

# THE CREATIVE SILENCE

(Reflections on the *Voice of the Silence*)

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The Theosophical Publishing House  
Chennai, India

## PREFACE

Modern theosophical literature, vast and varied as it is, contains two exquisite gems of profound mysticism. They are *Light on the Path* and *The Voice of the Silence*. The latter was the last gift of H. P. Blavatsky to the world, as it was published only two years before she passed away. This book has a great relevance today as much confusion prevails all over the world regarding Yoga and Meditation, Spirituality and Psychism. *The Voice of the Silence* helps one to clear up these confusions, and put the aspirant on the right path of spiritual perception. This book may well be described as containing the essentials of the Yoga of Theosophy.

*The Voice of the Silence* indicates that the greatest obstacle on the spiritual path is the Mind with its tendency to “slay the Real”. It is true that the Real cannot be slain, but it can be covered over by the innumerable projections of the Mind. And this is exactly what happens. The journey of the neophyte through the Three Halls described in the book is indeed a process whereby the projections of the Mind, even the subtlest, are put aside. The aspirant then enters the Vale of Bliss where he comes to the great ecstasy of spiritual experience.

The book asks the neophyte to slay the slayer—but can mind be slain? If so, who slays the mind? Indeed, the mind cannot be slain, it slays itself. H.P.B. says “The Mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects”. To observe the gathering of dust is the only way to keep the mirror clear and polished where no distortion of the image occurs. It is in this observation that the mind slays itself. H. P. B. speaks of the tidal wave and allowing it to work itself out. It is thus that the mind comes to a deep silence where alone there occurs “Right Perception of existing things, the Knowledge of the non-existent”.

When today all over the World much that is spurious seems to gain currency in the name of Yoga, it is imperative that the message contained in *The Voice of the Silence* be spread far and wide so that modern man may be enabled to move safely to the Vale of Bliss unmindful of the attractions of the Three Halls.

Varanasi—India,  
Rohit Metha,  
June 1, 1976.

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Note: Throughout this work, the author employs the word “man” in its traditional sense, which is inclusive of both male and female genders. However, some minor editing of the text has been done, including the conversion of British spelling to the American style, some changes in punctuation, and minor stylistic modifications for the sake of clarity.

— David P. Bruce, Director of Education, 2009

## Chapter I

### THE NEW UNDERSTANDING

*The Voice of the Silence* is one of the most remarkable books ever written on the subject of the spiritual life. It is very comprehensive, for it covers the whole range of man's spiritual endeavor—from the beginning of his spiritual unrest to the glorious vision of perfection. Its author, Madame H. P. Blavatsky—referred to in this book as HPB—was herself a very outstanding personality of the nineteenth century. Few people in history have had such a colorful life as she had, and fewer still have suffered as much as she did for the proclamation of truth—the truth that she perceived. But such was her indomitable courage that she could defy the whole world for the sake of the truth that she cherished, and for the sake of which no sacrifice was too great for her. In the course of her most eventful life, she gave many outstanding books to the world, such as *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Key to Theosophy* and last, but not the least, *The Voice of the Silence*. The world will ever be grateful to her for the great truths of life she has revealed in these books, although this sense of gratitude may remain unexpressed for some generations to come!

It is only now—when science and technology have released such powers as man cannot control—that the thinking men and women of the world are gradually turning to that aspect of life which was revealed by HPB more than eighty years ago. Increasingly, it is being realized that only spiritual wisdom can effectively control the powers released by physical science in this century of ours. And if man fails to take the path indicated by the spiritual values of life, then he must see the destruction of all he has cherished in human civilization. Humanity is today at the parting of ways—one way leading to wars, catastrophes, and eventual destruction; the other leading to heights of stupendous glory. Will man take the second path? If so, let him investigate the powers latent in his soul, for the powers released by physical science will pale into utter insignificance before the powers that lie hidden in man. The spiritual powers of man will subdue the material forces of science and harness them to such purposes as will lead to human betterment. But for this to occur, man must discover the Land of the Spirit. There are very few books in the world that can give a clear guidance to one who desires to discover this land; and among these *The Voice of the Silence* stands foremost because of the unfailing light that it sheds on the darkened path of man.

*The Voice of the Silence* was first published in 1889—just two years before HPB passed away, thus it was her last gift to the world. That being so, it sums up her whole philosophy of life. *The Voice* has been rightly described as “the grandest thing” in modern Theosophical literature, one of the profound books in the spiritual literature of the world. In this book, HPB has translated and annotated certain chosen fragments from the *Book of the Golden Precepts*. She issued the book, as she has said on the title page: “for the daily use of Lanoos [Disciples]”—those who desire to tread the Path of Spiritual Unfoldment. In the Preface, HPB tells us that

The following pages are derived from “The Book of the Golden Precepts,” one of the works put into the hands of mystic students in the East.

*The Voice of the Silence* is fundamentally a book of esoteric Buddhism, and places before the world the teaching of the Buddha, revealing those aspects of his teachings as have not been well understood by the people in the East, as well as in the West. The esoteric Buddhism which HPB expounds in this book has much affinity with the Hindu Vedanta. HPB herself says at one place:

After as much study as we could give to it, we came to the firm conviction that Vedantism and Buddhism were two synonyms, nearly identical philosophies in spirit, if not in practice and interpretation. The Vedanta system is but transcendental or so to say *spiritualized* Buddhism, while the latter is rational or even *radical* Vedantism. (*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. 3, p. 241)

*The Book of the Golden Precepts*, on which *The Voice of the Silence* is based, belongs to the same series of books as the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, which became the basis for *The Secret Doctrine*, a work that many consider to be HPB's magnum opus. She says that the maxims and ideas contained in the *Book of the Golden Precepts* are to be found under different forms, particularly in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. This accounts for the great similarity between the teachings of Vedanta and those contained in *The Voice of the Silence*. In fact, there is a great similarity between the mystic teachings of all the great religions of the world, and *The Voice* is without doubt a book of profound mysticism. Referring to *The Voice* and the fragments chosen from the *Book of the Golden Precepts*, HPB herself states in the Preface:

. . . it has been thought better to make a judicious selection only from those treatises which will best suit the few real mystics in the Theosophical Society, and which are sure to answer their needs.

Thus it is clear that HPB has given in *The Voice of the Silence* the mystical teaching of the Buddha. Therefore unless a student brings a mystical approach to its study, it will not be possible to understand its real meaning.

But it may be asked—what, after all, is mysticism? Mysticism implies a direct, or an unveiled, perception of Truth. In every age it is the mystics who have been the spiritual regenerators of humanity. Whenever there is a decay of righteousness, a new impulse of mysticism has invariably come, bringing a fresh inspiration to the lives of the people. Today, in the midst of enveloping darkness, caused by man's selfishness in the use of powers placed by physical science at his disposal, there is to be seen here and there a new ray of mysticism both in the East and the West. In fact the new religious trend of the world is in the direction of mysticism. There is today an increased interest in Hindu Vedanta and in Zen Buddhism, both outstanding examples of religious and philosophical mysticism. The twentieth century has seen the emergence of a number of mystics, big and small, throughout the world. And it is the new ray of mysticism brought by these spiritual men and women of the world that fills us with hope so far as the future of human civilization is concerned. Writing on the role of mystics in his *Nature of Mysticism*, C. Jinarājadāsa says:

Mysticism is as the scent of blossoms in tropical lands which only open as the sun goes down and then perfume the air to a swooning rapture. Away from the turmoil of action, beyond where thoughts can live, the mystic senses the per-

fume of life and makes of his heart a chalice to gather that perfume to offer to God and Man. Happy are men that the world contains mystics always, for the mystics are those children of God who know no age, who sing of sunrise in the darkness of the night, and who see the vision of Man's Ascension in the tragedy of his Crucifixion. (p. 80)

To see "Man's Ascension in the tragedy of his Crucifixion"—that indeed is the great contribution of mysticism. In the midst of the frustrations and the tragedies of life, the world needs the message of mysticism more than ever. It is through mysticism that we will regain the spiritual values of life. And, accordingly, the teachings contained in *The Voice* are most appropriate for the modern man who evidently is in search of a soul!

Besides being a book of profound mysticism, *The Voice* is an exquisite prose-poem, full of spiritual inspiration, and containing over three hundred verses. As Bhikku Arya Asanga says in his admirable introduction to the Golden Jubilee Edition of *The Voice of the Silence*, the books of Dr. D. T. Suzuki will "materially help the student to a better understanding of *The Voice of the Silence*." Dr. Suzuki has written quite a number of most remarkable books on Zen Buddhism; in fact, he is one of the great world authorities on that subject. There is no doubt that the teachings of *The Voice* become clearer in the light of Zen Buddhism.

Now the two schools representing the teachings of the Lord Buddha, the esoteric and the exoteric, are respectively called the 'Heart' and the 'Eye' doctrines. HPB makes a reference to this in *The Voice*. Needless to say, it is the 'Heart' doctrine which constitutes the esoteric teachings of Buddhism. It is this esoteric doctrine which forms the mystic core of Buddhism. In *The Secret Doctrine*, HPB describes esoteric doctrines as a "pearl within the shell of every religion." One of the outstanding personages who revealed the esoteric or the 'Heart' doctrine of the Buddha was Bodhidharma, who went from India to China in 526 A.D. and founded the Contemplative School of Buddhism from which emerged all the various branches of Zen Buddhism. About Bodhidharma, HPB had this to say:

Bodhidharma brought from the Western heaven [Shamballa] the "seal of truth" (true seal), and opened the fountain of contemplation in the East. He pointed directly to Buddha's heart and nature, swept away the parasitic and alien growth of book instruction, and thus established the *Tsung-men* or esoteric branch of the system, containing the tradition of the heart of Buddha. (*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. 14, p. 447)

*The Voice of the Silence*, representing as it does esoteric Buddhism, evidently belongs to the Contemplative School of Buddhism. In fact, it deals with the art and science of meditation—meditation in all its three aspects of concentration, absorption, and contemplation—or *dhāranā*, *dhyaṇa* and *samādhi*, to use the words from the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

It may be asked, "What is the underlying philosophy of this book?" Almost at the very beginning, HPB gives its main teaching in one brief sentence:

The Mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the slayer.

Thus it is the “slaying of the mind” which is the central theme of the book. Now the slaying of the mind is, in fact, the transcending of the mind; and HPB shows in the course of the Three Fragments how mind can be transcended with the help of the mind! To transcend the mind with the help of the mind is to explore its very possibilities, and in that very process of exploration, to discover its limitations! A mind that does not know its possibilities is a dull mind; a mind that does not know its limitations is a closed mind. A mind that is completely open and yet not dull, not vacant, not passive—this it is which constitutes the main teaching of *The Voice*. This will become clear from the following verse, appearing near the end of the book:

. . . thou hast to feel thyself ALL-THOUGHT, and yet exile all thoughts from out thy Soul.

How is this to be done? It is here that the teachings of the Three Fragments of *The Voice of the Silence* become intensely significant. These themes are: the Three Halls, the Two Paths, and the Seven Portals. They deal, respectively, with the preparation, the discovery of, and the treading of the Spiritual Path. The spiritual aspirant undergoes a definite process of preparation in the Three Halls so that he emerges from them properly prepared. It is this preparation which enables him to discover the Path. And in the light of this discovery he treads the Path of Perfection, or what is called the Path of Initiations—the Path where the Disciple “becomes what he is.”

The First Fragment is concerned with the distractions of the human mind, for so long as the mind is distracted, it cannot arrive at the point of Discovery. But what is the cause of those distractions? Obviously, it is the memory, or what the Bhagavad Gita calls *rasa*. Toward the end of the First Fragment, HPB says:

One single thought about the past that thou hast left behind will drag thee down and thou wilt have to start the climb anew.

Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost.

And what will the undistracted mind discover? It is to this question that HPB turns our attention. Discovery is obviously the Right Vision; the Lord Buddha mentions this as the first step of his Noble Eightfold Path. Without Right Vision the treading of the Path is utterly impossible. But what this Right Vision is, that is the subject matter of the Second Fragment of *The Voice of the Silence*. HPB calls this

. . . the right perception of existing things, the Knowledge of the non-existent!

It is the “knowledge of the non-existent” which truly constitutes discovery in the spiritual sense. The knowledge of the non-existent can come only in the utter silence of the mind, for mind can know only that which is existent, that which is manifest. The Unmanifest is perceived in the silence—in the interval. The Soundless Sound can be heard only in the interval between two sounds. To perceive the Unmanifest, to comprehend the Unborn, is to have a Vision of the Whole—and it is with this Right Vision that the spiritual aspirant can begin his journey on the Path.

It is in the Third Fragment that HPB deals with the subject of the treading of the Path. If there is a secret to treading the Path, it is to keep the vision of the Unmanifest undimmed in the midst of the constant changes taking place in the world of mani-

festation. It is this which is indicated by HPB in the Third Fragment when she tells the disciple:

Thou hast to study the voidness of the seeming full, the fullness of the seeming void.

To see fullness in void—and void in fullness—this indeed is the secret of Right Action. One is reminded of the Bhagavad Gita where the seeing of “action” in “inaction” and “inaction” in “action” is considered as the true sign of wisdom. When action is performed in the background of inaction, then is the disciple in possession of the secret underlying the treading of the Path.

Thus the message of *The Voice* is most appropriate to the age in which we live. Ours is an age of the mind—but the human mind stands baffled today at the problems it has created. These problems cannot be solved only by the mind. It is in the transcending of the mind that the problems of man can be resolved. It does not matter what name we give to that which transcends the mind—whether we call it “intuition” or “supra-mind” or “beyond the mind”—or perhaps very wisely, we refrain from giving any name to it. But whether we name it or not, humanity has come to a state when a new dimension of understanding must dawn upon it—the understanding that is not of the mind, but of that which transcends the mind. It is only in the light of that new understanding that the problems of man can be resolved. If a new civilization is to emerge, then there must arise men and women of new understanding, in all countries of the world.

