principally absorbed in the mundane and personal (personality) matters of the lower (outer) world, and where a true obligation has been incurred. This can only occur where there exists a considerable and sufficient understanding of the basic philosophy of the path.

The distinction between perceived commitment and a true commitment (obligation) is an important one, for the basic vibration and qualification of the obligated student is changed, and the rate of karmic qualification (fulfillment) (evocation) is accelerated. A student (aspirant) can only become an obligated student when the basic work of the probationary period is fulfilled and when the guardians of the path recognize the individual as being both qualified and willing to undergo the rigors of the spiritual path. Then and only then can a student make a proper commitment and be accepted within the formal context of the spiritual path. Until that time, the motives and intentions of the student provide the necessary momentum.

The guardians of the path are not active in the outer or lower worlds, nor can any true commitment to the path be made in the external world or through any external (manifested) organization. It can only be made by a mind and soul

together, on the (lowest) level of the soul (i.e., the mental plane). The actual obligation is twofold: the student is obligated to the path and all of the qualification (rules) of the path, and the path (through those who are the path) is obligated to the (obligated) student. The obligation of the path to the individual is one primarily of further qualification and training and opportunity for service. All must nonetheless be earned by the individual, for naught can be that is not merited.

The demands of the student at any level are ignored, for demands are the noise of the personality and not the love or quality (significance) of the heart (mind) (soul) of the student. Demands serve only to undermine an individual's own effort. The proper demeanor is one of humility, intelligent subordination, cooperation, responsiveness, and thanksgiving. Progress comes through increasing rapport with the soul, the esoteric group (on soul levels), and the path. And that rapport comes when and to the extent that the ego of the personality is overcome. The ego is the principal impediment to the path (proper), for it is the ego that is deceived by external appearances (the grand illusion) and it is the ego that actually deceives the personality as a whole.

The price of obligation is considerable (at least from the worldly perspective and that of the personality). Not only does obligation include the subordination of all personality values and activities to the path, and an acceleration of karma, but it also includes a subtle burden relative to humanity. For the obligated student is also one to whom the karma of humanity can be applied in considerable measure. Thus an obligated student must not only so love humanity, but be willing and able to bear the pressures associated with karma on the level and breadth of the lifewave itself (humanity). Serving humanity is no simple task, for many are the subtle implications of obligated service, and great is the (inner) joy of one who is so obligated.

Dharma and Karma

The distinction between dharma and karma is that of dharma being a particular form of karma which conveys some degree of obligation or responsibility (duty) that is not the case for the more general and more prevalent forms of karma.

In the more general (prevalent) case (karma), one acquires karmic consequences as the result of action (experience and expression on all levels of consciousness) and within those earned consequences are intended lessons. If a particular lesson is learned (and appropriate adjustments made) then that (associated) karma is fulfilled and one is free to face (create) additional karma (resulting in further progress). That fulfillment occurs through assimilation (understanding), consciously or unconsciously achieved. But if a particular lesson is not learned then that (associated) karma is not fulfilled and accumulates and reforms to re-manifest in a similar (albeit later) fashion or otherwise according to overall karmic factors. In this more general (prevalent) case (karma), one is not obligated or expected to learn the intended (earned) lesson at the particular (afforded) opportunity (though it is certainly more auspicious to do so); one must simply learn the lesson eventually and the longer it takes (from the initial affordance) the (relatively) more difficult the consequences (circumstances) become.

With dharma however, the acquired karmic consequences imply a responsibility (expectation) to act or respond in some appropriate manner. In a sense, dharma is a much more potent (yet more subtle) form of karma because it (dharma) implies that the individual has developed (earned) the capacity for responsibility and can therefore progress by fulfilling duty (in addition to (merely) learning implied lessons). In fact, progress (in the evolution of consciousness) (along the spiritual path) is achieved more potently by adherence to truth (fulfillment of dharma) than by any conscious or unconscious learning of implied lessons, for the greater lessons per se are the lessons of dharma. Karma is qualified by merit, appropriateness, and affordance of some lesson to be learned (experience to be assimilated); dharma is (additionally) qualified by responsibility and the expectations that that implies.

The early forms of dharma involve more mundane responsibilities leading gradually to the (more potent) responsibilities of ethics. The later (and even more potent (subtle)) forms of dharma involve the qualification(s) of the spiritual path (the soul) itself. If one responds (positively) in accordance with dharma, then that dharma is fulfilled and sustained (while karma is merely fulfilled). If one fails to respond properly (if the responsibility is not recognized and honored) then one's karma is complicated more considerably than with non-dharmic karma, but the dharma persists nonetheless. One of the higher talents is the ability to recognize dharma and properly discern its implied (conveyed) responsibilities, and in that recognition and understanding comes the capacity for adherence.

As one progresses upon the evolutionary (spiritual) path, one gradually and eventually becomes free from accumulated karma (karmic obligations), but never free from (instantaneous) karma or the law of karma itself. As one progresses along the path, one earns more and more dharma and that dharma (or more properly the adherence to that dharma) conveys considerable (albeit subtle) and increasing freedom. There is simply a profound freedom implied (conveyed) in adherence to truth (dharma), for dharma reveals the way and conveys the ability to proceed intelligently upon that way, in light and love and power.

« Commentary No. 1161

Responsibility

Responsibility is defined as the quality or state of being morally, legally, and/or mentally (individually) accountable, the condition of being able to answer for one's conduct and obligations (secular and spiritual). A person is, by virtue of being human, responsible for his or her own actions, i.e., for the consequences of those actions. In the karmic sense, actions include attitudes, behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. In the broader sense, not inconsistently, responsibility is related to both dharma and karma.

So. What is the responsibility of the human being? To live, to experience, to grow, to learn, to express oneself, harmoniously, i.e., not at the expense of others' freedom and quality of experience and expression. The human being incarnates because the soul invokes the process (forces) of incarnation, under karmic law. There is purpose. There are expectations. Every incarnation (lifetime) is an opportunity for growth (evolution) in consciousness through experience and expression. Secular law (to some extent) and spiritual law (karma) (in the broader sense) hold a person accountable (responsible) for adherence to the laws of the land, and karma (respectively) (i.e., for his or her health, life, experience, and expression).

But responsibility at the human level is primarily experiential. A person learns according to experience, sometimes directly (during the experience), more oftentimes indirectly (eventually) (through unconscious assimilation of experience). A person behaves according to values (consciousness) based upon that experience (accumulated wisdom). A person evokes karmic force (resolution) to the extent of need and merit. But the spiritual student, who understands more of the underlying cause and effect relationships, is more accountable by virtue of that understanding. The spiritual student, and particularly the disciple, has a definite responsibility to embrace the basic principles and practices and values of the path, which in turn contribute to the overall welfare of humanity. There is, for the spiritual student, a responsibility for truth. There is a responsibility for harmlessness. There is a responsibility for consciously facing the consequences of one's actions. And thereby learning. And fulfilling the balance.

For the spiritual student, being responsible is a matter of dharma, of living in accord with the underlying principles of the spiritual life, as they are understood. For the disciple, it is a relatively conscious and deliberate matter of embracing and allowing, of recognizing the truth and living in accordance with that truth, of allowing the conscience (inner wisdom) to guide one's activities in the lower worlds. And where the student does not recognize the truth, or does not recognize the truth sufficiently completely, there is thereby invoked (and eventually evoked) the appropriate experience (opportunity) to more fully embrace the intended lesson.

In the final analysis, dharma (duty) (responsibility) is a matter of being honest (living in accordance with truth), to the extent that one can, and a matter of being harmless (living in harmony with all lives), to the extent that one can. If the student is truly committed to these two dimensions of responsibility, and is open to understanding cause and effect relationships (natural law), and consciously accepting responsibility for one's own behavior and consequences, then growth (experience and expression) is enhanced and facilitated. The spiritual student is responsible to himself (herself) at the personality level, to the soul and the soul group, to humanity, and to all of life.



Section 2.411



Commitment

It is the conscious commitment of the spiritual student (disciple) that results in adherence to the principles and practices of the spiritual student, to the best of his or her understanding and ability.

Commitment

In the specific sense of conscious, deliberate evolution, the spiritual path is considered the most demanding of all potential human experience. The ordinary path (of normal evolution), chosen by default by the vast majority of souls, implies a gradual fulfillment of the same (spiritual) (evolutionary) standards, with considerable individual latitude, subject only to karma (the gradual, evolutionary urge). But the hastened (spiritual) path is far more demanding because it implies a giving of oneself without recourse, to the exacting (higher) (compressed) standards of the path. However, that path is only for souls who are suitably responsive to the call.

