

Lesson 8

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR THE MAN OF THE WORLD

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Condensed from *Basic Theosophy*

Spirituality simply consists in discovering and becoming one's higher, nobler self, in accentuating the highest in motive, speech and the conduct of life. Indeed, the discovery and expression of one's highest Self is both the immediate and the main and true purpose of all spiritual exercises. Especially is it the message of the unhappiness and pain which have so large a part in human experience. Pain itself can be one of the chief agencies which cause men to seek and follow the spiritual life, even whilst fulfilling worldly duties.

The message of pain is at least threefold: to awaken compassion for the pain of others — to be compassionate is in itself to be spiritual; to teach man to live according to the law of love; and to serve as a spur to induce him to rise to those levels of human nature and consciousness where pain is not, which means the level of the permanent realities and of the Spiritual Self of man. Then man can release into his life the power, the light and the life of that Self. Then spirituality becomes natural to us. In such ways pain can be turned to very good purposes.

How is the spiritual life to be lived by men and women amidst the pressures of mundane, earthly life and duties? There are at least two essentials: spiritual awakening and ordered effort.

Spiritual Awakening. Spiritual awakening in man is as natural as is the appearance of bud and flower in the plant. At a certain stage of evolution there naturally occurs an awakening of the will to attainment. One possible meaning of the parable of the ten virgins,¹ five wise and five foolish, is that five were spiritually awakened and five were not.

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When certain phases of evolution are entered upon, the ego becomes strong enough to send spiritualizing influences "down" to the personality. These strengthen conscience, and arouse the aspiration to make the most of life and to live in the highest possible purity and service. Such experiences are sometimes accompanied by visions of divine perfection and mystical events of various kinds. Difficulties can arise, such as habitual indulgences which demand continuance, the claims of everyday life, and the destructively critical attributes of the con-

¹ *Matt*, XXV: 1-13

crete mind. In spite of these, the Path is ultimately chosen because it is the only way of life. It is chosen for the sole reason that the individual cannot help himself, the choice being completely spontaneous. It is, in fact, the natural re-

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sult of hundreds of lives of growth, culminating in an inward resolve, an irrevocable will to attainment, to spiritual victory. For the awakened Soul, "There is no other path at all to go."²

Three interior experiences are then passed through. Firstly, mentally awakened man seeks the answers to the problems of life. He demands logic in religion and justice from God. His interest in philosophy and religion deepens. He begins the great search for knowledge, which is often hastened by such painful experiences as worldly failure, bereavement, frustration, and even disaster.

Second, the neophyte also experiences both an awakening of will and a divine discontent. The outer man becomes aware of the "inexpressible longing . . . of the inner man for the infinite." Dissatisfaction, self-shame, the sense of failure even amidst material success — all these act as spurs. He recognizes that selfishness and materialism have ruled his life, and sees how harmful they are and how hurtful to others he has been. He knows he has been drifting, and that purpose-

lessness was the cause of much suffering and failure in his life. He notes with pain that faculties have remained undeveloped, that indulgences have not been outgrown, and he sees in his former life a general smallness of aim. He thereupon determines to rise above these and other faults.

At this stage help becomes available. The aspirant meets a teacher, either interiorly, externally or both. Life itself also comes to his aid, in that opportunities for progress and service offer themselves. Looking back later, he discovers that indeed his whole life has been guided. When such spiritual aspirations awaken, it is important to respond outwardly, as by a desirable change of habit, an uttered prayer or an act of renunciation, restitution, or service.

The third experience which accompanies the true awakening of the soul is a diminution of the sense of separateness and an increase of those of kinship and responsibility. There is a change of nature from getting to giving, and a change of accent from the personal to the impersonal, from the smaller self to the larger Self. An expansion of mind, of outlook, is experienced, a greater kindness develops. A Cause is generally adopted and the spirit of dedication takes up its abode within the awakened man. All this is quite unforced, being perfectly natural and utterly sincere. In these ways the first of the two essentials is met — Awakening. Fortunate are those who recognize, acknowledge and ratify this interior change.