*The Voice of the Silence* is verily the book of new understanding—the book of *buddhi*—for it places before the men and women of today a philosophy of life which will enable them to rend asunder the veil of the mind and look at the indescribable beauty of the world beyond—which is mysteriously also the world within.

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## Chapter II

### THE GREAT HERESY

In the very first verse of *The Voice of the Silence*, HPB makes a distinction between psychic development and spiritual unfoldment:

These instructions are for those ignorant of the dangers of the lower IDHDI.

The lower Iddhis are the psychic powers, and these constitute great temptations on the path of a spiritual aspirant. To wean him away from the dangers of the lower Iddhi and to indicate to him the path of true spirituality is, therefore, the main purpose of *The Voice of the Silence*. During the course of Three Fragments, HPB develops the theme of spiritual life, basing her instructions around three main principles: *dhāranā* or concentration, *dhyāna* or meditation, and *samādhi* or contemplation.

The First Fragment contains one hundred verses dealing with the problem of *dhāranā*. This would become clear as one turns to the eighty-seventh verse of this Fragment, wherein HPB says, “Thou art now in *Dhāranā*.” Thus in verse after verse of the First Fragment, she discusses the most fundamental problem of spiritual life—the problem of concentration. She says in the very beginning of this Fragment:

He who would hear the voice of *Nāda*, “the soundless Sound,” and comprehend it, he has to learn the nature of *Dhāranā*.

What indeed is *dhāranā*, and why is it given the first place in the field of spiritual life? *Dhāranā* is the undistracted condition of the mind. In other words, it indicates that state of mind wherein it is able to give its full attention to whatever is presented to it. The mind that wavers is incapable of full and complete attention; and without full and undistracted attention how can we understand anything? To comprehend the Soundless Sound, the mind must come to a condition of total attention. It is quite obvious that unless our mind is harmonized or integrated we cannot give our complete attention to whatever we seek to understand. As the Bhagavad Gita says:

There is no Pure Reason for the non-harmonized, nor for the non-harmonized is there concentration.

The question then becomes: How is one to come to this state of *dhāranā*? In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, *dhāranā* is preceded by *pratyāhāra*, which may be translated as withdrawal. This withdrawal, indicated by the word *pratyāhāra*, does not mean an escape or running away from the phenomenal world. It is not a process of mortification, of false asceticism, in which man runs away from the objects of perception lest they cause temptation. It has to be remembered that temptations are caused, not by the objects of perception, but by the projections with which the mind has endowed them. In other words, it is not the objects but the mind’s associations with regard to them that are the root cause of all distractions. As long as pulls of distraction remain, the nature of *dhāranā* cannot be understood. It is therefore necessary that the spiritual pilgrim should first deal with these distractions before he aspires to hear the Soundless Sound. That is why *pratyāhāra* must precede *dhāranā*. In the following verse, HPB

draws our attention to this essential factor of *pratyāhāra* as a condition precedent to *dhāranā*:

Having become indifferent to objects of perception, the pupil must seek out the *rājah* of the senses, the Thought-producer, he who awakes illusion.

In this verse HPB deals with a subject of deep psychological import, for according to her, *pratyāhāra* must cover the conscious as well as the unconscious processes of the mind. In the above passage she has indicated two things: being indifferent to the objects of perception; and seeking out the thought-producer, he who awakes illusion. In the human mind, a twofold process goes on continually—this may be described as the projections of the conscious mind and the associations of the unconscious mind. Thus the operations of the mind have both an active as well as a passive aspect—the projections of the conscious mind representing the active aspect, the associations of the unconscious mind representing the passive aspect.

To be indifferent to the objects of perception is to deal with the conscious mind, which, by its numerous projections, distorts the objects of perception. To be indifferent to objects of perception is to see things as they are—in other words, to see things and events as facts. It is the objectivity of perception that is indicated here. To sort out facts from what has been projected on them is the first act required of a spiritual aspirant desiring to learn the nature of *dhāranā*. But it may be asked: “Does HPB speak here of the objectivity of a scientist?” It is true that the scientist brings an objective outlook to bear upon his field of investigation. He knows that the physical senses are selective in their operations and therefore they do not give a correct picture of the phenomena he is endeavoring to study. His main concern is obviously to eliminate the selectivity of the senses. This he does by the use of scientific instruments. In recent times, science has developed to a remarkable degree this factor of objectivity with reference to physical phenomena. We could say that a scientist is “indifferent to the objects of perception.” Let us, however, not forget that in his capacity as a scientist, his field of perception encompasses physical objects. He endeavors to eliminate as much of the subjective factor as possible from his acts of observation and experimentation with reference to these objects.

But man’s essential field of growth and activity is psychological. And it is here that he finds it extremely difficult to display an objectivity of outlook. Thus he is not able to be indifferent to psychological objects of perception. He invariably projects something into psychological phenomena and thereby distorts the very object of perception. This subjective factor prevents us from seeing psychological phenomena in true perspective. In other words, the human mind is far from being indifferent where perception of psychological phenomena is concerned. Our conscious thinking in the realm of psychological phenomena is full of projectional activity. And so the mind sees what it wants to see! It sees what it has projected into a psychological event. At the psychological level we hardly see things as they truly are because therein our subjective factor is involved, in a greater or a lesser degree. To be aware of one’s own projections, to distinguish the events from the constructions we have put on those events, is indeed to become “indifferent to the objects of perception” at the psychological level, just as

the scientist is indifferent to objects of perception at the physical level. This is the first step in *pratyāhāra* as indicated by HPB in the passage that we have been considering.

But there is a second step that follows the process of becoming “indifferent to the objects of perception,” which is to “seek out the *rājah* of the senses, the thought-producer, he who awakes illusion.” It is not enough to know *what* we are projecting into our psychological phenomena; we must inquire *why* we are indulging in such projections. It is here that we come across the associations of the mind, which are largely unconscious and which are the motivating factors behind the projections of the conscious mind. To be aware of the patterns of projection is to deal with the conscious mind, but to inquire into the motives of projections is to delve into the unconscious layers of the mind. And it is this which is indicated by HPB in the phrase, “Seek out the *rājah* of the senses.” Indeed, the mind has to be sought out, since it is hidden behind the various patterns of thought. It is in the intentions, the purposes, the motives that the mind really abides. So long as these remain intact, so long does the mind feel secure, giving birth to new patterns of thought at the conscious level. The hiding places of the mind have to be sought out and these are the motives and the incentives which produce thought. Rightly does HPB say that we have to seek out the “thought-producer.” This search involves an inquiry into the motives underlying our conscious projections. The intentions and the motives of the mind are hidden in the projections with which the facts of life are overlaid. And so it is by an inquiry into the motives that we can seek out the *rājah* of the senses.

HPB describes the thought-producer as “he who awakes illusion.” The thought-producer is obviously the mind. At the conscious level one sees only the thought—it is at the unconscious level that one can perceive the producer of thought. Thus the producer of thought and the thought are only two aspects of the mind—one conscious, the other unconscious. It is the motives and the intentions that constitute the Thinker, and therefore it is he who is the producer of thought. But how does the thought-producer awaken illusion?

What is an illusion? Surely, when one does not see things as they are, one is caught up in an illusion. When a thing is seen not in its right perspective, then it is that one labors under an illusion. To mistake a rope for a snake is to be under an illusion because the rope is not seen as a rope. The concept of snake is projected on the rope, and one sees what one has projected. But why does one project a snake? The projection obviously emerges out of certain associations. We see only the projection, which is at the conscious level. We do not see the associations, which are at the unconscious level. The illusion in one’s perception is created by the unconscious associations of the mind. They therefore put a screen over reality. Thus it is that HPB describes the mind as the great “slayer of the Real.” Mind distorts facts by its projections which have their roots in unconscious motivations. And it is associations that give birth to motives. The Gita uses the word *desire* for motive when it says:

From Association ariseth Desire; from Desire, Anger cometh forth; from Anger proceedeth Delusion; from Delusion confused Memory; from confused Memory destruction of Reason.

It is this destruction of reason to which HPB refers when she describes mind as the great slayer of the Real. It should be remembered that “reason” is used in the Bhagavad Gita as meaning *buddhi*, or intuition. Whereas intuition perceives a thing directly, the perception by the mind is always indirect, and it is this indirect perception which causes the slaying of the Real. To this indirect perception are added the factors of association, motivation, and projection, thus giving a considerably distorted vision of the thing perceived.

In this First Fragment dealing with the subject of *dhāranā* (concentration), HPB asks the disciple to slay the slayer. And it is with the “slaying” of the mind that she is concerned in this entire discourse. Needless to say, the slaying of the mind means rendering the mind, mindless—to use the term used in the Upanishads. The mind becomes mindless when its distorting instrument of association, motivation, and projection is rendered inoperative. It is with this instrument that the mind overlays the Real with the false. If the spiritual aspirant is to “slay the slayer” he must deal with the associations, the motivations and the projections of the mind.

The question is: How is this to be done? It is obvious that the Real exists; It cannot be slain or destroyed. But a screen may hide it, even as the sun is hidden behind a cloud. Just as the sun has not to be brought into existence—only the cloud has to be removed—similarly when there is the dropping away of the false, the Real shines in all its glory. Thus the dropping away of the false and the perception of the Real are a simultaneous process. In the awareness of the false, the Real is perceived.

When he has ceased to hear the many . . . then only, not till then, shall he forsake the region of *Asat* . . . to come into the realm of *Sat* . . .

The neophyte must first cease to hear the many; and it is the hearing of the many which causes distractions. So long as one hears the many, so long the nature of *dhāranā* cannot be fully comprehended. The Many must drop away before the ONE can be perceived. HPB enlarges upon this idea of distractions when she says:

Before the Soul can hear, the image (man) has to become as deaf to roarings as to whispers, to cries of bellowing elephants as to the silvery buzzing of the golden fire-fly.

The above passage indicates that distractions can be very loud or extremely subtle. But the spiritual disciple has to become deaf even to the subtlest distraction appearing in the most beautiful form or in the noblest garb. One is reminded here of the first discourse of the Bhagavad Gita, which depicts Arjuna in a state of mental distractions, hearing as he did the blowing of several conches on all sides. He is utterly confused as to his duty and covers up his distractions behind beautiful words and noble sentiments. Shri Krishna rebukes him by saying:

Thou grieveest for those that should not be grieved for, yet speakest words of wisdom.

Here, in the first discourse of the Gita, is an illustration of distractions coming to man in a noble garb. The nobility at the verbal level, many a time, leads a person away from the path of true spirituality. And therefore all voices of the mind must be silenced before the neophyte can hear the Soundless Sound.

As noted above, the mind's perception is always indirect, while spiritual perception demands a quality of directness on the part of the neophyte. Such directness can come only in a state of dhāranā, where all distractions have dropped away and the mind has been rendered utterly silent. It is to this directness that HPB refers in the following passage:

Before the soul can comprehend and may remember, she must unto the Silent Speaker be united just as the form to which the clay is modeled, is first united with the potter's mind.

For then the soul will hear, and will remember. And then to the inner ear will speak—

THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE

The neophyte must be united to the Silent Speaker before he can hear the Voice of the Silence. It means that nothing must stand between the spiritual aspirant and the Silent Speaker—not even the subtlest image. Distractions, of course, are the paths made by the mind for the fulfillment of its vested interests. So long as these remain, the union with the Silent Speaker will exist only as an idle dream. The dropping away of the mind's interests is truly the slaying of the slayer. But before the mind can be “slain”—rendered mindless—it is necessary to understand the ways of the mind. Many a time the mind pretends to be dead, only to rise again and take the neophyte completely unawares. It is because of this danger that the ways of the mind—the way it operates and its functions—should be fully understood so that the spiritual pilgrim may not be carried away by its pretensions, and thus lose his way. In the First Fragment of *The Voice*, HPB unveils before us all the subtle ways of the mind—its clever devices, its glamorous distractions. The study of the human mind and its operations is the main theme of the First Fragment, for without a thorough investigation into the modes of the mind's functioning, the spiritual aspirant cannot possibly arrive at the condition of dhāranā.

In order to understand the operations of the mind, we have to watch and observe its immediate reactions to the events and happenings of life. There is an enormous process of thought behind these reactions, and unless one becomes aware of this whole background of thought, one cannot comprehend the subtle ways of the mind. Broadly speaking, all our reactions can be classified into two categories: they signify either approval or disapproval; acceptance or rejection; indulgence or denial. The mind always operates between pairs of opposites and therefore it either affirms or it denies. Accordingly, all our reactions swing between two opposite poles. All thinking is in terms of opposites. That is the field within which mind can operate, and thus all its reactions emerge either from the point of approval or from the point of disapproval. The movement between the poles of opposites is indeed the only movement known to the mind. If mind is to be rendered mindless, it is this movement of the opposites that must cease. If both the opposites, with reference to any problem or situation, drop away, there is no movement possible for the mind. And it is in the cessation of the movement of the mind that there arrives deep silence in which alone the Soundless

Sound can be heard. HPB deals with this problem of opposites, the reactions of indulgence and denial, in a very striking and picturesque manner:

If thy soul smiles while bathing in the Sunlight of thy Life; if thy soul sings within the chrysalis of flesh and matter; if thy soul weeps inside her castle of illusion; if thy soul struggles to break the silver thread that binds her to the MASTER; know, O Disciple, thy Soul is of the earth.