It is invariably the soul's decision to embark upon the spiritual path, albeit not a rational decision (for the soul is incapably beyond rational thinking); it is, rather, an inevitable consequence of the soul's repose (for those souls who are disposed toward the path). The soul that responds to the call commits itself to the path in such a way that the soul is irrevocably bound to the processes (destiny) of that path. The soul that fails to respond to the call of the path is the soul that hears not that call, though it may later grow more responsive to the evolutionary process. But the soul that does respond to the call is then subject to a considerable and increasing magnetic bond with the path and with all whose lives are transformed into that path.

The real commitment belongs to the soul, and is manifested between the soul and the path (and the hastened (intensified) resulting karma). But since the personality is the instrument (reflection) of the soul, the personality is necessarily subject to the soul's commitment; indeed, it is the personality which must therefore experience (suffer) directly the perils (impositions) of the path. To the extent that the personality cooperates with the soul in its quest for perfection (such a quest being inextricably bound within the processes of the path), by subordinating its own nature to that of the soul, that direct, hastened evolutionary experience is a (quiet) joy and source of considerable encouragement. But to the extent that the personality resists the will (decision) (commitment) of the soul, the more difficult will that experience be.

It is not the prerogative of the personality (mind) to commit itself to the path; it is the prerogative of the personality only to commit itself to the soul (such commitment being ultimately forced, as necessary, by the soul). The personality that is attracted to the path (through glamour) without its soul committing itself is certainly not embraced by the path or subject to its demands or its opportunities (which can only be earned). But the personality that is drawn to the path by virtue of inner (subjective) prompting, whose soul is indeed committed, will be bound to the path and subjected to its momentum and influence. Many are the personalities who are thus drawn to the path even before a self-realization is achieved, but many too are they who resist the inner alignment, who approach the path as self-willed personalities rather than personalities humbly committed to the soul.

It is for the personality thus drawn to the path (by the soul) to ultimately overcome its self-interest and to give itself wholeheartedly to the soul and to the path. The personality who feels itself committed to the path, for whom the soul (path) is not foremost within its waking consciousness for the greater portion of its waking experience is deceiving itself and resisting that greater will. But the humble personality which seeks alignment with the soul and the path throughout the waking hours, taking precedence over more mundane demands, is one who is indeed committed, and blessed by the infusion of soul energy.

« Commentary No. 718

The Crisis of Commitment 1

The human personality and ego are not (naturally) predisposed to respond to the call of the (spiritual) path and properly acknowledge the commitment of the soul (to that path of hastened evolution in consciousness); to the contrary, the personality (and particularly the ego) is (naturally) predisposed to resist any alignment with (or responsiveness to) the soul. This (egoistic) path of increasing resistance (as the ego develops and strengthens its defenses, so is it increasingly resistant to higher impression) is a natural one in the sense (1) that the ego is the psychological equivalence (correspondence) to material attachment and (2) that the development of the ego is a necessary stage in the

development of the human personality and preparatory to personality refinement, integration, and (subsequent) alignment (with the soul).

The resistance (independence) of the personality (ego) is the inherent resistance of matter. The personality is formed of physical (etheric), emotional (astral), and concrete mental matter that has been appropriated by the soul to serve as its means of obtaining objective experience (and subsequently, as a means of expression (service)). The inherent coarseness (independence) (separativeness) (resistance) of matter is thereby incorporated in the form of the personality and is very gradually purified, qualified, and further refined by higher impression (over the course of many incarnations) (with the quality of matter appropriated in a particular incarnation being (initially) comparable to that achieved in the previous cycle (lifetime)).

As the personality develops and as the mind begins to integrate the personality into a single coherent (composite) energy, the personality is further refined. But the ego is a more subtle creature than the personality per se, and draws upon the material (form) aspect (even in the case of a well-developed and reasonably tempered (refined) personality) to resist and impede any perceived threat to its (presumed) (illusionary) independence. The basic self-deception is that of the personality. "Advanced" self-deception is much more subtle and based upon ego rather than (merely) personality (in this context, the ego is a relatively subtle aspect of personality that takes on an artificial "life" of its own).

When the soul makes its (natural) (and eventual) commitment to the path, it sends forth a vibration (message) (qualification) to its lesser (personality) expression, seeking to reform, refine, and uplift that personality into an effective instrument of (in) the service of the soul. The personality (ego) naturally resists (except in exceptional cases of considerable preparation and tempering) and the struggle (crisis) unfolds. This struggle (crisis) is not between the soul and personality directly, but between the qualifying forces of the soul and the ego or resistive aspect of the personality. The soul is not objectively conscious or concerned about "details" at the personality level; the soul is concerned with quality and consciousness and responsiveness as measured by quality of consciousness.

Similarly, the waking-consciousness of the personality (i.e., what most people identify with as themselves) is not normally conscious of the presence of the ego (or of the soul), nor of the crisis evoked by the resistance of the ego. The battle (struggle) takes many forms, generally along relatively subtle lines, such that the ego willfully (and usually relatively effectively) deceives the waking-consciousness and actively manipulates that personality consciousness in its own (egoistic) defense (even as that consciousness remains oblivious to the process).

« Commentary No. 719

The Crisis of Commitment 2

If the soul makes its commitment relatively early in the evolutionary cycle, such that the ego has not had much opportunity to develop, then the crisis of commitment on the part of the personality is relatively straightforward (i.e., the soul “wins” relatively easily, as the personality is tempered and subsequently integrated in the context of the path (i.e., in such a case the ego really does not have a chance to resist or impede the work of the soul upon the personality and the soul is able (more properly the forces or energy of the soul as impressed upon the personality are able) to prevent the substantial development of the ego (i.e., the ego that does emerge is already well-tempered and not much of an impediment))).

But if the soul makes its commitment relatively late in the evolutionary cycle, such that the ego is already well-developed (firmly entrenched) (dominant (even subtly)) within the personality, then the crisis is relatively major and relatively enduring (typically, for several incarnations). The soul almost always “wins” but the struggle will be protracted. Although the ego is artificial, it is nonetheless effectively highly intelligent and resourceful. The evolutionary process has produced this individual survival mechanism which (unless tempered) grows from lifetime to lifetime. Because of the great illusion (wherein the personality (i.e., human waking-consciousness) believes itself to be real, independent, etc.), the ego is (normally) easily able to deceive and manipulate the personality and draw upon all of the resources (fears, strengths, etc.) of that personality, dividing or temporarily integrating the personality as it (the ego)

needs in order to maintain control (or at least its influence and independent existence).

The ego will lead the mind to rationalize (fabricate) whatever reasons or excuses are needed to achieve its goal (maintenance of independence). But the soul will, over the long term of this struggle, increasingly qualify the mind (and the whole personality) (even the ego) so that eventually the mind (and personality (and ego)) are won over to the soul (i.e., they eventually become increasingly responsive to the soul, even so the ego is willing to give up its (illusion of) independence). In the beginning of responsiveness, the person (personality) will be drawn toward the path through various means (knowledge, wisdom, service) while retaining as much of the independence as it can.

During the crisis of commitment many contradictions may then emerge that indicate the presence of both forces (e.g., there may be a service motive and considerable self-indulgence, or there may be interest in learning theosophy while reserving or resisting any commitments). Those who as personalities are not yet consciously committed can still contribute significantly to the spiritual work, albeit relatively far less effectively than those who are consciously committed to the path. Those who have emerged from the crisis and who are then fully consciously committed (albeit still far less than perfect), generally shine forth as relatively tireless workers in the context of the path, where virtually every aspect of the personality life is (in principle and to a large extent even in practice) subordinated to the spiritual work (of whatever the calling may be).

When the balance shifts from the ego's influence to that of the soul, then considerable and relatively rapid progress is achieved as the individual becomes more and more (intelligently) responsive to higher impression. The resulting spiritual momentum brings considerable joy (quiet encouragement) to the student, who is then free to face the consequential dharma of the path.

The Path and the Rules

From the standpoint of the spiritual path, the entire period of involution and evolution up to the time of actually approaching the spiritual path is the first or preliminary phase and is governed by the third ray of active intelligence and the ordinary rules (karmic or balancing forces) of life in the lower worlds (incarnation). Under the rules of the third ray (third aspect) (in the sense of relationship to the spiritual path, not with regard to particular third ray personalities, souls, world periods, etc.), the human being incarnates, gathers experience, develops according to the human archetype and the particular qualifications of the soul, and ultimately becomes relatively complete (as far as ordinary humanity is concerned).

The rules of this third ray (relatively mundane) period of evolution (experience and expression) are the parameters of the karmic equation; i.e., for every action the human being is responsible and accountable and experiences consequences appropriate to gradual, relatively gentle development and maturation. Karmic force provides evolutionary pressure, but the pressure is relatively gentle and allows for a wide range of experience and a relatively long timescale of fulfillment (resolution) of particular karma.

