

THE OBLIGATORY PILGRIMAGE

The Master once wrote: “There are more ways than one for acquiring occult knowledge. “Many are the grains of incense destined for one and the same altar: one falls sooner into the fire, the other later — the difference of time is nothing,” remarked a great man when he was refused admission and supreme initiation into the mysteries.” The ‘great man’ He refers to is Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman Emperor. The ‘grains of incense’ are on an ‘Obligatory Pilgrimage’.

H.P.Blavatsky speaks of the Obligatory Pilgrimage in the Proem to the Secret Doctrine:”The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul—a spark of the former—through the Cycle of Incarnation (or “Necessity”) in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term.”

She goes on to explain what she means: “In other words, no purely spiritual Buddhi (divine Soul) can have an independent (conscious) existence before the spark which issued from the pure Essence of the Universal Sixth principle,—or the OVER-SOUL,—has (a) passed through every elemental form of the phenomenal world of that Manvantara, and (b) acquired individuality, first by natural impulse, and then by self-induced and self-devised efforts (checked by its Karma), thus ascending through all the degrees of intelligence, from the lowest to the highest Manas, from mineral and plant, up to the holiest archangel (Dhyani-Buddha).”

What is also important to note is that no one is exempt from this ‘Obligatory Pilgrimage’. She is unequivocal in making this point by saying: “The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no

privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.”

This takes us to matters pertaining to Karma and therefrom to what is the right way of living. This is more important for the pilgrim to understand, rather than float on metaphysical clouds, seeking *Nirvana*. The pilgrim has not experienced *Moksha* or *Nirvana*; he only has word-images of it. In fact, in today's world, neither the teacher nor the taught seem to understand that the race for *Nirvana* or *Moksha* is an exercise in futility. The cunning peddle it in the spiritual marketplace, and the credulous lend themselves into being cheated. The voice of the true Theosophist is drowned among the cries of the vendors of psychic experiences. Prescriptions for short-cuts and instant results, each with its unique selling proposition, seem to have the attention of the wavering pilgrim. The Law of *Karma* has little appeal to one who wants exemptions, short-cuts and quick results. The task of the true Theosophist is no easy one. It is said to be 'lonely' and there is but a 'forlorn hope'. Yet, the satisfaction of speaking the truth amidst dissenting voices is the only reward.

On the Obligatory Pilgrimage, it is important to throw the seeds of practical wisdom, among the seekers. This practical wisdom cannot include speculations on *Nirvana* or *Moksha*; rather it has to do with a mindful & meditative way of life. It has to do with Compassion to all in all that we do. If you look carefully, a mindful & meditative life is indeed a compassionate life - If you truly love something, you will pay attention to it. This attention is not fragmented and divided; it is whole unadulterated & undiluted. It is an attention where the subject is fully involved with the object. Such an attention is indeed a challenge to the separate identity of the subject & consequently, the object. It is a

challenge to the passage of time. It is a challenge to the familiar pattern of the working of the mind. Anything short of this complete attention is fragmented. In a fragmented experience, there is a separation between the subject and the object. This separation is an expression of duality as opposed to unity. Duality is the principal characteristic of the world of causes, and the resultant effects. It sustains the cycle of cause & effect. Duality, in its very nature, separates. It creates the pairs of opposites. There is good & evil; there is happiness & misery, etc. It holds the performer to *samsara*. The generation of each new cause is another step on the *pravritti marga*. The pilgrim will wait another day in *samsara*.