When to the World's turmoil thy budding soul lends ear; when to the roaring voice of the great illusion thy soul responds; when frightened at the sight of the hot tears of pain, when deafened by the cries of distress, thy soul withdraws like the shy turtle within the carapace of SELFHOOD, learn, O Disciple, of her Silent "God," thy Soul is an unworthy shrine.

When waxing stronger, thy soul glides forth from her secure retreat: and breaking loose from protecting shrine, extends her silver thread and rushes onward; when beholding her image on the waves of Space, she whispers, "This is I"—declare, O Disciple, that thy Soul is caught in the webs of delusion.

The above three passages aptly describe the reactions of the mind. As HPB says, if thy soul smiles or weeps, if it withdraws or rushes forward, know that it is "of the earth," that it is "an unworthy shrine," that it is caught "in the webs of delusion." But what else can the soul do? It can either smile or weep; it can either withdraw or go forward. Is there any other action possible? The mind surely cannot visualize any other path. That indeed is the limitation of the mind. And such is the complete identification of man with the operations of the mind that he regards the will of the mind as his own, the ways of the mind as the only ways to be trodden by him. But as HPB says: "When beholding her image on the waves of Space, she whispers, 'This is I'—declare, O Disciple, that thy soul is caught in the webs of delusion." What man usually calls the SOUL, or the SELF is only the image created by the mind. But mind's image is only a product of the pairs of opposites. It can think of the SELF only as opposed to the Not-Self. By the creation of opposites, the mind is forever caught up in conflicts and contradictions. It tries to subdue that which it disapproves of with the help of that which it approves. Thus our reactions, induced by the mind, generate more and more conflicts. In terms of mind's reactions, man must ever remain in the Hall of Sorrow "wherein are set, along the Path of dire probations, traps to ensnare thy EGO by the delusion called 'Great Heresy'."

The Great Heresy is the *Attavāda*, according to the Buddhist philosophy. It is a belief in the existence of a separated Self. This concept of the separated Self is the product of the mind. Once this separated Self is postulated, then efforts have to be made to guard and protect it against the Not-Self. It is this which the mind constantly does by putting up defense mechanisms and by building up resistances. All reactions functioning within the framework of opposites have this element of resistance in them. Under the guise of protecting the Self, the mind seeks to build up its own security. It covers up its desire for continuity behind the high-sounding motive of guarding and protecting the Self against the influences of the Not-Self. This indeed is the clever device of the mind for safeguarding its own existence. It is therefore necessary to lay bare before our gaze the patterns and motives of the mind so that we may be free from

the delusion called Great Heresy. It is to this problem of exploring the ways of the mind that HPB turns as she expounds the fascinating theme of the Three Halls in the subsequent verses of the First Fragment of *The Voice of the Silence*.

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### Chapter III

## THE THREE HALLS

There is nothing so fascinating, and yet nothing so difficult, as the study of the human mind. For the mind has many layers of existence—conscious, sub-conscious, unconscious, and super-conscious. To comprehend the working of the mind is to observe it in different settings. From many standpoints, the activities of the conscious mind make it very difficult to probe other layers of the mind. And yet the most significant aspects of the mind are not at the conscious level. It is therefore extremely profitable to watch the operations of the mind when the conscious level is comparatively quiet. It is because of this that modern psychologists have laid great stress on the study of dreams; for the dream state indicates a non-active condition of the human brain. It is true that the brain is not synonymous with the mind, but modern psychology has not been able to settle the mind-brain controversy. And so when it talks of the unconscious, it is very largely the brain-unconscious, and not the mind-unconscious. Even in the dream state, which the psychologist considers so important, what is revealed is not the unconscious mind, but only that layer that is below the level of brain-consciousness. This is why the psychologist makes use of certain drugs by which the brain can be made quiet, but certainly not the mind. The modern ‘tranquillizers’ may produce tranquility of the brain by soothing or dulling the nerves, but surely they cannot create tranquility of the mind. Psychology will understand the secret achieving mental tranquility only when it turns in the direction of Yoga. It is to this tranquil mind that HPB points the way in *The Voice of the Silence*.

In order to achieve mental tranquility, we need to understand the ways of the mind. The best way of doing this is to observe it unawares. In other words, it is not in the spheres of deliberate thinking that the mind can be effectively observed. At the conscious level, mind follows a cultivated pattern of thinking. It is quite obvious that the natural trend of the mind cannot be perceived at this level. To take the mind unawares is to observe its drift of thinking, which reveals its natural habits and impulses. The mind follows a particular plane of inclination, obviously differing from individual to individual, but in each person it represents the habits of his or her mind. It is therefore necessary for us to understand our own psychological planes of inclination. Behind the habits of the mind lies a vast background of thought; and it is this background which truly is the thought-producer. In this kind of study it is not the pattern of thought that is so important as the background of thought. Our normal day-to-day thinking invariably inclines towards this background. In observing the drift of thought, one comes into contact with this background, the source of all the various operations of the mind.

If we examine the movement of the mind for any stretch of time, we will find that even though we may have chosen a deliberate starting point for it, the mind finds out its own plane of inclination, just as water finds its own level. Select any starting point of thought you like and then allow the mind to drift. If you interrupt this drift—even after five minutes—you will find that the mind has moved away to a point which has seemingly no resemblance to the starting point. It can be interesting to watch the drift

of one's mind and to find out *where* it drifts. But this is not enough. One must carry the inquiry further and find out *how* it drifts to a particular point. It has to be understood that the mind does not take a jump from the starting point to the point of its own interest; it does not jump from point A to point Z, for it follows its own laws of thought. In other words, by a regular process of association it eventually reaches its point of interest. In order to understand this process of association, one has to put one's mind, as it were, in the reverse—that is to go back from the point of interest to the starting point, to work backward from point Z to point A. In this backward movement we shall see *how* the mind drifts from one idea to another through the network of associations which it has built up. But the most interesting question in this process of drift is this: *why* does the mind drift along a particular line? It is this inquiry that gives us an opening into the underworld of the mind's associations.

For this inquiry two things seem to be essential: first, the study of one's own dreams; and second, listening to what the mind has to say with regard to its own drift. A careful study of dreams will reveal to a very large extent the *rationale* behind our associations of thought. But here it is necessary to remember that in the ultimate analysis the interpretation of dreams can be done truly and effectively only by the individual himself. Another person, however expert he or she may be, can give only a structural interpretation of dreams. The content of a dream is known only to the individual, and it is the content that matters so far as the interpretation of dreams is concerned. In the content of the dream is to be found the impulses and the desires of the mind.

But how is one to comprehend these desires and impulses? If the conscious mind begins to interpret dreams, it is sure to cover up the instinctual urges of the mind. It is here that one needs to listen to the story of the mind with regard to its own drift, without any judgment. If we could allow the mind to say what it wants to say with regard to its drift, without any interference by the conscious mind, then we would learn much about the background of associations and the motives and intentions that emerge out of this background. But how to listen to the mind without any judgment or evaluation?

The human mind is indeed a very clever instrument. For the purposes of its own security, it splits itself into two parts so that one part of the mind sits in judgment over the other! The part of the mind that judges and evaluates assumes an air of superiority. It is this part which we usually designate as the 'I'—the Self or the Soul. And so, what we usually call the Self or the Soul is not apart from the mind; it has no existence independent of the mind. To postulate a separate and independent existence for it is indeed the Great Heresy. Patanjali calls it *asmita*, or false identification. In Buddhist literature it is also known as *sakkāyaditthi*, delusion of personality. Having given to this self, which is the product of the mind, a separate and independent existence, we are forever concerned about its security and continuity. We regard its disappearance as complete annihilation or nothingness. We regard the maintenance of this self as the supreme spiritual endeavor. How clever indeed is the mind! By giving a new name to that part which judges and evaluates, it has secured a new lease for itself. It can now seek its continuity in the name of spiritual endeavor. Surely, ignorance (*avidya*) arising out of false identification is the greatest obstacle in the path of our understanding. Unless we

learn to dissociate ourselves from that which is the product of the mind, we cannot begin to comprehend our true nature. It is this dissociation which is the subject matter of the Three Halls.

But before we come to the profoundly mystical teaching concerning the Three Halls and the dissociation from false identification, we have to remember that the human mind, in spite of its limitations, has a very important part to play in this drama of mankind's spiritual unfoldment. Let it not be presumed that the mind is of no importance, that it has to be condemned because of its cleverness. HPB says:

In order to become the KNOWER of All, SELF thou has first of SELF to be the knower.

Here she makes a distinction between *Ātmajñāna* and *Tattvajñāna*—between wisdom and knowledge. The KNOWER of ALL SELF is indeed one who has come to wisdom. But how does one come to wisdom? To come to wisdom is to have a direct perception of Reality. But be it remembered that it is not the dull, the indolent mind that can bring one to the doorstep of Reality. The empty mind is not a blank mind; the negative mind is not a passive mind. The vessel in which the waters of Reality are to be received must have no leakage; it must have the capacity to retain what it receives. In other words, it is not the dull, the inert, the indolent mind that has to be carried to the door of Reality, but a mind that is alert, alive, and extraordinarily sensitive. And so, one has to be a *Tattvajñāna* before one becomes an *Ātmajñāni*. It is *Tattvajñāna* which makes the mind alert. The emptiness of a dull mind results in passivity, while the emptiness of an alert mind results in a condition of negativity. Such a mind is sensitive even to the faintest whisper that comes from the Above and Beyond. It is true that spiritual realization demands the transcending of the mind, but the fact is that the mind can be transcended only with the help of the mind.

The neophyte may ask: How does one come to this alert and sensitive mind? How does one tread the path of knowledge before coming to the path of wisdom? To these questions, HPB says:

To reach the knowledge of the SELF, thou hast to give up *Self* to Non-Self, Being to Non-Being. . . .

In the Buddhist terminology, “Non-Self” and “Non-Being” are used in the same sense as the terms “Self” and “Being” are used in Hindu philosophical thought. Modern Theosophical terminology also uses these words as depicted in Hindu philosophy. Whatever terminology we may use, the above passage makes it quite clear that it is by the process of dissociation, by the process of negation, that one reaches the knowledge of the Self. Unless there is a dissociation of the Self from the Not-Self, it is not possible to tread the path of knowledge. But how can there be dissociation of the Self from the Not-Self when one does not even know what the Self is? The answer is that the path indicated is not so much the dissociation of the Self from the Not-Self as the awareness of the Not-Self, the awareness of the Not-I. It is a process of discarding that which one has found by experience to be transient and fleeting. We may not know what the Eternal and the Permanent is; in fact we cannot know it in terms of our mind's activities. But surely we *can* and *must* know what the fleeting and the transitory is.

This is indeed the first Noble Truth of the Lord Buddha—and without the knowledge of the First Truth the rest is only words, the mere verbalization of the mind. It is this process of negation—the *neti, neti* of Vedānta—or the First Noble Truth of the Lord Buddha—which is the starting point of our spiritual journey. It is this which is the razor-edged path—a path requiring extraordinary awareness on the part of the spiritual pilgrim. It is this, which is the secret of the Middle Path, consisting of the negation of both indulgence and denial. HPB undoubtedly refers to this when she says:

. . . . and then thou canst repose between the wings of the GREAT BIRD. Aye, sweet is rest between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies . . .

The Great Bird is the *Garuda* of Hindu mythology—the vehicle of Vishnu, the Lord of Wisdom. It also means the Bird of Time, the *Kāla-hamsa*, its two wings symbolizing the past and the future, the two opposite poles between which the mind moves. Repose between the wings implies living in the present, or avoiding the two extremes—the two opposites of the mind. In this condition of repose, the mind is very alert, even tense; it is in a state of extraordinary sensitivity. One cannot walk on the razor-edged path (the Middle Path) unless there is alertness and sensitivity. HPB says, “sweet is rest between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies.” It is on the Middle Path, where the mind is free from the distractions of past and future, the distractions of opposites, that there comes the direct perception of Reality, which is unborn and unmanifest. That which is born dies, and surely that which dies is not the Real. So how can one perceive THAT which is unborn and unmanifest? While it is true that the mind engaged in the play of the opposites cannot perceive the Real, even as it cannot comprehend the Soundless Sound, there is a perception higher than that of the mind. However, the pilgrim must come properly prepared to this door of higher perception. And the proper preparation consists in his passing through the Three Halls.

Three Halls, O weary pilgrim, lead to the end of toils. Three Halls, O conquerer of Māra, will bring thee through three states into the fourth and thence into the seven worlds, the worlds of Rest Eternal.

Needless to say, the Three Halls represent states of psychological consciousness, different states of our awareness. HPB says that these Halls bring the neophyte through the three states into the fourth. The three states are the Waking (*Jāgrat*), the Dream (*Svapna*), and the Deep Sleep (*Sushupti*) conditions described in the books of Hindu Yoga. The fourth is the *Turiya*, or the Transcendental State. Thus the passage through the Three Halls brings the spiritual pilgrim to the Transcendental State.

The first of these halls is the Hall of Ignorance, wherein the spiritual aspirant is in a state of complete identification with the Not-Self. In other words, there is the Non-awareness of the Not-Self. In this state there is a complete absence of psychological struggle, for struggle implies a duality. Where the duality of Self and Not-Self does not exist, there is a kind of stillness. But it is the stillness of the dull mind. In the Hall of Ignorance there is an identification of the Self with the Not-Self. It is indeed the Hall of Identification. HPB warns the neophyte against the dangers of mistaken identity or false identification, which is the characteristic feature in this first of the Three Halls. She says:

If thou would'st cross the first Hall safely, let not thy mind mistake the fires of lust that burn therein for the Sunlight of life.