Those “students” who have a casual (peripheral) (superficial) interest in metaphysical matters (as a preliminary to real interest in the spiritual aspects of the path) are still governed by third ray (or general) rules. But at some point, the student’s casual interest is transformed, albeit gradually, into semi-casual (semi-serious) interest and the student then comes under the rules of the second ray (second aspect) and the second or intermediate phase is entered. This occurs as the soul begins to stir in response to the call of the path (and the personality begins to respond, albeit distantly and without conscious appreciation of the occurrence). Students operating (semi-consciously) under the rules of the second aspect are subject to a quickening (acceleration) of the karmic timescale and an increase in the relative magnitude of karmic force. While under the third aspect (preparation) there are no real expectations of the student, but under the second aspect, the student is expected to learn more readily (quickly) and to (relatively gradually) consciously adjust to the dictates of the path.

The period of “adjustment” corresponds roughly to the paths of approach and the probationary path (and to some extent even to discipleship). Therein the student learns the discipline of the spiritual path and generally makes relatively rapid progress (with respect to the eons of experience under the third aspect). The second phase is a great time of testing, of trials that tend to separate the student from the basic glamours and illusions of life in the material (mundane) world and lead the student through various stages of refinement and integration. But even so, the rules of the second aspect (balance) (adjustment) (accommodation), being more severe (austere) than those of the third aspect, are not very severe compared to those of the first aspect.

When the semi-serious student makes the commitment to the path and thereby becomes the serious student (acknowledging the soul’s decision (commitment)), then the path narrows considerably and the expectations of the (soul for the) student increase dramatically. The discipline of the path in the third phase (first aspect) is enforced in such a manner that the student cannot wander much from the intended path, yet the freedom and constructive potency of the serious student is increased also dramatically. Thus the first ray ultimately rules, yet with the intelligence of the third ray and the wisdom of the second ray.

« Commentary No. 1162

Determination

The key to successful commitment (living in accordance with the commitments that one has made) is determination. The human being, by virtue of being in physical incarnation, is subject to inertia (the inertial forces inherent in material existence). Through determination one can naturally and effectively overcome inertial forces and live in accordance with one’s principles and values, actually rather than merely (sincerely) intentionally. Determination is an inherently creative endeavor, as it naturally evokes energy (force) in accordance with the nature and quality (and intensity (seriousness)) of the determination.

The spiritual student is, at the soul level, one who is committed to the spiritual path and all that that implies. But at the personality level (ego), there may or

may not be a conscious commitment. Thus circumstances are evoked that eventually compel the waking-consciousness to face up to that commitment, through realization that the commitment is made, through actually (consciously and deliberately) embracing the commitment, i.e., through being determined to live in accordance with the commitment, to the extent that it is understood. Determination arises where there is such a conscious appreciation for the inner commitment and a conscious commitment at the personality level to collaborate with and support the intention of the higher Self, even while knowing that that implies the eventual end of personality-centeredness. Even with commitment and determination, there remains inertia at various levels and through various aspects and elements of the personality (body) (ego) (intellect).

Determination means that a person has made a definite and firm decision. This evokes power that gradually creates, sustains, and broadens the momentum of the student in the context of the path. To merely voice determination is not sufficient. One must be determined in order to evoke that power and to achieve what is determined to be achieved. Many make (apparent) commitments, however sincerely, but lack the determination to proceed effectively. Procrastination is a common symptom of the inertial state (matter) (personality) (ego). Good intentions are better than bad intentions, but without determination, without the commitment to follow through, without the actuality of following through, good intentions are merely that. The making of excuses, however sincerely, is also symptomatic of inertia.

But once the inertial state has been (even just barely) overcome, there is the gradual building of momentum and further overcoming of inertia. If the student is open-minded in his or her determination, then progress is assured. But if the student allows opinions to take hold, or other attachments, those will naturally tend to undermine whatever momentum has been achieved. Thus one needs to be both determined and intelligently open-minded regarding the process (and even the goals).

One of the most potent aspects of determination is that it tends to continually remind the waking-consciousness of one's intentions, thereby better enabling the needed (desired) actions, attitudes, behaviors, feelings, and thinking. Thus determination tends to undermine the tendency to go back to sleep (become absorbed again in the material (mundane) world of personality-centeredness).

Determination is thus an ingredient to achieving and sustaining conscious awareness. Proper determination encourages proper habits, those actions and activities that encourage growth (development) (evolution), but one should remain vigilant, as even good habits can degenerate through inertia into mechanicalness.



Section 2.412



Adherence

The first responsibility of the committed spiritual student (disciple) is adherence to the principles and practices of the spiritual path, to the best of his or her understanding and ability.

Adherence

The principles and practices of the spiritual path are many and varied; although in some sense (in principle) they are relatively simple. The principles and practices of the path are simply those which properly encourage the student to live in accordance with conscience (truth, harmlessness) (the accumulated wisdom derived from assimilation of experience) and facilitate the experience and expression of the spiritual path (life) (deepening). Adherence is a matter of accord, of balance, of equilibrium, of harmony, in some higher sense.

The successful student is one who adheres to the principles and practices of the path, to the extent that he or she is able to. In order to properly adhere, one must first understand at some level what the principles and practices are, and then understand how to embrace them intelligently. Much of the preliminary training of students involves these basic ideas, so that the student knows what to do and why and how. Later on, the student becomes more attuned to the inner voice and is able to discern appropriateness without recourse to reasons. In fact, to some extent, adherence is merely a matter of some (inner, higher) sense of appropriateness. Adherence naturally follows from commitment and determination.

Adherence is not (properly) a matter of blindly following some leader (presumed authority) or some dictate. It is (properly) a matter of understanding (or at least recognizing) the value of the endeavor and therefore proceeding accordingly. In understanding, or in intuitively recognizing, one can proceed intelligently (intelligently does not imply merely intellectually). Adherence is (properly) a matter of remaining faithful to and committed to some course (principles and practices) to the extent of one's understanding or realization. If one truly listens to the inner voice (conscience) (and not the mask of (false) self), then there is guidance (adaptation, encouragement) and building of momentum. One adheres because it is consistent with one's inner quality and character.

Adherence is not (properly) a matter of attachment or glamour. If one embraces certain principles and practices because one is merely told to do so, or because of glamour, then one is not intelligently embracing them, and one is not therefore

really learning or growing or accomplishing what is intended. What one has, at that level, is the facade of adherence (the karma of obedience) (the karma of absorption in glamour). Proper adherence means that one's embrace of principles and practices becomes a matter of inherent consciousness. It becomes a natural part of one's daily life. For example, the proper vegetarian does not need (and does not need to offer) reasons or excuses for the practice. It is simply a natural practice (discipline) (embrace) and one that the student is inherently (naturally) (consciously and unconsciously) committed to. Likewise the proper non-smoker and the proper non-drinker and the proper one-who-meditates. This is so natural, to one who truly embraces the principles and practices, that any transient lack of accord will register immediately in the waking-consciousness, and one will naturally and properly respond to that realization.

This does not mean that one cannot tentatively embrace a practice before one fully understands or recognizes its value. It just means that the principles and practices that are properly embraced are done so without reasons, without contriving, naturally and comfortably, without regret and without reluctance. Adherence is, ultimately, a matter of Tao.

« Commentary No. 621

Adherence and the Path 1

The primary basis of commitment to the spiritual path is the extent to which the soul is committed. In this sense there are three categories or cases (conditions), (1) where the soul is not responsive to the call of the path (and where the soul is therefore content to evolve (for the time being) gradually according to basic (evolutionary) karma), (2) where the soul is not yet committed but is drawn to the path (being somewhat responsive to the call), and (3) where the soul is (fully) committed to the spiritual path.

The secondary basis of commitment to the spiritual path is the extent to which the personality is consciously aware of the soul's commitment and the extent to which the personality is responsive to or interested in (or committed to) the spiritual path. Where the personality is characterized by buddhi-manas (the (spiritually-illuminated) intuitive mind) (i.e., where the personality is fully and

properly integrated, refined, and en rapport (to some extent consciously) with the overshadowing (indwelling) soul), then the soul and personality are (necessarily) both fully committed to the spiritual path and the mind (and the entire personality) is consciously subordinated to (cooperating with) (qualified by) the soul, and (in this case) the wisdom (quality) of the soul is manifested through buddhi-manas to the mind and the personality.

In such a case (where the soul and the mind are both fully committed), the spiritual path is the first and foremost consideration; everything else falls naturally into place (proper perspective); everything else is subordinated and secondary to the path and viewed primarily in the context of the path. This in no way implies neglect of family or other obligations (opportunities), but only that the various domestic and mundane commitments are viewed in the context of the path and reconciled with the foremost priority of the path (which is quality (of consciousness) (and service)). Thus the (serious) spiritual student's family and other considerations are viewed as being within the scope of the student's relationship to the path (which is (at least eventually) necessarily all embracing). Such considerations are intelligently embraced (balanced) without significant distraction (from the main focus (the path)).