ORDERED EFFORT

The second essential was ordered effort. Here two ideas are met, both somewhat new to Western thought. The first of these is that the spiritual life can be lived whilst out in the world, even amidst business and domestic activities; for in them opportunity and guidance can be found for the pursuit of the new interest — the search for truth,

understanding, power, reason and beauty in life. One qualification must, however, be made; this is that the means of livelihood must be neither ignoble nor hurtful to others, whether animals or men. The second idea is that the practice of the spiritual life is a science, an ordered, carefully organized effort being essential to success. This concerns the daily life of the aspirant, which must include regular meditation or prayer, study and character building, and self-giving in service without thought of return.

Meditation. Meditation is based on the fact that all man is seeking is within him; is, indeed, part of his inner Self. That Self must be found. To accomplish this regularity of effort is necessary, in order both to overcome the resistance of bodily habit, and by meditation to discover that which has now awakened — the Divine Self, the essential man behind the bodily veil. Meditation implies the daily withdrawal of thought from the transient towards the eternal, and a deepening interest in those things which are unchanging, undying, everlasting. The mind is turned from mortality to immortality, from the many to the One, and so from ignorance to truth.³

As a result of regular meditation man gradually comes to know himself as a radiant, immortal, divine being. Flaming, he knows himself as a flame which is part of the Fire of God. He dwells upon this fact, for this realization of his own divinity is the immediate objective of meditation. The ultimate objective is to realize identity with the divinity in all. Success brings, even at the beginning, illumination, serenity, purity, power, growing inspiration, idealism, and a deepening sense of dedication. All these are greatly needed on the Path. Meditation is thus found to be important as a personal rule of life, a daily practice carried out with a strong will to achieve both illumination and a steady improvement of character. Such is the first factor in successfully following the spiritual way of life — regular daily meditation at the same time each day, preferably in the morning.

Knowledge and Character. The second factor consists of study for advancement in knowledge and of character-building. Without being morbidly introspective, the aspirant must intelligently and impartially study his own character and conduct. Bad faults must be eliminated, whilst malice, gossip, cruelty, selfishness, sensuality, hardness, hurtfulness, brutality, intolerance, self-righteousness,

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untruthfulness, dishonesty and hypocrisy must, if they exist, speedily be outgrown; for they are the enemies of soul progress, obstacles to self-illumination.

Service. The third factor consists of service, implying that the aspirant is now outward-turned. He no longer lives for himself alone, but extends his help beyond his family to his neighbor, the community and the race. Such service may be regarded as active prayer which, moreover, is unfailingly answered. The doctor, for example, may regard himself as a channel for the healing life of God and of his Master. He stresses preventive medicine and — an ideal strange to the worldly mind — seeks to eliminate all need for the medical profession. The teacher is as dedicated as a priest,

3 q. v. *Light on the Path, The Light of Asia, The Voice of the Silence, At the Feet of the Master, The Song Celestial.*

serving more especially the God within child and adolescent. The government official endeavors to establish the ideal administration, the lawyer to become a personal counselor, a wise family philosopher and friend, and those responsible for the home to make it a place of beauty, happiness and peace, a spiritual and cultural center for all who live and enter there. All work is indeed, performed as part of the One Work and on behalf of the One Worker, is God. Business is

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regarded as part of the great business of the Solar System, and Deity is recognized in part as a Great Organizer Whom the dishonest trader degrades. All work in whatever field thus becomes dedicated work, performed on behalf of the One Worker, in His Name and Presence, and for Him.

Thus the path is indeed open for the man of the world, a change of accent and motive rather than of activity being involved. Although this change may at first seem to be rather forced and artificial, it is not really so. After the awakening, spirituality becomes increasingly natural and spontaneous. Service, for example, is not only natural but is clearly seen as the only way to happiness. True religion need not make one gloomy, severe or sad. On the contrary, the spiritual life is essentially the happy life, if only because purposeful. In loving service and a life of kindness and helpfulness one may realize "joyfulness of the Divine Presence." Thus living, personal desire becomes submerged and service a rule of

life. Self-forgetfulness is found to be the basis of all spirituality, and if there is renunciation, it is of but a single rose to obtain a tree bearing unto seventy times seven.