The above passage clearly implies that as long as the mistaken identity remains unbroken, the spiritual aspirant cannot hope to cross the Hall of Ignorance. In other words, the condition required for the crossing of this hall is an ever-increasing awareness of the Not-Self. This state of awareness correlates to the Waking, or the *Jāgrat* state, and it is in that state alone that the neophyte can emerge out of the first Hall. Dissociation from the Not-Self must begin if he is to move towards the second Hall. We must remember that the awareness of the Not-Self is not a static condition. As a result of our experiences in life, we become increasingly aware of what are the impermanent things of life—things that have passed away. Thus the sphere of the Not-Self gradually increases, bringing more and more awareness of the transitory and fleeting things of life. In certain aspect of our life, most of us are still in the Hall of Ignorance, inasmuch as we have not become aware of the transitory nature of things to which we cling. We know intellectually that that which is born dies—which means all manifested things are subject to death and decay. And yet we stubbornly cling to many manifested things as if they were permanent. This shows that the transitory nature of those things is not a part of our own experience. We mistake “fires of lust” for the “sunlight of life.” It is these mistaken identifications that prevent us from moving out of the first hall. But while a part of us still remains in the Hall of Ignorance, another part has already moved away into the second, the Hall of Learning.

We have now seen that the movement from the Hall of Ignorance to the Hall of Learning requires a state of consciousness known as the Waking state. Not knowing what the Self is, but increasingly aware of the Not-Self—it is in this condition that the neophyte enters the second hall. Describing this hall, HPB says:

In it thy Soul will find the blossoms of life, but under every flower a serpent coiled.

This is indeed a very curious description of the Hall of Learning, a place in which most of us reside most of the time. Why should there be a serpent coiled under every flower? We have to remember that the second hall is the Hall of Ideation, even as the first hall is the Hall of Identification. And it is by a process of negation, of dissociation from the Not-Self, that the spiritual aspirant enters this Hall of Ideation.

The human mind finds the never-ceasing process of negation as too trying, too difficult, because this never-ending process does not allow the mind to find a resting place. Sooner or later it wants to settle down in what it calls the positive knowledge. It is not satisfied by a declaration of that which is the Not-Self. It wants to create the opposite point of the Not-Self, in order that its movement between the two points could go on unhampered. This is what the mind does by means of ideation; it creates the Self as the opposite of the Not-Self. Because it finds the continual process of putting away the Not-Self as overly straining, the mind creates the Self in opposition to the Not-Self, and then clings to it.

It must be remembered that the mind feels secure only when two opposite poles are established. For example, when Self and Not-Self exist—then the mind is assured of

its continuity. But in this case, the Self is an entity created by the mind for the sake of its own security. It has no real existence *per se*. If it is a flower, it is an artificial flower, growing out of the mind's inherent craving for continuity. The mind creates the Self in the image of its own craving. It may encase this image in beautiful forms; it may decorate it with all the skill that it commands. Nevertheless, at the core of that image lies the mind's craving for security and continuity. This is the case with all things that the mind produces in opposition to something—whether it is an ideal, a virtue, or God. As noted above, the mind feels insecure without the pairs of opposites, for without them, its movement becomes impaired. It must have for its existence both a negative and a positive pole. If it negates something, it must also affirm something. Its entire knowledge is based on this process of comparison and contrast between the negative and the positive poles. And so, while the Not-Self remains a negative pole, it creates the Self as a positive pole, in order that the two can be balanced and the movement of the mind can continue unimpaired.

The “Self” created by the mind appears like a blossom due to the beauty of form that it has imparted to it; into this Self the mind has projected all that the Not-Self is not. In contrast to the Not-Self, the Self of the mind appears noble, beautiful, idealistic. But underneath this attractive form lies the mind's craving for continuity. It is because of this that HPB describes the blossoms in this Hall of Learning as having under them “a serpent coiled.” The serpent represents the craving of the mind; it remains coiled and so is not easily visible because of the beauty of form in which the mind has encased its craving. HPB says:

If thou would'st cross the second [Hall] safely, stop not the fragrance of its stupefying blossoms to inhale.

She describes the blossoms of the mind as *stupefying*—meaning they are beautiful in form but ugly in content. With regard to the Hall of Learning, HPB further says:

This Hall is dangerous in its perfidious beauty. . . . Beware, Lanoo, lest dazzled by illusive radiance thy Soul should linger and be caught in its deceptive light.

To describe the Hall of Learning as one that has “perfidious beauty” is indeed the case, for the ideations of the mind have an element of pretension in them. They are not what they seem! There is a “deceptive light” and an “illusive radiance” about them. Woe unto him who lingers in this hall and is taken in by the beauty of outer form, by the glamour of mind's verbalizations. HPB gives a strict warning to the neophyte with regard to the light that shines in the Hall of Learning:

This light shines from the jewel of the Great Ensnarer (Māra). The senses it bewitches, blinds the mind, and leaves the unwary an abandoned wreck.

The moth attracted to the dazzling flame of thy night-lamp is doomed to perish in the viscid oil. The unwary Soul that fails to grapple with the mocking demon of illusion, will return to earth the slave of Māra.

Behold the Hosts of Souls. Watch how they hover o'er the stormy sea of human life, and how exhausted, bleeding, broken-winged, they drop one after other on

the swelling waves. Tossed by the fierce winds, chased by the gale, they drift into the eddies and disappear within the first great vortex.

The great danger that faces the neophyte in this Hall of Learning is to be attracted like a moth “to the dazzling flame of the night-lamp.” He is likely to regard the image of the mind as Reality and begin to worship it. Not knowing that it is only an idol wrought by the clever hands of the mind, he may settle down in the Hall of Learning and regard it as his journey’s end. HPB calls this hall the Māyāvic region, and tells the spiritual pilgrim that:

If freed thou would’st be from the Karmic chains, seek not for thy Guru in those Māyāvic regions.

The Guru, the Master, is not to be found in the Hall of Learning. One may spend thousands of years in the Hall of Learning and yet the Master will not be found, for this hall contains only images, idols, and ideations. Though these images and idols may look beautiful, they have feet of clay, for they are the products of the mind’s craving.

It may sound strange that even though HPB has described the Hall of Learning in such strong terms, using such epithets as “perfidious beauty” and “stupefying blossoms,” she says that it is needed for the neophyte’s probation. Must the neophyte go through the Hall of Learning in spite of all its dangers? Of what use is this hall if he must refrain from even inhaling the blossoms that he finds therein? It is indeed necessary for the spiritual pilgrim to pass through this hall if he is to be free from the distractions of the mind and come to the comprehension of the nature of dhāranā. It is obvious that the movement of the mind must cease before the neophyte comes to the state of dhāranā, and the movement of the mind cannot cease so long as the two opposites have not dropped away. The neophyte passes out of the Hall of Ignorance by dissociation from the Not-Self. The Not-Self is left behind; it drops away; it causes no distraction because he has become aware of its transitory nature. It is in this process of negation that he enters the Hall of Learning, wherein he fashions the opposite pole, the point of affirmation, so that the movement of the mind may continue between what is negated and what is affirmed. In the Hall of Ignorance the mind was dull, but now with the formulation of the two opposite points it becomes alert and active. The mind that formulates the two opposites can never be dull, and so in the Hall of Learning the mind displays its abundant activity. Mind’s inertia (*tamas*) has been discarded, and its activity (*rajas*) has come into existence. This indeed is the place of the Hall of Learning in the life of a spiritual pilgrim. The formulation of the opposites sharpens the mind; its placidity is gone; it has become more pliable.

But the Hall of Learning is not the journey’s end. The pilgrim must pass out of this hall and move further into the third hall—the Hall of Wisdom. The question is: How? He crosses the Hall of Learning by the same process of dissociation that helped him to cross the Hall of Ignorance. It may be asked: From what has he to dissociate in this Hall of Learning? It is quite evident that he has to dissociate from the Self, even as he dissociated from the Not-Self when he emerged from the Hall of Ignorance. To dissociate from the Self is something unimaginable to the human mind. What remains if one dissociates from the Self? And why should one dissociate from the Self, which is so beautiful and noble? We have seen that the beauty of the Self is perfidious for it

conceals the ugly craving of the mind. But has the neophyte come to this awareness? Has he seen through the deception of the mind's images? If not, he cannot pass out of this hall. If the ideations of the mind hold him fast he, must linger in this hall and inhale the poisonous fragrance of its stupefying blossoms.

How does this process of dissociation from the Self start? With the Not-Self, we saw that the dissociation begins with the awareness of the transitory nature of things. That which is seen as moving away, as fleeting and transitory, is regarded by man as the Not-Self. In this very awareness, the Not-Self ceases to distract him—or at least its spell is broken so that it can no longer enslave him. But is one to apply this very test so far as dissociation from the Self is concerned? Obviously that will not work, because in the midst of the fleeting and the transitory things of life, the mind has created the Self as something permanent. It wants it to remain permanent.

Again, how can one dissociate from the Self? The answer is, by examining the content of the mind's images and idols. Obviously this can be done only when one goes behind the patterns of thought. We are so carried away by the patterns of the mind's images, idols, ideals, and all that it produces that we hardly care to examine the content of those patterns. The word and the thing are different, and, if we are to perceive the real nature of things, we must break through the shell of words. It is not *what* we believe but *why* we believe that is important—the former reveals to us only the pattern; it is the latter which lays bare the content. It is not the conclusion of thought that matters so much as the process of thinking. The conclusion of thought is the idol, the image, the Self, the Soul, all of which the mind places before us for the purposes of worship. It looks beautiful and noble as an outcome of thought, but as one inquires into the process by which this conclusion has been reached, one realizes how treacherous is its beauty! And so it is by this inquiry into the process of one's thinking that one realizes how hollow are one's ideals and ideations, how terribly deceptive they are, how indeed the idols of the mind have feet of clay! It is this increasing awareness of the pretentiousness underlying the mind's professions, which starts the process of dissociation from the Self. The idols, the images, the creations of the mind drop away, and as this process of dissociation gathers momentum the neophyte passes out of the second Hall and is ready for his entrance into the Hall of Wisdom.

We saw in the earlier part of this discussion that the passage from the first hall to the second represents the *Jāgrat*, or the Waking state of consciousness. Similarly the passage from the Hall of Learning to the Hall of Wisdom represents the *Svapna*, or the Dream state. Does not the dream condition imply a dissociation from one's self? Very frequently we find that in dreams we are quite different from our usual self. In dreams, we are required to play various roles and many times it's difficult for us to recognize ourselves in these dreams! In a far deeper sense, this is the condition of man as he leaves the Hall of Learning, for he leaves behind what he had so far described as his Self. With the content of the mind's images laid bare, even the patterns of that image get shattered. No longer can that image hold the attention of the neophyte. He finds himself free from the distraction of the Not-Self as well as those of the Self. He is once again in a state of negation, his mind finding no footstool to rest its weary feet. To use the description of the Bhagavad Gita, the mind of the neophyte is "homeless"; it is without any abode, for both the points of negation and affirmation have been rendered

unfit for habitation. It entered the Hall of Learning freed from inertia (*tamas*), but it now leaves this hall freed from activity (*rajas*), for with the dropping away of the two opposites—the Self and the Not-Self—it has nowhere to go. Having divested the mind of all its activity, the neophyte enters the Hall of Wisdom. In speaking about this hall, HPB offers this description:

The name of the third Hall is Wisdom, beyond which stretch the shoeless waters of AKSHARA, the indestructible Fount of Omniscience.

We have described the first two halls in terms of Identification and Ideation, respectively. The Hall of Wisdom, which the neophyte now enters, is truly the Hall of Illumination. He has left behind the world of images and ideations. No longer is his mind tethered to any fixed point, either of affirmation or of denial. Instructing the aspirant with regard to this hall, HPB gives this advice:

Seek for him who is to give thee birth, in the Hall of Wisdom, the Hall which lies beyond, wherein all shadows are unknown, and where the light of truth shines with unfading glory.

In this Hall “shadows are unknown,” indicating that we are no longer dealing with idols and images. The realm of indirect perception has been left behind; the mind’s processes of comparison and contrast are no more; for here the “light of truth shines with unfading glory.” It is in this hall that the spiritual pilgrim can know what repose between the wings of the Great Bird is. As we saw earlier, the wings of the bird represent the opposites of the mind. When the opposites drop away, only then is there a possibility of repose between the wings. In reference to this repose, HPB says: “Sweet is rest between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies.” Have we then—in this Hall of Wisdom—come to the perception of the Unborn and the Unmanifest? Has our preparation through the two earlier halls been sufficient to bring us to this higher perception, the perception which is direct and immediate? In the following passage HPB describes clearly this preparation and the miracle that takes place in this Hall of Wisdom:

That which is uncreate abides in thee, Disciple, as it abides in that Hall. If thou would’st reach it and blend the two, thou must divest thyself of thy dark garments of illusion.

She says it is the “uncreate” which abides in the Hall of Wisdom—meaning that which is neither born, nor dies. A great miracle takes place in this hall, the blending of the “create” and the “uncreate.” But before this blending can take place, the neophyte must leave behind the dark garments of illusion so that there is no image standing in the way.

The “create” and the “uncreate” correspond to the Immanent and the Transcendent of philosophy, both Eastern as well as Western. We might ask: What does the blending of the two mean? It obviously means the one becomes the reflection of the other; the create becomes the clear, unspotted mirror in which the uncreate is reflected without any distortion. This implies that in the Hall of Wisdom all modifications of consciousness have ceased. A condition of perfect stillness has arrived. In the blending of the “create” and the “uncreate” takes place the miracle play of Ascent and Descent.