In such a case there is no question of adherence to the discipline of the path appropriate to the level and quality of consciousness, for the path (and associated discipline) is fully embraced (not merely adhered to), without doubt or reservation (the various subtleties of ego (glamour) and relative absorption are always to be contended, but the power of the soul is felt and the intensity of karmic balance such that a serious spiritual student cannot stray far or for long (for the committed student, karmic considerations are intensified)). In such a case (of cooperative and responsive commitment) the ways of the world (desire, experience, etc.) have no serious hold or sway for the personality, for the ways of the world (sense-gratification, self-indulgence, personality-centeredness, etc.) are seen as emptiness (enslavement) relative to the richness and freedom (potency) of buddhi-manas (soul alignment and direct qualification of the mind and personality by the soul).

It is only in the case of conscious cooperation of a fully committed mind (heart) (personality) that the light (love) (power) of the soul blazes forth into and through the personality (and into the outer life (manifestation) (service) of the

spiritual student). Where the soul is committed but the mind (personality) is not, the soul merely calls for the mind to awaken and respond (and upon awakening, the mind then consciously recognizes and accepts the soul's commitment and makes its own responsive commitment (to the soul and the path)).

« Commentary No. 622

Adherence and the Path 2

Each of the three soul conditions (soul (1) unresponsiveness, (2) responsive to the call of the path, (3) committed to the spiritual path) can be considered (in turn) in relation to (relative) polarization of consciousness ((1) kama-manas, (2) manas, (3) buddhi-manas (not respectively)).

In the first case (the soul that is unresponsive (deaf) to the call of the path), the consciousness is gradually evolved and naturally progresses from physical to emotional to mental polarization. As the soul evolves (and therefore as its personality progresses in its ability to express consciousness), the soul is relatively better able to hear the call of the path and respond appropriately (the call is such that if it is heard, the soul responds). From another perspective, the evolutionary pressure increases as the soul evolves and therefore, eventually, the call is heard; however, some souls are inherently more responsive than others (and hear (and respond to) the call of the path relatively earlier than others). Ultimately, all souls hear and heed the call, but some will do so only in the very far future, as the lifewave (humanity) as a whole is completing the human stage. Unresponsive souls can cultivate (in the personality instrument) consciousness up to and including mental polarization (for unresponsive souls, mental polarization is limited to concrete mental experience and expression) (for a soul that is unresponsive to the (call of the) path is simply unable to build the bridge of consciousness between the (abstract mind of the) soul and the (concrete mind of the) personality (at least for the present sequence of evolutionary cycles)).

In the second case (the soul that is not yet committed but is approaching the path (heeding the call)) the evolutionary factors are quickened (tightened) (but not necessarily hastened) and the soul generally becomes committed to the path when its momentum reaches an appropriate level. The only real difference

between the first and second cases is that in the second case the soul is simply increasingly responsive to the call (at whatever levels of achievement) while in the first case (and at the same levels of achievement) the soul continues to be unresponsive.

The two great initiations of the soul occur at the transition points between the three cases (i.e., when a soul passes the threshold of responsiveness to the path and when a soul makes the ultimate commitment to the spiritual path (when a soul is absorbed by the path)) (a third, comparable initiation (of a distinctly different order) occurs when the soul individualizes (where the personality becomes self-conscious)) (individualization can occur (in principle) during any of the three stages relative to the spiritual path) (which accounts for the case of extremely rapid evolution of some souls from the point of individualization).

Thus in the third case (where the soul is committed to the spiritual path (at whatever point in the evolutionary cycle)), the soul exerts considerable pressure upon its personality at whatever polarization of consciousness is achieved, culminating in the breakthrough of (continuity of) consciousness as the bridge of buddhi-manas is completed. Yet, as above, so below; so the mind (and personality) passes similarly from unresponsiveness to responsiveness to conscious commitment (but not coincidentally with the soul). The soul is merely a (higher) instrument of qualification, while the personality is an instrument of experience and expression (activity) (which implies that the personality undergoes rather dynamic (dramatic) crises relative to the (impersonal) (impassive) soul). The soul is without struggle; the personality struggles relatively considerably until it becomes more and more responsive to the soul.

Adherence and the Path 3

From the soul's perspective, progressive (increasing) adherence to the discipline (quality) (character) of the path is expected of the personality in accordance with the soul's commitment. If the soul is committed to the path, the personality is expected to be (become) responsive to the soul (and the path), as the soul applies increasing qualitative pressure (qualification) upon its personality. That pressure ultimately breaks the will (sense of independence) of the mind (personality) and the mind (heart) (personality) becomes a cooperative, subordinated, and responsive instrument.

If the soul is not committed, but is responding to the call of the path, the mind (heart) (personality) will be drawn (almost casually) to the spiritual path on whatever level and with whatever means are available (e.g., kama-manas or manas). If the soul is not responsive to the call of the path, the mind (heart) (personality) may or may not be drawn to the path (philosophy) (spirituality), but if it is drawn, the interest will be relatively self-centered (e.g., through glamour or self-interest (the appeal of power)), since an unresponsive soul is relatively (generally) unable to qualify the personality directly. In the case of a responsive (uncommitted) soul, the relative interest of the personality (albeit relatively self-centered) will be qualified to some extent.

From the personality's perspective, in the case of the unresponsive uncommitted soul, the soul cannot be perceived and therefore does not exist. In the case of the responding, uncommitted soul, there is potential appreciation of the soul's existence (at least unconsciously), while in the case of the committed soul, the reality of the soul is evident (at least unconsciously) (by relative qualification). For the soul upon the path whose personality has achieved buddhi-manas, the mind (integrated, qualified personality) consciously recognizes (realizes) (accepts) the commitment, and the path (discipline) (character) (quality) is fully embraced (and reflected).

For the soul upon the path whose personality is merely mentally-polarized (i.e., without intuitional insight), the mind (integrated personality) is more or less consciously drawn to the path, but without conscious appreciation (realization)

of the soul's commitment (i.e., the personality's approach to the path is relatively merely intellectual) and adherence to the path's calling depends (positively) on the degree of conscious (unconscious) understanding and (negatively) on the degree of personality resistance (inertia) (ego) (self-centeredness). For the soul upon the path whose personality is emotionally-polarized (characterized by the desire-mind (kama-manas)), the personality is drawn to the path along emotional lines, with feelings of commitment without any real appreciation or understanding of the path or its commitment. In such a case, the call of the world (worldly ways) is likely to be relatively strong compared to the call of the path. But eventually, the (committed) soul overcomes the defensive barriers imposed by the personality.

For the personality seeking to embrace the soul (and the path), adherence to the preliminary discipline (of the path) is quite essential, for it is only in such conscientious adherence that the soul has a chance to qualify the personality (without adherence, the personality is simply too coarse and too noisy to be responsive to the soul). As the mind (heart) (personality) becomes more qualified (refined) (responsive), increased understanding (appreciation) is achieved and more intelligent responsiveness ensues (and adherence is gradually transformed into proper embrace) (and the preliminary work (discipline) (endeavors) leads to the intermediate discipline).

« Commentary No. 624

Adherence and the Path 4

In the context of the spiritual path, adherence means living in accordance with the character (discipline) (nature) (quality) of the path, according to the relative ability and understanding of the spiritual student (personality) and the extent to which the mind (heart) (personality) is responsive to the soul (and the path). Adherence is the process and condition of following closely (conscientiously) the discipline implied by the character (nature) (quality) of the path. Adherence is (properly) a continuous act of devotion, an indication (demonstration) of commitment to or consideration for the spiritual path.

In the most nominal sense, adherence is the sincere (un-resenting) willingness to live in accordance with the preliminary discipline (work) (endeavors) on the assumption that understanding and appreciation will thereby and eventually be realized. At maturity, it is the full and proper embrace of the (discipline of the) spiritual path by the self-realized adherent (spiritual student). Of course it is the nature of the self-interested personality (lower self) (ego) to resist adherence, until such time as realization (refinement) is sufficient to qualify and cultivate the personality and bring about its earnest cooperation in embracing the path and its guiding principles. In the meantime numerous and varied (rationalized or otherwise) excuses are generally evoked by the personality as a means of extending or sustaining the illusion of independent existence. But once the joy (freedom) of the path is fully realized, the personality resistance is overcome and the challenge then falls to the more subtle aspects of the personality.