Dr. Annie Besant wrote:

"The life of the disciple is one long series of petty renunciations; one long series of daily sacrifices, one continual dying in time in order that the higher may eternally live. It is not a single deed that strikes the world with wonder which makes true discipleship, else were the hero or the martyr greater than the disciple. The life of the disciple is lived in the home, is lived in the town, is lived in the office, is lived in the market place, yea, amid the common lives of men. The true life of sacrifice is that which utterly forgets itself, in which renunciation becomes so common that there is no effort, that it becomes a thing of course. If we lead that life of sacrifice, if we lead that life of renunciation, if daily, perseveringly, we pour out ourselves for others, we shall find ourselves one day on the summit of the mountain, and shall discover that we made the Great Renunciation, without ever dreaming that another act were possible."

The Prophet Isaiah wrote:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them [the redeemed]; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become as a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: . . . And an highway there shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. . . the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs

and everlasting joy . . . and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”⁴

TO SUM UP

The acceptance of idealism by an individual is an unforced, natural result of interior growth. It is spontaneous and unpremeditated, being the effect of entry into a new level of consciousness. The ideals which then become natural are to some extent reversals of those of the past. Hitherto he has lived, and quite naturally, in order to compete and to acquire; now he lives, just as naturally, in order to co-operate and to contribute. As the plant in the early stages of its growth acquires from the soil, from the air and from the sun, so also, before the birth of idealism in him, man lives to acquire. Eventually in the plant, an external change occurs; a new type of tissue appears — the bud. Within the bud is contained the promise of the fulfilment of plant life, the realization of the purpose of the plant existence. Quite naturally the bud is formed, develops and opens. Naturally, also, in due time the plant displays new attributes of flora, beauty, color and fragrance. Finally it achieves its immortality, the greatest miracle of its cycle of growth — the production of the seed through which the plant may perpetuate itself indefinitely.

The evolution of the soul of man follows the same pattern. At a certain stage of development man becomes spiritually awakened, and the bud — symbol and promise of spiritual beauty, fragrance and immortality — appears. In the fulness of time the bud is opened, and later the state is reached of the stature of the Perfect Man. The naturalness of this process is beautifully expressed in Tagore’s words: “He who can open the bud, does it so simply.” This awakening is the real conversion, such as that which came to St. Paul as a voice — that of his Higher Self. Ever after he was a changed man, changed from within.

All true idealists stand with St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Their response to idealism is as

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natural as was his, and when this stage is reached, help is always offered. “When the disciple is ready, the Master appears.” Once the ideal of the spiritual life is embraced, once the awakened individual begins to lose himself

The Golden Stairs

*A clean life, an open mind,
A pure heart, an eager intellect,
An unveiled spiritual perception,
A brotherliness for all,
A readiness to give and receive advice
and instruction,
A loyal sense of duty to the Teacher,
A willing obedience to the behests of
TRUTH,
Once we have placed our confidence in,
and believe that Teacher to be in
possession of it;
A courageous endurance of personal
injustice,
A brave declaration of principles,
A valiant defense of those who are
unjustly attacked,
And a constant eye to the ideal of human
progression and perfection which the
Secret Science depicts-
These are the golden stairs up the steps
of which the learner may climb to the
Temple of Divine Wisdom*

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in and give himself to a great Cause, then additional strength, outer guidance and inner illumination come to him. Whether in a vision, as a great light, as a new inspiration, or as a newly discovered Counselor and Friend, the Master presents Himself. Thereafter He assists the aspirant to find and tread the steep and narrow way, helps him to pass through that portal of which the Lord Christ said: “. . . strait is the gate, and

narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

H. P. Blavatsky wrote:

“There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind — but yet a road; and it leads to the heart of the universe. I can tell you how to find Those who will show you the secret gateway that leads inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer. There is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through. There is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onwards, there is reward past all telling; the power to bless and save humanity. For those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.”

Geoffrey Hodson, *Basic Theosophy*. Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India.

Questions for Review:

1. What is your understanding of the spiritual life?
2. What the message of pain in human life?
3. What are three significant interior experiences that an awakening person goes through?
4. What are the three factors needed to successfully pursue the spiritual life?
5. How do you think should a person balance the demands of the worldly life and the requirements of the spiritual life?