The “create,” or the manifest, becomes a grail in which the fresh waters of the “uncreate” are poured. But this can happen only if the grail is completely empty, for it is only the empty cup that can be filled. To come properly prepared is to bring this empty cup. This surely is the meaning of being divested of the “dark garments of illusion.” The passage through the Halls of Ignorance and Learning enables the neophyte to bring with him this empty cup to the Hall of Wisdom. The seemingly negative process of dissociation is, in fact, intensely positive, for what else can be more positive than the fresh waters of life poured by the Transcendental Reality into the mind emptied of content?

HPB asks the neophyte to “seek for him who is to give thee birth” in the Hall of Wisdom. In the spiritual sense, he who gives birth is the Guru, the Master. She has indicated that the Master cannot be found in the Hall of Learning. The disciple can find the Master only in the Hall of Wisdom. Why? Because the Master transcends the normal consciousness of the disciple. The mind, which is the normal instrument of cognition, cannot comprehend the nature of the Master by means of its activities. Between the Master and the disciple there is obviously a gap of consciousness, and so unless there is a leap in consciousness the disciple cannot know the Master. It is this leap which takes place between the Hall of Learning and the Hall of Wisdom. There is a qualitative difference between the two halls. The Hall of Learning represents the state of mind in its activity—moving between two poles of opposites. But before the disciple can enter the Hall of Wisdom this activity has to cease, for unless there is a dissociation both from the Not-Self and the Self, the neophyte cannot enter the Hall of Wisdom. But while he finds his Guru or Master in this hall, his spiritual rebirth does not take place here, but in the region beyond the Hall of Wisdom. And what is this region beyond the Hall of Wisdom? Is there anything beyond wisdom? Has the neophyte to leave this hall, too, even as he left the other two halls? In answer to these questions, HPB has this to say:

If through the Hall of Wisdom, thou would'st reach the Vale of Bliss, Disciple,  
close fast thy senses against the great dire heresy of separateness that wean thee  
from the rest.

She describes that which lies beyond the Hall of Wisdom as the Vale of Bliss. To pursue the simile of the halls, we may call this the Hall of Initiation. It is here that the spiritual rebirth of the neophyte takes place, for he is initiated into a new way of life. It is here that the disciple discovers the Path, for the Path proper begins at the state of Initiation. The Vale of Bliss represents the state of Initiation in terms of spiritual consciousness. This theme of Initiation forms part of the Second Fragment in *The Voice*, and we shall take up its study later on when we come to that Fragment.

However, we are concerned here with the passage of the neophyte from the Hall of Wisdom to the Vale of Bliss. HPB says that the disciple must “close fast [his] senses against the dire heresy of separateness,” if he is to enter the Vale of Bliss. In other words, the consciousness of separateness must disappear. It means that the disciple must “step out of himself”—he must be in a condition of Ecstasy. Unless a person steps out of himself, how can he be free from the “great dire heresy of separateness”? And so it is in this condition that the neophyte must come out of the Hall of Wisdom, and this

is exactly what is meant by *Sushupti*, or Deep Sleep consciousness. The neophyte came out of the Hall of Ignorance in the Waking state. He emerged out of the Hall of Learning in the Dream state. Now, out of the Hall of Wisdom he must emerge in the Deep Sleep state, the state in which there is perfect calm—not even a flicker of thought to disturb—nay, there is not even the consciousness on the part of the individual that he is in deep sleep. The Deep Sleep state is a condition of deep awareness, but it is an awareness in which the person is not aware that he is aware! It is non-awareness in awareness—in other words, it is a state of Pure Awareness.

But if the neophyte is required to leave the Hall of Wisdom in this Deep Sleep condition, the question is: How is he to arrive at this state? Once again, by a process of dissociation. It may then be asked: What is he to be dissociated from, since both the Not-Self and the Self have dropped away? The human mind is indeed very clever. Even when the opposites have dropped away, it makes the last effort to cling to them by naming the act of dropping away. By naming an experience, the mind endeavors again to establish a fixed point. If it can establish one fixed point, then it can easily create its opposite, thus starting all over its game of moving between the two opposites. This naming of an experience contains the consciousness of “I”—the dire heresy of separateness. For, even though the opposites have dropped away, man has a consciousness that “he” is free from those opposites. In renunciation, so long as there is a feeling, “I have renounced,” there is really no renunciation. The consciousness of being virtuous is indeed a negation of all virtue. *Light on the Path* says: “The self-righteous man makes for himself a bed of mire.” The dissociation from the Not-Self as well as from the Self leads the neophyte nowhere as long as there still lingers in his consciousness the feeling: “I have dissociated myself from the two opposites; I am free from the pairs of opposites.” This feeling will once again drag him down and will make him a prisoner within the confines of the mind. If he is to enter the Vale of Bliss, even this feeling of “I have dissociated” must vanish, and it is only when this feeling vanishes that he can come to the state of state of Deep Sleep.

And so in the Hall of Wisdom there must arise a third category of dissociation, which is the dissociation from the very idea of dissociation! This third category of dissociation has been very beautifully illustrated in a story appearing in one of the Buddhist books. The story runs as follows:

Once upon a time the Buddha was seated in a hall when he saw a Brahmin approaching him with gifts in both his hands. Seeing this, the Buddha addressed the Brahmin by saying: “Drop it.” The Brahmin dropped the gift from his right hand and proceeded further. The Buddha again said: “Drop it.” The Brahmin dropped the gift from his left hand and proceeded further. Again the Buddha said: “Drop it.” The Brahmin dropped and was enlightened.

Now what was it that the Brahmin dropped the third time? He had only two gifts, which he dropped one after the other when the Buddha asked him to do so. What did he have which the Buddha asked him to drop, even after the two gifts had been dropped? The Brahmin had still the *idea* of dropping—the consciousness that he had dropped the two gifts. At the third instruction of the Buddha, the Brahmin relinquished the very idea of dropping—and it was then that he was truly illumined.

This, indeed, is the third category of dissociation, without which the neophyte cannot enter the Vale of Bliss. Thus the dissociation from the Not-Self, the dissociation from the Self, and the dissociation from the very idea of dissociation: these constitute the three states of consciousness through which the disciple comes into the “fourth”—the *Turiya* state—which is the Transcendental State, the state of Initiation, the hour of the spiritual rebirth for the neophyte.

It is in the hour of Initiation that the disciple becomes the “Walker of the Sky,” a *Khechara*—“who treads the winds above the waves, whose step touches not the waters.” He, the spiritually reborn, moves without any resistance whatsoever for his “step touches not the waters.” Surely, it is only in this condition of non-resistance that one can tread the Path. But unless a man has stepped out of himself, he cannot be free from resistance. The *Turiya*, or the Transcendental State, where the disciple “treads the winds above the waves,” arrives only when the third category of dissociation has taken place—where the disciple is not even aware that he has dissociated himself from the Not-Self, as well as from the Self. It is through the process of constant dissociation that the neophyte is enabled to pass through the Three Halls and be prepared for the Great Hour of Initiation.

It is in this third category of dissociation that the mind of man is freed from the attribute of *sattva*, or equilibrium. The mind has three layers or attributes, those factors which condition it: they are inertia, activity, and equilibrium—*tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna asks Arjuna to be “above these three attributes.” Even the attribute of *sattva* has to be left behind if the mind of man is to be freed from all the conditioning factors. *Sattva* is described as harmony or equilibrium, a condition where the two opposites have dropped away, but there still lingers in the mind the consciousness of freedom from the conflict of opposites—the consciousness that it has reached harmony or equilibrium. The neophyte has to be dissociated even from this consciousness of harmony having been established. It is in the condition of Deep Sleep that he is freed from this third conditioning factor of the mind. The passage through the Three Halls is indeed the process of the de-conditioning of the human mind. How can a conditioned mind know what it is to be a “Walker of the Sky”? A conditioned mind is full of resistances and so its step cannot but help touching the waters. A conditioned mind cannot comprehend the nature of *dhāranā*—much less can it understand *dhyāna* or *samādhi*. To seek out the *rājah* of the senses is indeed to de-condition the mind, to free it from all the three attributes.

What is the state of the mind when it is freed from these attributes? It is to this question that HPB turns in the last portion of the First Fragment.

## Chapter IV

## THE CHILD STATE

*The Voice of the Silence* describes in detail the human journey on the spiritual path, a journey that can be divided broadly into three parts. The first part consists of the preparation for the path; the second part is concerned with the discovery of the path; and the third part has essentially to do with the treading of the path. The Three Fragments of *The Voice* deal with these three aspects—the preparation, the discovery, and the treading of the spiritual path. They may be thought of as *dhāranā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. HPB describes samādhi as “the state of faultless vision.” Unless the neophyte has this faultless vision he cannot tread the Path of Perfection. But how does he obtain this faultless vision? He acquires it in the condition of dhyāna—the moment of Initiation, an expansion of consciousness. It is a condition where “the dew-drop slips into the shining sea,” or to put it another way—the sea enters the dewdrop. In this state of consciousness the duality of subject and object vanishes. And surely there can be no discovery where the duality of the subject and the object persists. Thus meditation is pre-eminently a moment of discovery, and discovery implies the existence of the thing discovered. In meditation, evidently, the neophyte discovers Reality. But Reality *is*; it is not something that is brought into existence. If this is the case, then, why do we not discover Reality from moment to moment? Because there are veils that hide Reality, screens that have been created by the human mind. It is only as veil after veil is rent asunder that Reality comes into view. It is in rending asunder these veils that the human mind comes to the condition of dhāranā—a state of full and undistracted attention in which alone Reality can be perceived.

The passage of the neophyte through the Three Halls is, in fact, a process of rending asunder the veils that hide Reality. We have seen that the three fundamental attributes of the mind—inertia, activity, equilibrium—distort one’s vision of Reality. Therefore a complete de-conditioning of the mind is needed before the neophyte can come to the state of *dhyāna*—the supreme moment of Initiation. HPB indicates this quite beautifully in the following passage:

Eternal life’s pure waters, clear and crystal, with the monsoon tempest’s muddy torrents cannot mingle.

Heaven’s dew-drop glittering in the morn’s first sun-beam within the bosom of the lotus, when dropped on earth becomes a piece of clay; behold, the pearl is now a speck of mire.

She says there cannot be a blending of “pure waters” with the “muddy torrents.” Unless the mind is completely free from the muddy torrents generated by the “I,” there can be no descent of the eternal waters of life into that mind. Any descent from above into a mind that is so contaminated would result in the pearl becoming a speck of mire. Even the noblest things of life become mere pieces of clay under the molding influences of a contaminated mind. The mind is quite adept at verbalization—it catches hold of beautiful words and puts into them the ugly content of its own craving. The mind has therefore to be stripped of everything before it can serve as a chalice to

receive the pure waters of eternal life. This is the condition to which the neophyte must come if he is to experience the joys of spiritual discovery in the great hour of meditation. So long as even the tiniest seed remains in the mind, so long meditation is out of the reach of the neophyte. In what is known as “meditation with seed” there is no meditation at all, it is only a condition of *dhāranā*. The neophyte may mistake the Hall of Wisdom for the Hall of Meditation and may settle down there regarding it as his journey’s end. But in this hall there is still the tiny seed of “I-consciousness” present; inasmuch as the neophyte is conscious of his victories over the lower self, he is conscious that he is in a state of harmony or equilibrium, his mind is still covered by the attribute of *sattva*—the attribute of virtuosity. Even this tiny seed must disappear ere the neophyte can enter the Hall of Meditation. It is to this that HPB refers in the following passage, which introduces us to the great mystical teaching of the Seven Sounds. She says:

Before thou set’st thy foot upon the ladder’s upper rung, the ladder of the mystic sounds, thou hast to hear the voice of thy *inner* GOD in seven manners.

The inner God is obviously the Higher Self of the neophyte. He has left behind the lower self in the Hall of Learning—the personal self that was the creation of the mind. The Hall of Wisdom is the region of the Higher Self. But it is to this Higher Self that there clings the seed—tiny and imperceptible—of the “I-consciousness.” This is quite evident from the fact that HPB speaks about the slaying of the six out of the seven sounds. If these seven sounds represent the voice of the inner God, why should they be slain? Obviously there is some contamination that is clinging to these voices of the inner God. Unless these voices are “slain,” there can be no hearing of the Soundless Sound. The Seven Sounds described by HPB are:

The first is the nightingale’s sweet voice chanting a song of parting to its mate.

The second comes as the sound of a silver cymbal of the *Dhyānī*, awakening the twinkling stars.

The next is as the plaint melodious of the ocean-sprite imprisoned in its shell.

And this is followed by the chant of *Vīna*.

The fifth like sound of bamboo-flute shrills in thine ear.

It changes next into a trumpet-blast.

The last vibrates like the dull rumbling of a thunder-cloud.

She immediately follows with this striking statement:

The seventh swallows all the other sounds. They die and are heard no more.

What is the significance of this teaching about the Seven Sounds, and what is their place here when the neophyte has moved thus far in his spiritual journey? The Seven Sounds are said to represent the different layers of human consciousness. The neophyte, having dissociated himself from the lower self, is now full of the consciousness of the Higher Self in the Hall of Wisdom. But what is this consciousness of the Higher Self? Is it a sense of subtle superiority, a feeling of triumph over the lower? If

this is the case, then the dire heresy of separateness has appeared, masquerading as the Higher Self. A passage from *Light on the Path* elaborates:

The vices of the ordinary man pass through a subtle transformation and reappear in the heart of the disciple.