The spiritual discipline implied by the nature (character) (quality) of the soul (path) cannot be adequately rationalized or fully explained. It is simply a matter of accord and recognition (realization) (appreciation) of that accord. And that accord actually tempers the personality and permits refinement and revitalization along spiritual lines (in place of living (blindly) according to the ways of the (mundane) world). Sincere adherence brings about (allows) refinement of the coarse nature of the personality and (through the aspect of self-discipline) brings about (allows) (promotes) the further responsiveness (subordination) of the mind (personality) to the soul (path).

But what constitutes adherence and what constitutes the preliminary work (discipline) (endeavors) (and subsequent intermediate discipline) is not a matter of rationalization or analysis of cause and effect; it is, rather a matter of recognition (realization) (conscious or otherwise) of the nature of the soul (and the nature of the spiritual path) and the concomitant urge to live as much in accordance with that nature as is possible.

As that realization broadens and deepens, so is the discipline (work) (service) enriched, as the adherent gradually embraces the nature (character) (quality) of the path so that the adherent becomes (absorbed in) the spiritual path (such that the energy (qualification) of the soul (path) flows unimpeded through the entire personality). There is though a critical mass or threshold for adherence such that any effort beneath that threshold (e.g., half-hearted (pretensive) adherence

or rationalized exclusion of one or more of the basic elements of the preliminary discipline) is preclusion of any significant progress (from the soul's perspective), while effort at or beyond that threshold creates sufficient momentum for progress. One cannot live according to the (self-indulgent) (absorbing) ways of the world and expect to realize any spiritual results; one can (and should) live according to the nature of the soul and the ways of the path and still live (intelligently) in the world.



Section 2.413



Transformation

One of the consequences of adherence to the path is the natural acceleration in the evolution in consciousness of the spiritual student. This generally involves transformation, from personality-centeredness to being more fully aware of and responsive to the soul.

Transformation

The spiritual path is fundamentally a matter of experience and assimilation of experience, of growth and expansion in consciousness, leading to greater realization, service, etc. Much along the way involves extension and/or expansion, in the sense that what we are to be requires an extension from what we are now and an expansion toward that greater existence. The whole (necessary) process of purification, qualification, refinement, and upliftment is one of extension. The whole process of growth in consciousness from the physical, to and through the emotional, to and through the mental, and beyond, is a matter of expansion built upon the foundation of assimilated experience that allows extension (refinement) in consciousness.

The so-called Masters are (properly) those who have evolved beyond the human stage, who have entered the next kingdom in nature (the kingdom of souls), who have overcome the limitations (sleep) of human existence and who have expanded their consciousness well beyond that of being (merely) human. They do not lose their humanity, but they do lose all of the weaknesses implied in being (merely) human. And they become something greater-than-human. The masters are the real pioneers within and beyond humanity, who, by virtue of their relationship to (within) humanity, draw and inspire humanity onward and upward.

But are the so-called Masters merely extensions of humanity, having greater knowledge, deeper understanding, more power and wisdom? Do they also have expanded or extended egos and all that that implies? No. A human being does not achieve this mastery merely by extension or expansion (growth), although the evolutionary process necessarily includes both extension and expansion in consciousness, they are not sufficient. Mastery proper is achieved through fundamental transformation. The candidate must achieve a self-mastery which conveys a fundamental self-realization. This can only occur through radical change, through transformation of what a person is (as a person) to something else entirely different (yet related to that from which one comes).

This transformation is a fundamental conversion in composition and structure, in character and condition, and in function, a transmutation of the lesser (element) into the greater, a metamorphosis and a transfiguration. This transformation affects and effects the entire personality as the matter which forms each of the several bodies (dense physical, etheric, emotional (astral), and concrete mental) is purified, qualified, refined, and uplifted; as the refined personality is integrated and ultimately transformed in its functional existence from being more or less independent (as an ego) to being wholly infused (changed in its underlying polarization) by the soul. This transformation occurs as the consciousness expands and is transformed (radically) to embrace the underlying unity of all life, not conceptually or intellectually but actually. But (this) transformation cannot occur without (proper) expansion. And (this) expansion cannot occur without (proper) extension. All of the factors (aspects and attributes) of the human being must be fulfilled in order for this transformation to be possible.

Although fundamentally the factors for transformation are extension and expansion of consciousness, the process is necessarily synergistic and holistic. The real keys are the head and heart (and their suitability for transformation). Without temperance and balance, transformation is not possible. Without freedom (from attachments (ideas, beliefs, opinions), materialism, egoism, self-centeredness, etc.) transformation is not possible. In freedom (humility) comes transformation, and awakening from sleep.

« Commentary No. 179

The Death of Self

One of the significant milestones in the spiritual life is the elimination of separateness or the death of self. In this sense, death does not refer to the end of incarnation, but rather, it refers to the end of self-centered existence, and the beginning of the enlightened life (without self). The true individuality (the soul) is not lost, nor is the personality terminated. Only the independence and separateness of the personality is ended, as the real self (the soul) takes complete control of its reflection in the lower worlds.

The death of self involves the complete sublimation of the personality, as the mind and the emotions, and the physical instrument lose all sense of resistance to the downpouring energies of the soul. The personality is the ego, and it is that sense of ego which must ultimately be destroyed (transformed) into useful cooperation and complete subordination to the higher self. It is the vanity and conceit and deception of the ego that are finally overcome as the humility of true spiritual strength (freedom from the limitations of self-centered existence) is achieved. And in that newfound spiritual poise is found the three-fold ray of life (love) (light) in God.

The true self is the (relatively) immortal soul which is forever coexistent and atoned with every other soul. The false self (the personality) (which is usually centered in the separative concrete mind) is quite mortal and, of its own accord, separated from other lives by the illusion of its selfhood. In reality, the ego (personal self) is merely loose association (integration) of elemental (involutionary) lives identified wholly with the aspect of form (matter) rather than the aspect of consciousness. As the false (lower) self is overcome, the individual is reborn (in the midst of life in the lower worlds) into higher consciousness. This process (transformation) has some analogies, including some emotionally-polarized orthodox religious experiences as well as some daily esoteric exercises in which the humility of higher existence is brought forth into the responsive mind and heart of the dedicated disciple.

The death of self is a most potent transition for the aspirant, because it includes (suggests) (leads to) a complete repolarization of consciousness and a deep commitment to God (the spiritual path) and to the world of souls (humanity). The true self is a noble existence in which the life of God predominates. The individuality exists as a powerful focus of energy, but in such a refined, impersonal, selfless way that complete harmony qualifies every relationship in a group (lifewave) context. There is no independence, yet there is perfect freedom. What seems to be a paradox is resolved by the underlying purpose of life and the revelation of divine existence. The individual who becomes God (while retaining the individuality) experiences that greatness through deepest humility. No sense of separation can exist on those levels, and no personal energy can enter the field of causation for the lower worlds.

The individual who refuses to die to self clings to the temporary form of futile existence. The individual who conquers himself achieves the freedom of creative consciousness unbound by the form through which it works. The death of self (self-centeredness) is essential (mandatory) to ultimate progress upon the spiritual path, for there comes a time in the life at which a certain major crises must be faced. The spiritual student who passes that test must die to self (be transformed and reborn in the spiritual self). It is a gate through which each must pass who is to evolve beyond the human experience, a gate through which independence and separateness and ego cannot pass, a gate through which can pass only the individuals who have achieved self-mastery.

« Commentary No. 390

Personality Transformation 1

The early years of each incarnation are generally spent developing the three aspects (vehicles) of the personality: the physical body and its etheric double, the emotional or astral body, and the mind. Roughly seven to ten years are spent developing (forming) each vehicle, though no fixed rule applies. This development is actually a redevelopment or recapitulation, at least for the physical and emotional vehicles, while the development (redevelopment) (formulation) of the mind may take a few years in the case of advanced recapitulation, or many years (or several lifetimes) in the case of the relatively unevolved who have (relatively) little mental focus (development).

Advanced development (rapid recapitulation), followed by considerable enhancement as the mind consolidates or integrates the personality allows simultaneous redevelopment and refinement of the physical, emotional, and mental abilities. While the relatively unevolved spend lifetimes gradually developing and refining the personality aspects, the spiritual student is expected to achieve some considerable control (integration) of the personality, relatively early in the incarnation, so that effort may then be concentrated on alignment (refinement and subordination of the personality) with the soul and on the application of the higher (deeper) temperament (service).

An integrated personality is required for alignment, but the mere achievement of an integrated personality does not indicate the ability or suitability for alignment, for considerable refinement (qualification) of the personality is necessary before alignment is even possible. But where such integration and alignment is a recapitulation, the achievement may follow (relatively) quickly, depending on ability, circumstances (opportunity), and current qualification. Thus alignment (relatively conscious awareness of the soul via a responsive, wholly subordinated personality) may or may not follow effective integration, but that integration (and subsequent refinement) is nonetheless a necessary prelude to the next major, evolutionary step (the transition from personality consciousness to soul consciousness).