We are constantly making choices in our life. *Viveka*, or discrimination helps us in two ways; at first, It helps us make the right choice, but later, it helps to go beyond choice. *Viveka* is born out of constant mindfulness. Unless it becomes a part of one's nature to be mindful, there is always the lurking danger of making a [wrong] choice. Clarification of motives is an exercise that precedes discrimination. Very often, even if we know 'what' we want do, we do not ask ourselves 'why' we want to do it. There are two forces that act when we clarify our motives. One is a 'restraining force' and the other is a 'driving force'. The former is the voice of conscience, while the latter is the whisper of intuition. It is called by the Master, "whisperings of the *Buddhi* to the *Manas*'. It is like connecting to the intelligence of the universe. The universe is intelligent; it is a cosmos and not a chaos. Planets do not absent-mindedly collide into each other, like cars driven by distracted drivers, who are not mindful. If one connects to this inherent intelligence resident in the *Buddhi*, the choice will always be the right one. If one looks further, one learns that not only is it important to make the right choice, but also to exercise *Vairagya* & detach oneself from that choice. If one attaches oneself to the choice, even if it is the right

choice, it becomes tainted with the motive of the self. Virtue & merit are intrinsically pure. In a way they are impersonal. The motive of the self would only leave them tainted.

How does one detach the self from the choice? We are in the midst of the battle of life. Perhaps, we may find an answer, if we understand a particular statement in the 'Light on the Path'. It reads:

- “1. Stand aside in the coming battle, and though thou fightest be not thou the warrior.
2. Look for the warrior and let him fight in thee.
3. Take his orders for battle and obey them.
4. Obey him not as though he were a general, but as though he were thyself...”

Who is this mysterious warrior? Do His actions not attract Karma? Does He not generate causes that bind? Is He within or without, or is He everywhere?

To recognise the mysterious warrior, one needs to understand yet another paradox that Shri Krishna presents in the *Bhagvad Gita*. He says, “He who sees **inaction in action**, and **action in inaction**, he is wise among men, he is harmonious, even while performing all **action**.” We must pay attention to the key words: “even while performing all **action**”.

The *Mahabharata* is the epic from which our motto, ‘*Satya nasti paro dharmah*’ taken. The high point of this epic is the *Bhagvad Gita*. It is a conversation between Shri Krishna & Arjuna. There is a particular interpretation to this epic. Considering only the relevant part of this interpretation, we understand that Shri Krishna is The God within, or

The Master within. Arjuna is the aspiring personality who looks for teaching. Shri Krishna asks him to abandon tradition & relationships and come to him. Are we not familiar with the Mahatma's statement? He says, "Let those who really desire to learn *abandon all* and come to us, instead of asking or expecting us to go to them." What does 'abandoning' mean? Does it mean that we desert all our loved ones, leaving them nothing & abstain from performing our duties? Does it mean that we do not fulfil our responsibilities? It takes us to a serious question about discipleship and the obligatory pilgrimage.

We think we are responsible. We think we are duty-bound. It may not really be the case. On a closer examination, it seems that life is fragmented. There is certainly intent to live one's life rightly. Notwithstanding, one is often confused – lost between what one knows he has to do and what he actually does. The motive of the self creates the chasm between aspiration & practice. For example, one moves from loving someone to using someone. One turns charity into benefit for oneself. Working for a cause ends up in an exercise of controlling resources. In all cases it is the motive of the self. It acts quietly in the sub-conscious mind. It is like wearing coloured glasses and seeing things. It creates images of people & circumstances in our minds. It creates images based on opinions & prejudices which are like 'phantoms' in our minds. We programme ourselves to be either 'attracted' or 'repulsed' based on our 'fancies & antipathies'; it is either *raga* or *dvesa*. It is like the binary system on which computers are based. This should not be confused with *viveka*; *viveka* is pro-active, while *raga* & *dvesa* are reactive. *Viveka* has to do with a 'need to do' choice, while *raga* & *dvesa* have to do with a 'nice to do' choice. The latter is a choice that strengthens the little self and keeps us immersed in *samsara*. To 'abandon all' would mean to abandon the motive of the self in all that we do. It would mean that we move away from the

images in the mind. We have to move away from the *trigunas* & their play. Patanjali says in the *Kaivalya Pada*, “The three *Gunas* having fulfilled their object, the process of change [in the *Gunas*] comes to an end.”