Where there is a sense of superiority, the consciousness of triumph and victory, there the vices of the lower self will re-appear under the garb of the Higher Self. It is because of this that HPB says that before the neophyte sets his foot upon the upper rung of the ladder, he must hear the voices of the Higher Self at different levels. In other words, he must examine what lies below the surface of the Higher Self. The top layers of the Higher Self will give out voices that are enchanting. The neophyte is likely to be lulled into a pleasant sleep hearing these voices, feeling that the Higher Self is pure and unsullied. But it is only when he comes to the seventh sound—the lowest layer of his Higher Self consciousness—that he finds that all the other voices have been swallowed up. He is face to face with the “dull rumbling of the thunder-cloud.” Gone are the sweet sounds of the cymbal, the vīna, and the flute. He had assumed he was completely freed from the vices of the lower self, but they seem to have re-appeared taking shelter under the protecting wing of the Higher Self. What are these vices? They are the feelings of self-righteousness, the consciousness of being virtuous. These are the last vestiges of the “I-consciousness,” and that is why it is said that pride is one of the obstacles hampering the movement of the neophyte up to the end. It is this spiritual pride that often struts about under the guise of the Higher Self. It is this subtle form of pride that must completely vanish before the hour of Initiation can strike. HPB is emphatic on this point:

The Self of matter and the SELF of Spirit can never meet. One of the twain must disappear; there is no place for both.

Ere thy Soul’s mind can understand, the bud of personality must be crushed out, the worm of sense destroyed past resurrection.

It is this complete crushing of the personality that must take place before the spiritual pilgrim can pass out of the Hall of Wisdom and enter the Vale of Bliss. The Seven Sounds are the sounds of the mind, and they can be silenced only as the very content of the Higher Self is examined. Then is the neophyte in a condition of Deep Sleep ready to enter the Vale of Bliss.

At this point a question may arise: Is not *Sushupti*—Deep Sleep—a dangerous condition because of the emptiness that it indicates? Will not this passivity expose the aspirant to undesirable influences? The following verse of the Bhagavad Gita may perhaps help us to understand what the consciousness of deep sleep means:

That which is night of all beings, for the disciplined man is time of waking;  
when other beings are waking then is night for the Sage who seeth. (2:69)

This shows that the state of Deep Sleep is not one of passivity, but one of deep awareness. It may be called Pure Awareness—*pure* because there is just the state of awareness without the duality of the subject and the object. There has taken place the blending of the subject and the object, the perceiver and the perceived. Such deep

awareness is a condition of sensitivity—not of passivity. It is this condition which is indicated by this frequently quoted passage from *The Voice*:

Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself.

The disciple must become the Path itself before he can begin to tread it. What does this mean? It signifies that the duality of the Path and he who treads the Path must vanish. They must become one. Where this duality persists, there the individual is lost in the intricacies of discipline and struggle and conflict. But when he and the Path are no longer two separate things, the question of discipline does not arise. So long as there is awareness that “I am treading the Path,” so long there is no real treading of the Path. The disciple has not come to Deep Sleep; he is still in the Dream state. The great discovery of the Path comes to the neophyte only when he—the one who treads the Path—has disappeared. This is the starting point, the point of Initiation. It is in Deep Sleep (*Sushupti*)—and there alone—that this point is reached.

The fact that the state of Deep Sleep—the condition in which the disciple passes out of the Hall of Wisdom—is not one of passivity, but of extreme sensitivity, can be borne out by the following passage from *The Voice*:

Let thy Soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun.

Let not the fierce Sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer’s eye.

It needs an extraordinary sensitivity to wipe the tear from the sufferer’s eye before it has been dried by the rays of the sun. It is only the mind that has no commitments which can display such sensitivity. A mind without commitment has no distractions, no resistances. There is no self that it has to defend—neither the lower nor the higher. It is only such a mind that can truly listen to the suffering of others. Needless to say, a passive mind cannot have this sensitivity. A passive mind is dull due to the weight of its own habits. By contrast, a sensitive mind is free, capable of giving its full attention to anything and everything, for it clings to nothing and nothing clings to it. It is with reference to such a mind that the following words have been spoken by HPB:

. . . let each burning human tear drop on thy heart and there remain, nor ever brush it off, until the pain that caused it is removed.

These tears . . . are the streams that irrigate the fields of charity immortal. ‘Tis on such soil that grows the midnight blossom of Buddha. . .

To receive the full impact of another’s pain without explanations, judgments, or justifications needs a very sensitive mind, a mind free from all resistances. It is in the soil of such a mind that the midnight blossom of Buddha grows, a blossom that arises when everything is asleep. It is only in the utter silence of Deep Sleep that such a rare flower can grow.

The disciple who emerges from the Hall of Wisdom in the condition of Deep Sleep and enters the Vale of Bliss—he alone can “help Nature and work on with her.” Nature regards him “as one of her creators” and “makes obeisance” to him. With the will of the mind crushed beyond resurrection, he perceives the Will of Nature, the Plan of God,

and becomes one with it. To such a man, Nature reveals her inmost secrets; the Path lies before him like an open book. An unveiled spiritual perception is vouchsafed to the neophyte—this is indeed the fourth state of consciousness, the state where the empty cup has been filled with the “Eternal life’s pure waters, clear and crystal.”

Will the neophyte come to this Transcendental State or will he linger in the Hall of Wisdom, enraptured by the light of his own Higher Self? Clinging to the Higher Self is the last subtle vestige of pride, which the disciple must throw away lest he be dragged down by its weight once again into the mire of mind’s ideations. In dramatic fashion, HPB warns the disciple of the pending danger:

Woe, then, to thee, Disciple, if there is one single vice thou hast not left behind. For then the ladder will give way and overthrow thee; its foot rests in the deep mire of thy sins and failings, and ere thou canst attempt to cross this wide abyss of matter thou hast to lave thy feet in the Waters of Renunciation. Beware lest thou shouldst set a foot still soiled upon the ladder’s lowest rung. Woe unto him who dares pollute one rung with miry feet. The foul and viscous mud will dry, become tenacious, then glue his feet unto the spot, and like a bird caught in the wily fowler’s lime, he will be stayed from further progress. His vices will take shape and drag him down. His vices will raise their voices like as the jackal’s laugh and sob after the sun goes down, his thoughts become an army and bear him off a captive slave.

Every single vice has to be left behind, the most powerful of which is the consciousness of a victory over other vices. This displays itself as spiritual pride in the life of the disciple. So long as it remains, other vices “will take shape and drag him down.” And so HPB says, “Make thy vices impotent ere the first step is taken on the solemn journey.” But the vices are not rendered impotent so long as spiritual pride remains, so long as one is conscious of a Higher Self. The neophyte’s consciousness of the Higher Self is really the consciousness of a victory over the lower self, which is a most subtle point of danger to the spiritual pilgrim. For it is in this awareness that the entire memory of the past is imperceptibly present. And sooner or later the memory of the past drags the neophyte down, giving one by one a shape to his seemingly forgotten vices. It is this warning which HPB sounds in no unmistakable words when she says:

One single thought about the past that thou hast left behind, will drag thee down and thou wilt have to start the climb anew.

Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost.

The memory of past experiences is indeed the starting point of one’s spiritual fall. And our so-called Higher Self is really the memory of past experiences—call it the causal body or by any name that you like. The memory of man contains centers of psychological recognition, and it is here that the vices retain their potency. The consciousness of the Higher Self is the consciousness of virtue, of moral victory. In other words, in the very consciousness of virtue there is the feeling of victory over vice. It is this feeling of victory which is the center of psychological recognition. It is this center that gives shape to vices and drags the neophyte down. The consciousness of virtue

arises from a feeling of security, but in the feeling of security there is present always the fear of insecurity.

And so we constantly look back, hoping that the vices left behind are not following us. But it is these backward glances that give potency to the vice. That is why HPB says, “Look not behind or thou art lost.” It is the looking back which strengthens the centers of psychological recognition. The desire to glance back arises out of a fear of insecurity. The greater the fear of insecurity, the greater is the clinging to false security. Strangely enough, the consciousness of virtue contains this fear, the fear lest the vices that have been left behind may overtake us. And virtue that has to constantly remind itself of its victory over vice is no virtue at all. How can virtue exist side by side with fear? Is not spiritual pride a form of the mind’s defense mechanism against this fear? Needless to say, a mind that is afraid is a corrupt, contaminated mind; it can have no spiritual quality in it; it is full of the “monsoon’s muddy torrents.”

It is the memory of past experiences which is the cause of mind’s distractions. The incomplete past always needs a future to fulfill itself, and it is the incomplete past that leaves behind traces of psychological memory. The past and the future are the two opposite poles of mind’s movements. How can there be repose so long as this movement continues? And can we really comprehend the nature of dhāranā so long as our mind is not in a state of repose? We have seen that the root cause of the mind’s movement is the memory of the past—not the memory of chronological events, but the memory of psychological attractions and repulsions. It is the mind which is freed from the distractions of memory that is ready for dhāranā.

The whole process of dissociation, which we have discussed with reference to the Three Halls, is actually a process of freeing the mind from the distractions of memory. The Not-Self, the Self, and lastly the Higher Self are all repositories of memory. By being aware of the transitory nature of things; by examining the process of one’s thinking; by observing the content of one’s own virtues—it is by these processes of dissociation that one comes to a state of complete freedom. This is a condition of renewal, for here the mind is rendered pure and fresh. It is a process of regaining the child-state to which HPB refers in the following passage:

The rose must re-become the bud born of its parent stem, before the parasite has eaten through its heart and drunk its life-sap. . . .

The pupil must regain *the child-state he has lost*, ere the first sound can fall upon his ear.

The “parasite” in the above passage represents our desire to cling, our memory of past experiences. It is this desire which induces the neophyte to look back. The rose re-becoming the bud represents the condition of the mind freed from the memory of past experiences. This is the child-state: a state of renewal, a state of spiritual rebirth. The mind is now without any commitments, without a center of psychological recognition. The child-state is that condition of consciousness in which the impact of life is received by the whole being of man. That is how a child receives the impacts of life; his consciousness is not divided, his mind is not in conflict. In whatever he does the entire being of the child is present. He is undistracted, for there are no centers of psycho-

logical recognition pulling him in different directions. To receive life with one's entire being—this indeed is the secret of *dhāranā*, or concentration. It is this which HPB has indicated in the two following sentences:

Unless thou hearest, thou canst nor see. Unless thou seest thou canst not hear. . . .

When considered superficially, the above two sentences seem utterly meaningless. One cannot hear unless one sees, and one cannot see unless one hears! Where is one to begin? It has the appearance of a Zen *koan*, which the mind cannot understand, since the mind always needs a sequence in space and time when two things are presented to it. How can two things remain in the same place at the same time? This is the problem which always perplexes the mind; and in terms of the mind there is no solution to it. Co-existence is unknown to the mind, and so it cannot know an experience as a whole. It must divide up the experience and place it in the sequence of space and time before it can know what it is. And so it always asks the question: Which is first—is it hearing or seeing? But for him who responds to life with his entire being, the hearing and the seeing are simultaneous. And this is how the child experiences life. We have to be like little children, in the spiritual sense, before we enter the Vale of Bliss. In the child-state there is a direct perception, with nothing intervening between subject and object. In fact, while in this condition, the subject is not conscious that he is perceiving an object. There is just a state of perception. In such a mind no image exists, for an image would cast a shadow. So long as any shadow exists, whether of an external object or of an internal concept, so long is mind rendered ineffective for *dhāranā*.

Withhold thy mind from all external objects, all external sights. Withhold internal images, lest on thy Soul-light dark shadows they should cast.

Thou art now in DHĀRANĀ . . .

Thus, according to HPB, when in the mind no images are cast—images of external sights or of internal ideations—then the neophyte has come to the state of *dhāranā*. This is indeed the condition where all mentation has ceased. The mind's soil is free of all seeds so that the seed that descends from heaven may fructify. In *dhāranā*, the earth is ready to receive the gift of heaven. Devoid of all conflicts and contradictions, the mind is receptive; it is in a state of inquiry. The disciple has truly become the seeker. "Seek and ye shall find" has been the ancient truth uttered by many a prophet and many a sage. Having become a seeker in the state of *dhāranā*, the disciple will come to the end of his seeking as he enters the Hall of Meditation and from there will go out to share that which he has found—and this sharing indeed will be the treading of the Path. Seek, Find, and Share—these are the three instructions given in *The Voice* under *dhāranā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. Having regained the child-state, the mind puts on the white robes of innocence, ready to be initiated into the Great Mysteries of Life. And the secrets of the Path are communicated only in the creative silence of meditation. It is to this supreme moment of inspiration that HPB takes us through her profoundly significant instruction contained in the Second Fragment.

## Chapter V

## THE DOCTRINE OF THE HEART

One of the commonest misconceptions about *dhāranā*, or concentration, is that it requires a tense condition of the mind. Sometimes a tense condition is artificially created in order that one may be able to concentrate, and it is because of this that people frequently complain of utter exhaustion. However, it needs to be clearly understood that concentration is an utterly relaxed condition of the mind. If the mind is not in a state of repose it cannot concentrate. A tense condition of the mind implies the presence of certain distracting factors, and how can there be concentration so long as the mind is distracted? First, the distractions have to be put away before concentration can begin. It is the putting away of distractions that is known as *pratyāhāra*, or withdrawal. When this happens through the process of dissociation, as discussed in the First Fragment, the mind comes to the child-state. And it is this condition, which HPB describes as *dhāranā*. The child-state may also be called the Deep Sleep condition of human consciousness, a condition of pure perception, without the perceiver being conscious of that which is being perceived. The perceiver himself is the cause of distraction in the whole act of perception! And so when the perceiver drops away, concentration becomes effortless, for there is no distraction against which a fight has to be put up. In the process of dissociation through the Three Halls, it is the perceiver that vanishes, leaving the act of perception pure and undistorted. It is to this that HPB refers towards the end of the First Fragment when she says:

Where is thy individuality, Lanoo, where the Lanoo himself? It is the spark lost in the fire, the drop within the ocean, the ever-present Ray become the all and the eternal radiance.