Those who are not yet on the spiritual path generally spend many lifetimes of experience leading to integration, followed by many lifetimes of further (more effective) experience via integrated personalities. Those who are on the path simply experience an accelerated, more conscious development and expression. Each major stage of development (experience) consists of phases or cycles, with an effective transition between each phase (cycle) (major stage) to provide continuity (assimilation) (reconfiguration) and to provide for adaptation to new (greater) challenges (further experience). Once any level or sub-level of consciousness (or aspect of experience) is effectively incorporated, it is time to go forward, to the next phase (cycle).

For the personality, generally, each transition or transformation is an unappreciated change, for the personality is quite naturally reactive (defensive), and generally seeks to retain the status quo (i.e., the personality has inertia). Thus the personality is normally easily attached to circumstances which afford apparent security, particularly where those circumstances are also entertaining (enchanted) or stimulating or inflationary (ego-centered), even though such experience (distraction) may not be productive as far as progress in consciousness is concerned. One of the problems for the spiritual student during the process of effectively integrating the personality and again during the process of soul alignment is to guide the personality onward, remaining adaptable and flexible (and coherent (stable)).

Personality Transformation 2

The resistance of the elements of the personality and of the personality itself (when integrated) to change are particularly evident during the effort to integrate those elements and during the subsequent refinement and elevation leading to soul alignment. This resistance (inertia) is an inherent property of matter (coarse vibration) and can be effectively overcome only by transformation (qualification). The personality resistance is a reflection of the natural independence (separativeness) of matter. The integration of the personality means the effective subordination of the ((apparently) relatively independent) elements of the personality to a central personality energy (the concrete mind). For the subordinated elements, this implies loss of self-control and acceptance of a secondary, albeit qualified position. The same is true for the integrated personality relative to the soul during the effort toward alignment, i.e., natural resistance, ultimately overcome and qualified, as the personality is transformed. For the soul, of course, these major changes are the culmination of lifetimes of patient qualification and guidance.

Transformation (leading to alignment) can create a real dilemma for the personality of the spiritual student. On one hand it is the time of life where everything is going reasonably well for the personality; the personality is effectively integrated and the potential experience is considerable. On the other hand, the inner nature is gradually making its presence and character felt, so that the outer (mundane) affairs of the personality seem to lack any “real” meaning or long-term goals. The integrated personality may be self-indulgent (or at least so accustomed) or dissatisfied with the inertial plateau (the oversimplification that much has already been achieved, leaving little more to do (superficially)). This dissatisfaction is enhanced by any conscious or unconscious insights into the possibilities of the soul-world (the world or domain of soul consciousness), which suggest a great deal more yet to achieve (albeit difficult and threatening to the personality nature).

In attempting this transformation from personality to soul-control, the spiritual student is faced with a major hurdle that can result in considerable psychological tension. The personality is pulling one way, but has nothing to

offer save self-indulgence (which is increasingly unsatisfying), its direction being counter to the forward (progressive) intent of the plan, while the soul is gently and patiently guiding the student forward toward that which is intended (destined) (the Light of the Soul), in concert with the plan.

Yet the psychological implications of the dilemma have considerable (meaningful) (beneficial) implications. When science (orthodox psychology) accepts the soul and its relationship to the personality as valid, necessary topics of consideration, then it (science) will be more meaningfully able to help individuals prepare for the crisis. In the meantime, much of the esoteric psychology is devoted to these problems of transition and continued progression (continuous transformation).

Until the soul's presence is consciously felt by the personality and accepted as a superior, beneficent influence, the integrated personality is likely to continue its self-created difficulties, whether those difficulties are inertial in the sense of being absorbed or distracted in a rather confining fashion (as far as the soul is concerned) or whether those difficulties are more active (dynamically psychological). Those difficulties involving stress (personality tension or pressure) are actually potent lessons leading (ultimately) to new and greater awareness.

« Commentary No. 392

Personality Transformation 3

Often during the process of evolution (transformation) great (apparent) difficulties and/or subtle stresses must be faced in order to free the personality from its self-centeredness (inertia) (absorption) (enchantment). Interludes may be challenging or apparently uneventful, yet the evolutionary pressure remains, on some level, to stimulate progress.

Progress is implied not so much by uneventful experience, as by changing difficulties, for lessons are learned (however consciously or unconsciously) and new challenges are evoked. The personality tends to take these difficulties personally, exaggerating the experience and the implications; but in fact, an impersonal approach, taking matters conscientiously and sensibly but not too

seriously, leads to more meaningful conclusions. Each experience (interlude) (transition) leads to new (increased) awareness (on some level). A major transition (like integration, alignment or repolarization (transformation) from one level of consciousness to the next higher) leads to a reorientation in consciousness that further stimulates the progress and effectiveness of the student.

From the soul's point of view, life begins when the integrated personality becomes aware of the soul and begins to respond to that soul influence. A proper response to the soul's calling will lead the personality away from the mundane distractions and the psychological complexities of personality-centered consciousness to a more meaningful round of difficulties and progress, with increased (constructive) effectiveness as far as the environment (humanity) is concerned. In this way the lesser energies of the personality are gradually refined and transformed to serve more meaningful, (collectively) purposive ends.

The practical distinction between those who are not upon the path and those who are upon the path, is the way that experience (difficulties) (work) is approached. The spiritual student, to the extent that he is responsive to the inner, higher nature, responds to experience more intelligently (patiently, effectively, without reaction or personality-indulgence). Difficulties are viewed as transient, specialized experience for some realized or unrealized purpose. Thus the attitude toward experience is distinctly different (more effective) and therefore the student is more likely to succeed (realize the needed lesson) while remaining spiritually poised and with proper perspective. Furthermore, the spiritually intelligent student (of at least some preliminary occult training) is likely to be aware of the existence and purpose of occult tension, and therefore be able to draw upon the higher forces for appropriate application (e.g., conscious transformation). But perhaps more significantly, the intelligent spiritual student is not so easily deceived by the ego (personal glamour) or by the external illusions and deceptions (world glamour) and is therefore able to work much more effectively.

The real transformation of the personality (from the highly reactive (personal) or self-centered state to the fully integrated (refined) (qualified) and aligned state) is relatively gradual, even for the spiritual student (albeit rapid relative to the casual student), being a series of accomplishments and increasing achievements

with a framework of continuous experience and/or constructive expression. Everything in the universe, regardless of any appearance to the contrary, is in a state of flux (on some level). The spiritual student remains in dynamic (intelligently interactive) and progressive equilibrium (dynamic stability and coherence), as the God within shines ever brighter and brighter.

« Commentary No. 1270

Meekness

In the context of (metaphysical-theosophical) spirituality, meekness is the quality or condition of being enduring, patient, strong in spirit, non-violent, mild and moderate in the ways of personality and the world. In the more worldly vernacular, being meek suggests being deficient in spirit and courage, being passive or submissive, being weak in personality. But in the deeper, more profound sense of meekness, it is a matter of spiritual strength, without lack of courage, without being passive or submissive, even while the worldly may not be able to recognize these strengths in one who is meek. This is because the meek (in this spiritual sense) do not entertain the worldly, do not embrace worldly (materialistic and egoistic) ways.

Some worldly folk would seek to “take advantage” of those who are meek, who appear to the worldly to be weak or passive. But the truly (spiritually) meek person is not gullible nor easily manipulated by people or circumstances, but simply exercises a quiet discretion in his or her worldly experience. The word “meek” actually means or suggests gentleness and moderation and sensible humility. This non-passive meekness is actually a wonderful place, where one is non-passively accepting of one’s nature and circumstances and quietly, gently progressing along the way.

“The meek shall inherit the earth” ... suggests this inner strength that allows the spiritual student to “endure injury with patience and without resentment.” It suggests that strength of personality (i.e., over-developed ego) is a barrier in consciousness that impedes or inhibits the process of conscious reunion with God. That it is only through refined consciousness that one can truly find the God within. That those who find themselves (God within) are reborn in a

higher place, and endure, while those who do not find themselves are fated to return again and again to the lower worlds, until the work of evolution in consciousness (for this stage) is actually accomplished.

In this spiritual context, meekness is equivalent to having a well-tempered personality, so that worldly materialism and egoism not longer have a strong hold on the personality, so that the student is no longer predominantly separative or self-serving. If by this nature of his or her embracing spirituality (through harmlessness, honesty, humility (meekness)), the student should be misunderstood by the worldly, then so be it. The wise man is not one who proclaims his (presumed) wisdom. The wise man is not one who seeks to be recognized or entertained by others. The wise man is simply one who sees and hears and feels from an inner place, necessarily quietly, with subtlety. It is not passivity nor is it contrived indifference to the world. But it is a natural (higher) condition of being unattached to worldly things and worldly ways, of being not absorbed in the senses or the intellect or the ego. It is living in the world gently, learning and growing and serving, without much in the way of worldly distractions or impediments.