Animals function on a ‘need to do’ basis. Hence there is no evil in what they do, altho’ it may apparently seem so. However, all forms of life have to pass thro’ the human stage. In the second volume of ‘The Secret Doctrine’, H.P.B. writes many interesting things. Among these are the metaphysical meanings of myths. She explains both ‘Satan’ & the ‘Fall of Angels’. She writes, “Thus, esoteric philosophy shows that man is truly the manifested deity in both its aspects—good and evil, but theology cannot admit this philosophical truth. Teaching the dogma of the Fallen Angels in its dead-letter meaning, and having made of Satan the corner-stone and pillar of the dogma of redemption—to do so would be suicidal. Having once shown the rebellious angels *distinct from God and the Logos* in their personalities, the admission that the downfall of the *disobedient* Spirits meant simply their fall into generation and matter, would be equivalent to saying that God and Satan were identical. For since the LOGOS (or God) is the aggregate of that once divine Host accused of having fallen, it would follow that the Logos and Satan are one.”

Therefore, with man [and, woman] begins & also ends evil. Here begins the problem of choice. If this choice is only between what the self likes and what it dislikes, we create more *Karma* in each choice we make. *Raga* & *dvesa* offer the formula for *Karma* creation. If on the other hand, we use *viveka* & move away from the *gunas*; we can begin to understand that *viveka* takes us to that which is choiceless; it puts to rest the mind. In the very second aphorism, Patanjali declares that this

is [the purpose of] *Yoga*. He says, “*Yogas citta-vritti-nirodah.*” When translated, this reads, ‘Yoga is the inhibition of the modifications of the mind’. When we see this & Mme. H.P.Blavatsky’s ‘Voice of the Silence’, which says, “The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer”, does it not imply that the Obligatory Pilgrimage takes us beyond the mind.

The *Bhagvad Gita* speaks of the three *Yogas* – *Bhakti Yoga*, *Jnana Yoga*, & *Karma Yoga*. This reminds one of the salute in the Order of the Round Table, which is, ‘*Heart, Head & Hand*’. The salute is made before the empty chair, the Chair of The King. The neophyte, at his initiation as a Page into the Order, is informed by the Officiating Knight that **The King** is the **Ideal Man** [within] whom we serve with heart [devotion], head [knowledge] & hand [action].

Speaking of *Yoga*, the true Theosophist or is a *Yogi*. Occultism, as different from the occult arts, is *Raja Yoga*, as revealed by H.P.B. Our learning and pursuit should not be for psychic powers. Our learning too is not merely for intellectual accomplishment. It is the ‘Doctrine of the Heart’ that we choose to follow. It is ‘Soul-Wisdom’ that we seek and not mere ‘Head Learning’. Many may ask how else they can attain Soul Wisdom if not thro’ Head Learning. There is a peculiar instruction given by H.P.B. in her little work, ‘Practical Occultism’, considering she wrote so much in her life. She says, “*Do not read too much*. If you read for ten minutes, reflect for as many hours. Habituate yourself to solitude, and remaining alone with your thoughts.” Reflection - in relation to what? It must be about how what we read applies to us. In Sanskrit, it is called ‘*Svadyaya*’ or ‘self-study’. The Master recommends “an honest and open-minded examination” in another context. When we do a

'mirroring' exercise, it is very revealing. We realise how much is left undone.

The *Raja Yogi* is one with his feet on the ground, but his head in the heavens. His practice of *Yoga* has much to do with the *Antaranga* or the inner part of the eightfold *Yoga*. It takes one from the duality of the intellect to the unity of wisdom. Wisdom, in this context, is that alchemy whereby head learning is transmuted to soul wisdom. *Antaranga* is the three-fold journey from concentration, through meditation to the trance-like *Samadhi*. It consists of *Dharana* [concentration], *Dhyana* [meditation] & finally, *Samadhi* [trance]. The last of the three is further described as being three-fold – *Sabija Samadhi*, *Nirbija Samadhi* & finally, *Dharma-Megha-Samadhi*. The classifications go on, but knowledge of them is only 'head learning'. *Samyama* really involves a paradigm shift in perception, perspective, experience & evolution. The Master writes, "The Real Knowledge here spoken of is not a mental but a spiritual state, implying full union between the Knower and the Known."