And now, Lanoo, thou art the doer and the witness, the radiator and the radiation, Light in the Sound, and the Sound in the Light.

The Lanoo himself has disappeared—and that indeed is the moment of intense concentration. Observe the concentration of the child. He makes no effort; he is indeed lost in the act of perception. Such is also the case when we are gripped by something indescribably beautiful or when our deep interest is aroused. In moments of intense happiness we are not conscious that we are happy. In fact, such an awareness would mean our separation from the experience of happiness. Our fullest concentration is only when we are in *it*, not away from it. Thus a consciousness of non-duality is of the essence of concentration.

It is in such a background of effortless concentration that true discovery takes place. For real discovery to occur, right perception is essential. When the perception is distorted, illusory visions and fantasies may arise, but certainly not discovery. It should be remembered that true discovery is not the product of a continuity of thought. A continuity of thought may perceive modifications in the realm of the known, but discovery is the perception of something new. How can the continuity of thought perceive something entirely new? For the perception of the new, the continuity of thought must come to an end. In other words, discovery is possible only when there is

a leap, a jump, or a discontinuity in consciousness. The following words of Dr. Albert Einstein may be of help to us in understanding this interesting subject of discovery.

The mind can proceed only so far upon what it knows and can prove. There comes a point where the mind takes a leap—call it intuition or what you will—and comes out upon a higher plane of knowledge, but can never prove how it got there. All great discoveries have involved such a leap. (Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times*, p. 755)

This transition from effortless concentration to discovery is the core of *dhyaṇa*, or meditation. This transition is so quick that one does not know where concentration ends and where meditation begins. In meditation lies the state of discovery, a leap in consciousness—an interval between the two continuities of thought. In other words, it is like a flash, which occurs suddenly when there is a break in the continuity of the cloud. Meditation is not a process of thinking, not even of the subtlest kind. It is only where the frontiers of thought cease that real meditation begins. And it is *dhāraṇā* that brings us to the point where the boundaries of thought cease. That is the meaning of the neophyte emerging out of the Hall of Wisdom in a condition of Deep Sleep. To stand where the boundaries of thought have ended is indeed to face Nothingness, or a Vast Emptiness, to use the words of a Zen Master. It is on this soil of Nothingness that the midnight blossom of Buddha grows. It is in this Vast Emptiness that the spiritual rebirth of the neophyte takes place. The cessation of thought is the moment of Creative Silence, and into this Silence is heard the Soundless Sound. It comes from Nowhere, for the mind cannot conceive of the point of its emergence. To hear the Soundless Sound is to awaken to a new dimension of understanding. It is a revolutionary experience, and real meditation is indeed a spiritual revolution of deep profundity and significance. It is a new Vision of Life; one who has it can never be the same again. He who has this vision from moment to moment is in a state of constant renewal. Meditation opens out this possibility because of the communion with Transcendence that it brings. It is possible for each person to come to this state of communion, which meditation truly is. Speaking on this subject, HPB says almost at the very beginning of the Second Fragment:

Alas, alas, that all men should possess Maya, be one with the great Soul, and that possessing it, *Ālaya* should so little avail them!

Behold how like the moon, reflected in the tranquil waves, *Ālaya* is reflected by the small and by the great, is mirrored in the tiniest atoms, yet fails to reach the heart of all. Alas, that so few men should profit by the gift, the priceless boon of learning truth, the right perception of existing things, the Knowledge of the non-existent.

*Ālaya* is indeed the Universal Soul, or to use the terminology of Hindu Vedānta, it is Brahman or the Absolute. HPB says that it is possible for all, the small as well as the great, to draw upon Maya or the Universal Soul. And this drawing upon Maya—or communion with the Universal Soul—is meditation. Even though the possibility of this communion is for all, very few profit by this gift. This is because very few pass through the preliminary stage of *dhāraṇā*. HPB says that *Ālaya* is reflected like the moon in the tranquil waves. The tranquility of the lake is a pre-condition for the clear reflection of

the moon. Similarly if Ālaya is to be reflected in the consciousness of man, there must be complete tranquility, a complete cessation of the modifications of thought. The stillness of the mind is essential before communion with the Universal Soul can take place in the hour of meditation. And what is stillness of the mind? Surely not a condition of dullness. It is a condition of Pure Thinking where both the Thinker and the Thought are nonexistent. The Thinker and the Thought are the cause of mind's modifications; they are the creators of the movement *of* the mind. Pure Thinking is that state where the movement *of* the mind has ceased and the movement *in* the mind has begun. It is this movement in the mind that is the secret of meditation. This movement is indeed the gift of Ālaya, the priceless boon of the Universal Soul.

But why does man need this gift? What is its significance in the spiritual life of man? HPB says that it is the priceless boon of "learning truth." In other words, by its presence man is enabled to learn truth—which means to see the essential nature of things. HPB calls this "the right perception of existing things, the Knowledge of the non-existent." According to this, the learning of truth means having a right perception of existing things. But who can have the right perception of existing things? He alone who has the knowledge of the non-existent. The non-existent is the unmanifest. Be it remembered, she speaks not of the invisible, but of the non-existent. The learning of truth, or the gaining of the right perception of things, does not require a journey into the invisible or the super-physical. HPB clearly indicates that it is the vision of the Unmanifest that gives to man the right perception of manifested things. And meditation is *par excellence* the vision of the Unmanifest, the knowledge of the non-existent. The vision of the Unmanifest is indeed the vision of the Whole; when the whole is perceived, the parts can be assigned their rightful place. And the right perception of existing things obviously implies giving to the parts their proper places.

In our day-to-day existence, there arise constantly moments of choice. We are required to choose in small as well as big things of life. If we make a wrong choice, we have to reap sorrow and sadness. Our happiness undoubtedly depends upon making right choices, and since life is not static but intensely dynamic, we are required to make the right choices constantly. Now right choice is the discovery of the right path. It is in the state of meditation—and there alone—that right choice is possible. How can the mind moving in its own limited circle of continuity make right choices? Right choice truly dawns upon the mind, for it arises from the vision of the Unmanifest. Call it the vision of the Unmanifest or call it the Soundless Sound—it is this, which in a flash indicates the right choice in a given situation.

It is Right Choice, which is the main theme of the Second Fragment. It discusses the subject of the Two Paths. The instruction given to the neophyte is: "Search for the Paths." But who can go out in search? He who has left behind the pride of knowledge, he who stands on the threshold of the Unknown. A person who moves within the boundaries of thought cannot search, for the direction of his search will be determined by the trend of his own thoughts. Such a person will find what his mind wants to find! Obviously, it is no search at all. It is the mind that has known the inadequacy of its knowledge and been rendered pure and sensitive that can seek. Before such a mind the way opens. And so once again HPB says:

O Lanoo, be of clean heart before thou startest on thy journey.

For the neophyte, the treading of that Path will soon begin, but before that he must search for the paths and make the right choice. It is for this that he needs to be utterly pure and humble. This choice of the path has to be self-initiated, for in the spiritual life imitation has no place. To combine humility with self-initiated choice seems paradoxical, and yet that is exactly what the neophyte must display. The one is positive and the other is negative. It is the co-existence of the positive and the negative, which HPB indicates in the following sentence:

To live and reap experience the mind needs breadth and depth . . .

The breadth of the mind shows an alertness along a wide range of interest; and depth shows a space, an emptiness—the mind having been completely divested of all its content. Strangely enough, striving for breadth and creating depth are not two different processes. The mind becomes alert only as it throws away the weight of the past; and as the past drops away the mind acquires depth, for an enormous space is created in it. HPB explains this idea very beautifully in just one sentence when she says, “Mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects.” The dust that gathers on the mirror has to be blown off again and again, and this is the very process of dissociation. And the brushing away of the dust makes the mirror alert. But what does the mirror do in this condition of alertness? It reflects. But why does it reflect? Because it is empty; it clings to nothing; it does not have a desire of its own. And so the capacity to reflect is both the alertness and the emptiness of the mirror—both at the same time, showing the co-existence of the positive and the negative.

At one stage the positive and the negative poles of the mind seem contradictory, in opposition to each other. But there comes a stage of the mind where they cease to be contradictory—nay, they together form the WHOLE even as light and shade constitute the wholeness of a landscape. To contain opposites seems paradoxical to one who is caught up in the movement *of* the mind. But to him in whom there is no movement *of* the mind, but only the movement *in* the mind, there is no such paradox. The activity of the mind cannot solve that paradox; it is in the silence of the mind that this paradox is resolved. It is this alert and yet empty mind that can come to right choice. Its choice has the humility indicated by emptiness and self-initiation depicted by alertness. Such a mind knows both the possibilities and limitations of knowledge; it can respond to the flash as and when it comes, and at the same time it can translate that flash in terms of self-initiated action. HPB has given this idea of the positive and the negative once again in the following sentence:

Seek, O Beginner, to blend thy Mind and Soul.

The Soul is the unmanifest; the Mind is obviously the manifest. The blending of the two is the state known as the Fourth, or the *Turiya* state, wherein the Unmanifest is perceived, wherein the Soundless Sound is heard—once again a paradox not to be understood in terms of the movement of the mind. The co-existence of the positive and the negative is one of the most sublime teachings found in *The Voice of the Silence*. One is reminded of the Bhagavad Gita’s teachings on action and inaction. This is the condition of one in the *Turiya* state, the state following the Deep Sleep condition. It is

the state of meditation. Sometimes it is described as Passive Alertness, but the word “passive” denotes a condition weighed down by habit and therefore by the tendencies of the past. It is difficult to describe this state of meditation—perhaps the phrase “co-existence of the negative and the positive” explains it best.

The state of Meditation, the simultaneous existence of the positive and the negative aspects of the mind, is so important in the understanding of the problem of choice between Two Paths that HPB reverts to it again and again in the Second Fragment. For example, she says: “Shun ignorance, and likewise shun illusion.” To shun ignorance is surely to make the mind alert, giving to mind the quality of breadth. Similarly to shun illusion is to put an end to mind’s projections, since all illusions are the projections of the mind. By its very operations the mind indulges in projections, and so to put an end to projections is indeed to render the mind—mindless. The mind that is rendered mindless and is yet alert and sensitive—it is this, which truly constitutes the state of meditation. It is such a mind that discerns the true quality of things. HPB says:

Seek in the Impersonal for the “eternal man,” and having sought him out, look inward: thou art Buddha.

The Eternal Man is to be sought out in the Impersonal. It indicates that it is only when the mind is rendered absolutely impersonal that the Eternal Man can be found. The impersonal mind is the one from which the person has stepped out. It is a mind in which there is no thought but only the process of thinking. In such a mind is reflected the true quality of things. To find the Eternal Man is indeed to discover the quality of one’s own being. It is the quality of one’s being that abides—all else is fleeting—for everything beside one’s nature is a compounded thing, and as the Lord Buddha has said, “Impermanent are all compounded things.” Eternal is that which is not compounded, but all manifested things are compounded. And therefore the Eternal is the Unmanifest. If one is to discover the Eternal Man, one must commune with the Unmanifest. The quality of one’s being is to be found not in the manifest, but truly in the Unmanifest. HPB says, “Look inward: thou art Buddha.” What does this mean? Is Buddhahood not the culminating point of the whole process of perfection? How can we then, imperfect as we are, find ourselves as Buddha by just looking inward?

It may be profitable for us to inquire as to what, after all, is the process of perfection? It is obviously a process of Becoming—but becoming what? As the Upanishads tell us, it is becoming what we are. If in the process of Becoming, we become what we are, then what indeed is the meaning of that process? The process of perfection is a quantitative process, a process of building up capacities and virtues, the acquiring of modes and techniques of expression. The question is: To express what? Obviously to express that which we qualitatively are—in other words, to express the fundamental nature of our being. Qualitatively, we are Buddha, for if this were not the case, we could not become what we are not, as a result of the perfecting process. And so to know ourselves qualitatively is to discover the great truth that we are Buddha. This is not an intellectual recognition but a deep spiritual realization. To a mind that has shunned ignorance but not shunned illusion, this may come as an intellectual recognition, but the mind that has shunned both—the mind that has in it the co-existence of both the negative and the positive aspects—knows this as a direct experience. Without this

qualitative realization the process of perfection has no meaning, the treading of the Path has no significance. In fact, to discover the Path is indeed to discover the quality of one's own being. It is in the ecstasy of this realization that we can begin the journey towards perfection. We can joyously tread the Path, for we have become the Path; the Path and we are not different.

The question may arise: Will not the person who sees himself as Buddha be filled with pride? Will he be humble enough to undertake the journey to perfection? Once again, the point to understand is this: Is this seeing himself as Buddha an intellectual perception? If so, he will assuredly be filled with pride and, as such, will not be able to move along the path of perfection. To such a person the seeing of oneself as Buddha is only a projection caused by his heightened intellect. Such has been the case with many Hindu Vedantins who have intellectually projected Brahman, saying, "I am Brahman." This assertion is the product of an alert mind, the mind that has shunned ignorance but has not been freed from illusion. It is the person of this heightened intellectual projection that has been described by HPB in the following passage:

Self-gratulation, O disciple, is like unto a lofty tower up which a haughty fool has climbed. Thereon he sits in prideful solitude and unperceived by any but himself.