The key to understanding meekness, indeed to understanding true spirituality, is the realization that things in this world are not actually as they appear to be, that most people experience life in this world superficially, who think and feel and behave and perceive and know and understand things superficially. In seeing things only on the surface, most people judge based on appearances, and think according to their conditioning. But those who walk gently through the trials and tribulations of this world are progressively able to see beyond the surface, to progressively deeper levels of reality, and embrace progressively deeper levels of spirituality.

Section 2.42



The Dark Night of the Soul

In addition to the basic process of personality transformation, there is also a more radical process called "the dark night of the soul" in which the pilgrim undergoes the rigours of a major transformation in consciousness.

The Dark Night of the Soul 1

What has been called “the dark night of the soul” is actually a number of different phenomena. In one sense it is the descension or reflection of the soul into matter or incarnation, which blocks or hinders the light of the soul from reaching the waking-consciousness of the incarnated personality. In that sense the entire incarnation is “the dark night of the soul.” In another sense it refers to the state of being absorbed in personality consciousness, in which case it is possible, for the properly trained and qualified student, to become enlightened or awakened and thereby transcend the lower experience. In yet another sense it refers to various periods of trials and difficulties encountered by the spiritual aspirant. In these various trials and difficulties the weaknesses and limitations of the student are brought to the surface of consciousness, by virtue of stress, such that the student can recognize them and transcend them.

There is also a more proper (deliberate) process of self-transformation that can be evoked by the soul, or within the context of a soul group, for its lower self. In this sense, the “dark night” can last for a period of a few months to many years, depending on the needs of the soul, the needs of the student (as recognized by the soul), the difficulties required to be faced, and the abilities of the student to recognize the process and associated opportunities (and the ability of the student to face those difficulties and opportunities and the effectiveness of the student in so facing).

In this sense of (major) self-transformation, the process is generally one of (1) making the transition from being emotionally-polarized to being mentally-polarized in consciousness, (2) making the transition from being mentally-polarized to being intuitively-polarized, (3) making the transition from being predominantly self-centered to being predominantly non-self-centered, (4) making the transition from heart-centeredness to having a balance of heart and head, (5) making the transition from head-centeredness to having a balance of head and heart, (6) making the transition from being relatively coarse to being relatively refined in consciousness, and/or (7) becoming self-realized (enlightened in the higher sense of achieving conscious alignment between the mind of the personality and the overshadowing soul).

In some cases a combination of these transitions and associated processes may be undertaken, e.g., a repolarization as well as a shift between the head and heart nature. The student may be largely unconscious of the process, in which case it generally takes several to many years (or even more than one lifetime) to complete, or the student may be more-or-less fully conscious of the process (i.e., where the student realizes that the process has been evoked and then consciously collaborates with the process), in which case the student generally progresses more rapidly to fulfillment (through a period of months to a few years).

None of these phenomena are evoked directly or indirectly by the mind (ego) (personality). It is not a matter of desire or aspiration, though desire or aspiration may be present. It is a matter of sufficient preparation, sufficient qualification, and suitable readiness to undertake the transition, and the determination of that readiness can be made only by the soul and only in the context of the soul group. Thus it is the soul or soul-realized mentor (on soul levels) that actually evokes the process of self-transformation. It is, ultimately, a matter of appropriateness that takes precedence over the more common aspects of the particular incarnation.

« Commentary No. 1026

The Dark Night of the Soul 2

In the sense of self-renewal or self-transformation one might ask why the outcome cannot be achieved in the normal course of human evolution rather than through the hastened or intensive period of considerable stress (dark night of the soul). The answer is, for the most part, that the inertia of the personality in incarnation is normally extremely inhibitive of these processes. The habits established by a personality generally preclude "gradual" enlightenment or self-transformation. This includes "good" habits that serve the student well in the context of learning from experience and in the context of performing useful work (service expression). Unless a student is able to periodically undertake a fully-unconditioned state, real progress comes very slowly.

Another "answer" is that there comes a time, periodically, for each student on the path, when the student has progressed as far as he or she can in the normal course of events and circumstances (and karma). In order to progress farther, in order to be more effective in spiritual work, in order to be more receptive and responsive to higher impression, the bonds (conditioning) (habits) of the personality must be broken and the "spirit laid bare" to facilitate transformation. This is a most difficult and trying period. It means that the personality must be substantially disrupted and rendered. The integrated personality must be destroyed and the pieces of the personality must then be put back together again in a new and improved pattern (leaving out much of the previous conditioning and including new, more progressive (yet more nominal) conditioning) [ultimately one reaches the limits facilitated by the new conditioning and the process must be repeated in some manner or another].

The period of personality-rendering is probably the most difficult non-subtle experience on the path. The normally poised and well-integrated spiritual student may be faced with a ruptured aura, with external forces hitherto held at bay by the quality and integrity of that aura. The (previously mentally polarized) student unaccustomed to emotional swings may through this process periodically face the depths of despair, loneliness (because no one else is participating in the process (it is intensely (and intensively) personal)), frustration, irritation, etc. Being exposed to the most intense feelings (e.g., utter despair) awakens the student in ways that would be impossible in the integrated, mentally-polarized state.

Through this process the deepest of weaknesses (at least those to be resolved) are evoked to the surface of the personality awareness so that they can be recognized and dealt with. But they are evoked at the times at which the student is least able to bear them or deal with them in a sensible fashion. This also leaves a great impression on the personality matrix. This stressing (testing) of the inner strength and reliance of the student is intended to destroy (or greatly diminish) the strength of ego and the strength of personality conditioning. It is a great and wonderful (albeit exceedingly painful) opportunity for growth and readjustment (renewal).

The whole process thus includes a period or periods of darkness (particularly enduring if the student is not really consciously aware of what the process

entails) interspersed with more peaceful (less intense) periods of contemplation and assessment (and resolve). If the student is able to overcome the conditioning of the personality, then the cycle is ended and the (new) person emerges. Otherwise the cycle repeats itself, with greater intensity, and again, until the intended transformation has been properly concluded.

« Commentary No. 1027

The Dark Night of the Soul 3

Is the evocation of the dark night grounds for ignoring or neglecting one's otherwise legitimate obligations and responsibilities? No. One must do the best one can to meet one's obligations and responsibilities, yet still take the opportunity for self-transformation very seriously. On the other hand, one must also break free from whatever habits and conditioning there may be. So one may need to re-evaluate one's obligations and responsibilities, and meet them in new or different, ultimately more effective, ways.

Is the evocation of the dark night an opportunity for self-indulgence? No, not really. With a non-integrated personality, for a while, there is a natural focusing on the lower self and its apparent needs, but ultimately one must turn properly inward, toward the deepest, highest aspect of the human being, and transcend the merely apparent needs of the lower nature. The lower self may be in turmoil for a while, with periods of untempered experience, as the student is unaccustomed to the non-integrated state and is not really able to properly temper the reaction or response to circumstances. But the inner strength, that brought the student to the integrated state in the first place, will come, encouraging the student to rise above the non-integrated state, to a new, more effective integration.

Does the evocation of the dark night bring even more stress to the lower self? Yes, but the important stress is the dark night itself (i.e., evolutionary pressure in its most intensive form). All other stresses must be overcome in order to focus properly on the needed lessons and aspects of transformation. The student must become more detached, more relaxed in regard to mundane pressures, so that the student may properly focus on the inner self and what it

reveals about the outer self. This process cannot be properly concluded where the student is not free to realize the truth about himself or herself. This means a lessening of outer stress. This means being more detached, withdrawing somewhat from whatever entanglements there may be, so that understanding can be achieved concerning the conditioning to be overcome and the adjustments to be made.

Why does the dark night invariably include the experience of intense loneliness? This is nature's way of allowing the student to become free from the usual mundane and personal conditioning. In the intensity of loneliness, the spiritual student naturally turns within to the inner, higher self, which is the only real self. It does not mean that the student is alone. Nor does it mean that the student is separated from humanity. It simply means that the connection with others and with humanity is based more properly on inner relationships than (superficial) outer experience. The spiritual path is itself a lonely path, even without the more intense loneliness evoked by virtue of the dark night. It is lonely in the sense that the student is awakening to a realization for which most everyone else is asleep. Those who share this experience tend to be few and far between. Thus a sense of loneliness helps to awaken the spiritual student, provided the student does not dwell in loneliness as an end in itself.