Very often enquirers are of the mistaken impression that this is a process carried out in steps or stages. They also look at it as the result of great learning. Some think it is a matter of chance that one stumbles on an extraordinary experience. If it were so, the moral & ethical considerations can be thrown to the winds. We would be left with a technique, culminating in an experience. *Samyama*, in its description, may seem like a technique, but is not; neither is *Antaranga* a methodology. This is a great lesson to learn. It is very misleading to look at it as a prescription or even a description. It is merely a hint that may provide the key to the intuitive pilgrim on his Obligatory Pilgrimage. Out of compassion for the pilgrim, the *Bodhisattva* halts his absorption into a well-earned *Nirvana*. He watches on the pilgrim like a

compassionate mother. Each individual is an evolution of its own. Each must find his way. Each must fight his battle with the self and its living wall of lust & passions.

This moral & ethical aspect is elaborated on, at the very beginning by Patanjali. *Yama* & *Niyama* precede the other steps and are part of the *Bahiranga*, or the outer part of the eightfold *Yoga*, itself. Karma has the key to Nirvana. Until the balance is reached, Nirvana is but a concept. If it is a pursuit, it is a “selfish” one, as pointed out by a very High Adept in the great letter of 1881. The *Jivanmukta* who has passed through *Dharma-Megha-Samadhi*, has destroyed the very seed & potential for evil. Patanjali says, ‘*Tatah klesa-karma-nivrittih*’, which literally means, ‘Then follows freedom from *Klesas* and *Karmas*. Dr.Taimini, in his commentary says, “The *Jivanmukta* cannot, after passing through *Dharma-Megha-Samadhi* and attaining *Kaivalya*, again fall into *Avidya* and start generating *Karmas* which bind.”

Viveka, *Vairagya*, *Shatsampatti* & *Mumukshatva* are teachings found under different names in different spiritual texts connected with great spiritual Masters of many different traditions. Alcyone, in *At the Feet of the Master* communicates his Master’s teaching on these. They are translated as Discrimination, Desirelessness, Good Conduct [in six points] & Love. The last of these is a curious and unconventional translation. The word *Mumukshatva* literally means ‘an intense desire for liberation’. It sounds like a personal pursuit. Therefore, it is deliberately hinted at by the Master that the final and most important qualification is **Love**.

We are faced with the biggest question of all. It stares us in the face. In it lies the answer too. Is *Raja Yoga* finally Love? Is Occultism finally Love? Is *Samyama* finally Love? Is the ‘Doctrine of the Heart’ finally

Love? Is the Obligatory Pilgrimage finally a pilgrimage of Love & Compassion? The answer is for you to decide.

What is Love? Is there Love in our lives? Do we understand Love? Paradoxically, you know what Love is not, but do you now what Love is? You may see acts of love; you may hear words of love; you may feel the touch of love, but do you know what love is? We speak of the first object of the T.S. – '*universal brotherhood*'. It is about Love & Compassion. In effect, it is Love for all sentient beings. At another place the Mahatma writes, "The *first* object of the Society is philanthropy. The true theosophist is the Philanthropist who— "not for himself, but for the world he lives".

We speak of meditation. We even claim to practice meditation, whatever that may mean! To meditate is to love. Love is in the here & now. Love does not generate a cause. Love is not the result of a cause. Where there is true Love, there is neither duality nor the motive of the self. That is why they say 'God is Love'. Or should we really say, 'Love is God'?

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