Why should the student passing through this experience be so misunderstood by others? Because most other people have no conscious experience of these matters and cannot properly relate to the experience of the dark night. On the other hand, the spiritual student is generally misunderstood by others anyway, for the same reason. The spiritual student is generally (more creatively) non-conforming to the mundane and personal expectations of culture and society.

The Dark Night of the Soul 4

So who can help the student who is passing through the dark night of the soul in this proper sense? No one, really. The student must rely on the soul for encouragement and guidance. That encouragement and guidance is necessarily qualitative and subjective in nature, and it is up to the (mind of the) student to make the best use of that encouragement and guidance. Real friends are simply patient (non-judging) and accepting of the experience being evoked.

In addition to the apparent conditioning, what else must the student overcome? Generally, there are various elements and aspects of conditioning. Some of the most important yet more subtle elements and aspects to be overcome are the various defense mechanisms and walls that are built into one's consciousness by the apparent conditioning (experience). Those walls and barriers serve to protect the student from himself or herself, in the lower self, yet impede or inhibit realization. In effect, each wall is a barrier to truth and realization. The lower self must not have "wanted" to deal with something, ergo a protective wall or barrier was created. In some cases walls are built in response to fear, real or imagined. In some cases walls are built by the ego to protect itself, to prevent or hinder the higher self from threatening the false reality of the ego (i.e., with the truth about oneself and the relative illusion (reality) of the ego and the outer world). Some walls are built as buffers, where reality cannot be comprehended directly. But all walls are essentially artificial and fabricated by the lower self and ultimately must be removed.

As the student grows and deepens spiritually, the various walls and barriers in consciousness become less protective and more limiting and inhibitive. As the student grows and deepens in consciousness, the various walls must be dealt with, one by one, and the truth of what they contain or convey or imply must be faced and realized. The dark night of the soul is simply a much-more-intensive-than-normal means of facilitating this progress, through intensive focus rather than as an incidental aspect of life-as-usual in the lower worlds. The spiritually-oriented person who is absorbed in mundane, personality-centered life as well as the student who is absorbed in spiritual work may have this experience evoked for them (by their respective souls), in order to disrupt that

absorbed state, effectively forcing the student to deal with the various nooks and crannies of lower consciousness.

Normal (mundane, conventional) psychological analysis is generally insufficient to resolve the difficulties presented by the (process of the) dark night. This is because some or all of the walls and barriers are inherited from earlier lifetimes. It is only when one effectively turns within to the higher self, that the essence in consciousness can be embraced and the issues of these inherited walls and barriers can be confronted. The details of previous experience are not really important. What is important is understanding the nature and quality of consciousness that created the wall or barrier.

The dark night of the soul is a wonderful, albeit painful and intensely lonely, experience and opportunity. As the student responds more consciously and more deliberately to this evocation he or she is better able to weather the associated difficulties and focus on the essence of the experience (which is the higher nature in relationship to the lower). Every truly God-centered person in history has passed through the dark night of the soul in one form or another. It is more than just a rite of passage, it is a very real and vital deepening and transformation.



Section 2.43



Spirituality

Ultimately, the practical object of the spiritual path is the development and expression of (genuine, higher, natural) spirituality, which is achieved in and through the absence of ego.

Spirituality

Spirituality is defined as the quality or state of being spiritual, of embracing and manifesting spiritual character, quality, temperament, and values. This really means embracing and manifesting the higher aspects and attributes of the human nature, being responsive to one's higher nature and allowing that higher nature to condition and qualify the entire lower nature or personality. In short, the extent of spirituality is the extent of absence of ego, as the ego is sublimated by the soul or higher self (that aspect of human nature that is above and beyond physical, emotional, and concrete mental levels).

Merely embracing religious discipline and values does not convey spirituality. One must actually refine the personality, subordinate that personality to the higher self, and eliminate the ego as an independent and intrusive entity. Spirituality requires a great deal of preparatory work, for it is the culmination of evolution in consciousness for humanity at this level (of successive incarnated existence (experience and expression)). Spirituality does not imply any supernatural-ness, although it is relatively rare to encounter a truly spiritual (selfless and consciously aware) person.

The achievement of spirituality implies understanding that transcends knowledge, and wisdom that transcends understanding. The achievement of spirituality conveys a very great freedom when compared with the bulk of humanity (who are virtually all living mechanical lives (being absorbed in mundane and personal matters, with mundane and personal consciousness (i.e., living merely as human (egoistic) personalities))). But that freedom also implies that the spiritual person has subordinated all self-will to that of the higher self. And while that higher self is not concerned with the particulars of life at the personality level, it is concerned with character, quality, and temperament, and so (accordingly) influences the lower life.

While spirituality does not necessarily imply perfection, it can be described or elucidated in terms of the preponderance of presence of various (higher) "spiritual" qualities and the absence of various (lower) (more common) human attributes. These include (but are not limited to) the relative absence of ego,

maya, glamour, and illusion, and the relative presence of altruism, charity, cheerfulness, compassion, discretion, dispassion, gentleness, harmlessness, honesty, humility, inclusiveness, moderation, moderate non-conformity, peacefulness, poise, prudence, quietness, respect, responsibility, reverence, and simplicity. There is also in the truly spiritual person the marked absence of any impositional tendencies. Above all there is simply a sense of spiritual values. For the spiritual person, action is a matter of appropriateness (inspired without contrivance, by that sense of spiritual values), not a matter of decisiveness or judgment.

That which is spiritual literally implies that which is not physical (i.e., that which is etheric, astral, mental, intuitional, etc.) or that which is above and beyond the normal human realm of physical awareness and (unenlightened) emotional and concrete mental expression. But the sense of spirituality, in the context of the esoteric philosophy, is a matter of character and quality, not a matter merely of level of consciousness, and certainly not a matter of psychic abilities. The truly spiritual person relies on conscience and intuition, without recourse to lower (animal) instincts or emotional urges or rationalization of any kind. In the final analysis, spirituality is the presence of the soul or higher self through induced character and quality and temperament and values.

« Commentary No. 975

Psychism and Spirituality

For the most part, the spiritual student is not interested in psychic phenomena per se and does not focus on any psychic development. The path involves spiritual development and training, and a focus on discipleship and service, without recourse to psychic development. In some cases there is deliberate and sanctioned training in psychic matters, but mainly psychic development is ancillary (incidental) to spiritual development and spiritual work. Emphasis is placed on the ability to perceive truth (discriminating between the real and the unreal) and to work without the distraction implied or conveyed by personal energies.

Properly trained (sanctioned) psychics operate entirely within the framework of the spiritual path but are not properly recognizable by anyone outside of that framework. They do not lead public lives nor do they demonstrate their abilities to anyone. Like other aspirants, disciples, and initiates, they serve quietly and (properly) anonymously, subjectively working with whatever energies and forces they are called upon to address. They also work intelligently within the karmic framework (i.e., while they are generally helpful and constructive people, they do not interfere in the karmic patterns of people (i.e., they recognize the futility of any superficial treatment (i.e., without a change in consciousness (learning) (adjustment) (realization), no healing or psychic adjustment is anything other than superficial))).

What emerges naturally, in the course of spiritual development, is the spiritual intuition (which is very substantially different in quality from the emotional or astral counterpart that is so common) which provides insight into the nature of things (the path, the work (dharma)). What also emerges is a growing telepathic rapport with coworkers (of comparable ability and quality of consciousness) that facilitates the work. Neither of these (proper) talents (and others) can be turned toward personal interests. And neither of these talents (and others) are consistent with the presence of ego (i.e., where the ego or self-interest (personality-centeredness) emerges, spiritual "talent" recedes). Thus the (proper) spiritual student rises above personal interests (and the ego) and is devoted to the path and its work. Therefore the spiritual student is generally able to discern between that which is real (true) and that which is false (unreal) (imagined or otherwise).

Yet many psychics do masquerade as spiritual people, some even sincerely so, yet without any appreciable insight into either their own talents or the processes involved. Most lack even rudimentary discrimination and insight, and are powerless in the face of forces they cannot control or comprehend (even though self-deception often leads them to believe otherwise). Thus one should be quite skeptical of any impressions obtained psychically. One should always judge for oneself the validity of any impression, one's own or otherwise, and defer judgment where there is not the ring of truth.

Thus psychism should not be confused with spirituality (though there is some inter-relationship). A psychic is not generally spiritual and a spiritual person is

not generally (particularly) psychic (although the serious spiritual students tend to be intuitive and perceptive). In the final analysis, the spiritual student is not distracted by psychic phenomena or his or her own psychic talents (or lack thereof). And the spiritual student is not generally deceived by his or her own imagination (which is in itself a very potent force in perception). With common sense one proceeds to do what is before one to do, in adherence to truth as it is understood.