There is a great deal of difference between intellectual recognition and spiritual realization. The former produces dry Vedanta of self-affirmation, what HPB calls the "Doctrine of the Eye." But the man of spiritual realization declares the "Doctrine of the Heart" by a process of self-abnegation and not of self-affirmation. The first says in prideful ignorance: "Behold, I know"—but the latter says in utter humility: "Thus have I heard." The knowledge of the intellectual man is indirect, but he does not know it. And the hearing of the spiritual man is direct. It is this direct comprehension, which makes him humble. The pride of indirect knowledge gives birth to the Eye Doctrine even as the humility of direct perception gives birth to the Heart Doctrine.

It is the state of meditation that determines whether the doctrine is of the Heart or merely of the Eye. But the state of meditation is an intangible point—it is a razor-edged path, for a slight deviation lands the neophyte either in the realm of ignorance where the mind has been dulled, or in the realm of illusion where the mind is alert with self-projection. It is because of this that the stage of *dhāranā* is all important. If the negative and the positive have not been evenly balanced, the neophyte is then likely to stray away into a wrong path, not realizing the true quality of his being. It is this balancing of the positive and the negative, which has been described in the Bhagavad Gita as "mind, well-poised." Spirituality is indeed this condition of poise, and the well-poised man suffers neither from diffidence nor from pride. The perception of one's own quality of being—one's own Buddha-nature—makes one humble and yet confident: confident because one has seen the Way, and humble because of the inadequacy of all forms to contain the exquisite beauty of the Buddha-nature.

In *The Voice*, the Heart-Doctrine has been described as the Great Sifter, for the Doctrine of the Heart is the product of a discerning mind—the mind free from both ignorance and illusion. The Great Sifter is indeed the maker of right choice, for how

can there be right choice unless the grain is sifted from the husk? It is the discerning mind, the well-poised mind, which can make the right choice.

A spiritual man cannot run away from choice; he must have the courage to make the right choice in the midst of the ever-changing circumstances of life. Right choice needs spiritual insight, and it is this insight, which is the priceless gift of meditation. Meditation does not consist in “sitting in dark forests, in proud seclusion and apart from men,” nor does it consist in living “on roots and plants,” nor does it imply assuaging the thirst “with snow from the great Range.” Meditation is right perception of existing things, the perception that comes because of the “knowledge of the non-existent.” It is this, which HPB has indicated in the following passages:

If thou art told that to become Arhan thou hast to cease to love all beings—tell them they lie.

If thou art told that to gain liberation thou hast to hate thy mother and disregard thy son; to disavow thy father and call him “householder”; for man and beast all pity to renounce—tell them their tongue is false. . . .

If thou art taught that sin is born of action and bliss of absolute inaction, then tell them they err. . .

Meditation is not escape from action; it indicates the starting point of Right Action. Right action may sometimes mean refraining from activity, as sometimes it may also mean plunging into activity. The rightness or the wrongness of a pattern of behavior is derived not from the form of conduct, which is manifested, but from the motive of conduct, which is unmanifested. Thus it is the source of behavior and not the patterns of behavior that determines whether a thing is right or wrong. If the source is the dull, habitual mind, then the action is obviously wrong, no matter how beautiful may be its pattern. Similarly if the source is the alert, self-projecting mind then, too, the action is wrong, no matter how attractive is its pattern. But if the source is the Silent Mind—alert and yet not projecting; negative and yet not dull—then the action is assuredly right, no matter what the pattern is. It is this action emerging from the background of a silent, well-poised mind, which is the main theme of the Bhagavad Gita, just as it is the main theme of the Second Fragment of *The Voice of the Silence*. In the following passage, HPB presents this idea in an exquisitely beautiful manner:

The Lamp burns bright when wick and oil are clean. To make them clean, a cleaner is required. The flame feels not the process of the cleaning. . . .

The wick and the oil form the background; the flame is the visible expression. But the flame cannot burn brightly if there has not been the process of cleaning with reference to the wick and oil. However, the flame is not conscious of this process of cleaning. Such indeed is the case with right action. It is clean, but the cleaner does not display his process of cleaning through it. In fact, if the cleaner is present, the action is not clean at all. Anything that clings to an action renders that action unclean, and so if the cleaner clings to an action, then surely that action cannot be regarded as clean. The flame must not feel the process of cleaning. The cleaner who carries on the process of cleaning must leave no trace of himself on the object cleaned—such is indeed the nature of right action.

Both action and inaction may find room in thee; thy body agitated, thy mind tranquil, thy Soul as limpid as a mountain lake.

No clearer exposition of the co-existence of the positive and the negative is needed than the above passage where HPB says that “both action and inaction may find room in thee”—not one after the other, but simultaneously. But simultaneous existence of the positive and the negative is inconceivable in terms of Time, for in Time there is a sequence, not simultaneity. It is in the Timeless that the experience of simultaneity can be had—and the Timeless is not the indefinite extension of Time, rather it is the cessation of Time. Timeless is where Time is not. The Everlasting and the Eternal are not the same, for the former is an unending extension of Time, while the latter is a complete cessation of Time. Now the Timeless is the region of the Unmanifest. If “both action and inaction are to find room” in the neophyte then it means that there has to be an awareness of the Timeless in Time, the awareness of the Unmanifest in the diversity of manifestation. When this happens, then one finds the quality of Eternity present in the never-ceasing movement of Time. If our action can display that quality then it is truly right. Such an action exists in the background. of inaction. As the Bhagavad Gita says:

He who seeth inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among men,  
he is harmonious even while performing all action.

HPB uses a peculiar phrase, “Yogi of Time’s Circle.” This evidently means one who has conquered Time, one who has triumphed over the flow of Time, one who has stepped out of the process of Time. To step out of the process of Time is to see the Unmanifest, for the Unmanifest is in the region of the Timeless. And to become Timeless is to live in the Eternal. One who performs actions while living in the Eternal is according to the Bhagavad Gita “the wise-among men.”

It may be asked: If the Second Fragment deals with the subject of *dhyāna*, or meditation, why is there such emphasis on action? It may be pointed out that it is not action, nor absence of action, which forms the theme of this discourse—it is the rightness or wrongness with reference to action as well as non-action, which HPB has discussed in this Fragment. A very common belief with regard to spiritual life is: the performance of action binds one to the chain of birth and death, and therefore it is wrong. HPB points out that the nonperformance of action too can be wrong:

Inaction in a deed of mercy is action in a deadly sin.

Thus non-action can also be deadly, even as action can be cruel. And therefore it is not the action or the absence of action, which is fundamental to spiritual living. What is fundamental is the background in which action, as well as non-action, is displayed. Actions—negative as well as positive—exist in the process of Time. If the background of these actions is also in Time, then they are assuredly wrong. What is the background of Time? It is memory, and so actions rooted in Time are reactions, for they emerge from the centers of memory. All actions, whether positive or negative, must emerge from the background of the Timeless, for then alone are they right. It is this background of action, which HPB discusses in the Second Fragment, for the Timeless can be comprehended only in *dhyāna*, or meditation.

Living in the Eternal—that indeed is the theme which occupies HPB in the first half of the Second Fragment. To live in the Eternal is to be in a state of meditation. The Eternal is where Time is not, and Time is a movement from the past to the future. And where the past and the future do not exist is the Eternal Now, the experience of which is the real state of meditation. In the condition of *dhāranā*, the neophyte deals with the distractions of the past and the future. He is therefore ready to enter the state of meditation where he transcends the limitations of Time and knows what the Eternal Now is.

It is the experience of the Eternal Now, which must subsist as the pure background for all actions, whether positive or negative. HPB has expressed this beautifully in the following passage:

Fix thy Soul's gaze upon the star whose ray thou art, the flaming star that shines  
within the light-less depths of ever-being, the boundless fields of the Unknown.

If we could be guided by the light of this star, the star which shines within “the boundless fields of the Unknown,” then we can never go wrong. All our actions will be right, for they will shine with the quality of the Timeless and the Eternal. HPB takes us further into the understanding of the Secret of Right Action as she develops this theme in the subsequent verses of the Second Fragment.

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## Chapter VI

## THE CANDIDATE FOR WOE

Spiritual Life has two components—Liberation and Perfection. It is true that the final summation of all spiritual endeavor is to be a perfect individual. But before we can enter the path leading to perfection we have to pass through the process of liberation. Unless we are freed from our limitations, how can we acquire perfection? Perfection obviously means the unfoldment of oneself, but this unfolding process can start only if it has been preceded by the process of putting away the screens behind which we hide. In other words, we must discard the false 'I' before the real 'I' can shine in its true glory. The discarding of the false 'I' is the process of liberation, just as the unfolding of the real 'I' is the process of perfection. The former is a process of increasing negativity, the latter a process of increasing positivity. A real positive effort is possible only in the background of complete negativity. If the background projects itself into the effort that the disciple makes on the path of perfection, then that effort is vitiated and it loses its positive character. And so the creation of a negative background is indeed the purpose of the liberating process. In liberation man ascends, but every process of ascent requires the casting away of all burdens; otherwise the pilgrim will be pulled down by the weight of his own possessions. On the ascending path, one has to dispossess oneself. When this happens, then from the summit of ascent the pilgrim comes down with the positive Gift of Heaven. To share this Gift, to distribute it among the people, is indeed to tread the Path of Perfection.

At the point where the Path of Liberation ends and the Path of Perfection begins, there is a pause; it is in this pause that the Gift of Heaven suddenly arrives—call it the Soundless Sound or the Vision of the Unmanifest or what you will. This pause is the Point of Balance, the Point of Harmony, between the ascending path of negativity and the descending path of positivity. It is a state of Poise—and this indeed is the moment of true meditation. These liberating and perfecting processes must go on at all levels, in the life of the great as also in the life of the small. Liberation is not a static condition. It has to go on from moment to moment, for “the mind gathers dust while it reflects.” And it is only when the liberating process continues from moment to moment that there can be the constant movement towards perfection. Perfection too is never-ending, for even when veil after veil is lifted, there will be veil after veil behind; when one rises to the summit of one hill, one discovers higher peaks still to be conquered. But woe unto the spiritual pilgrim if the negative process of liberation has ceased, for then the positive process of perfection will also come to an end.

This negative process constitutes the Preparation for the Path, even as the positive process is the Treading of the Path: one is *dhāraṇā*, the other is *samādhi*. But in the pause between the two is the vision—the Vision of the Path—and this indeed is *dhyāna*. It is a point of delicate balance; it has no extensions in time and space. It is the point of Eternal Now, and therefore timeless. It cannot be clung to, nor can it be extended. It is a moment of inspiration; it comes like a gift of God, suddenly and from nowhere. It is instantaneous, for the Eternal Now is an instant, a moment—but a moment that contains the richness of Eternity. It is the experience of this Moment

which is meditation, true and real. It is the unrolling of that Moment through the process of Time which indeed is the Treading of the Path. And so if the experience of the Moment is not there the Treading of the Path is meaningless. Thus even though Meditation is an experience of the Moment—the pause between the Negative and the Positive processes—it is fraught with rich possibilities, for it makes every step on the Path meaningful and significant.

Translating one of the verses of the Bhagavad Gita, Sir Edwin Arnold in his *Song Celestial* says: “With perfect meditation comes perfect act.” Thus action and meditation are interrelated. In fact, it is difficult—almost impossible—to describe the state of meditation. How can that instant of Eternity be described? It is a moment from which both speech and thought return, unable to say what it is. And so the only hint that can be given of that moment is in terms of the starting point of Right Action, or the reflection of Eternity in Time. It is because of this that HPB has dealt with the subject of meditation in the Second Fragment using the language of Right Action. But we should remember that she is not concerned here with the right *patterns* of action as with the right *starting point* of action. She discusses right patterns of action in the Third Fragment, but here in the Second Fragment she is concerned with the Vision of the Path, not with the Treading of the Path. And in the Vision of the Path lies indeed the Choice—the Right Choice of the spiritual pilgrim.

What is Right Choice, and why is it so important on the spiritual path? The Gita describes Right Choice as *Svadharmā*—one’s own *dharma*—for according to the Gita, the *dharma* of another is full of danger. And so Right Choice indicates the discovery of one’s own *dharma*, the quality of one’s own being. When one has made this discovery, then one has made the right choice. The treading of the Path for such an individual is unfolding the quality of his own being. Furthermore, to discover the quality of one’s being is to comprehend one’s own Ray—to use a technical Theosophical term. It is to know one’s own Fundamental Type. It is only when one acts in terms of the laws of one’s own being that one is natural; and the treading of the Path, if it is not natural, has no spiritual quality in it. Spiritual quality enters into an action only when one’s own nature is reflected in it. Such an action bears our true signature, for on it is carved our true name—not the name projected by the mind, not the assumed name, but the name that truly belongs to us—the name that we discover in the hour of initiation, in the condition of meditation. It is idle to attempt to find out one’s Ray—or the fundamental Quality of one’s own being—through the operations of the mind, through the processes of thinking, through the process of comparing and contrasting different behavior patterns. It is in the hour of silence—in the imperceptible pause between the ascending and the descending movements—that one’s Ray (of which there are seven) can be discovered. Once this is discovered, there are innumerable paths that open out before disciple for the unfolding and the expressing of his Ray. As the Bhagavad Gita says:

However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the paths men take from every side are Mine.

The paths of expression are many, and it is along this path that the Master meets and accompanies the disciple. The path of experience is the path of aloneness. Man must discover his own Nature, his own Quality in utter aloneness. The path of nega-

tivity is one where the disciple is stripped of everything, and it is in this condition that he discovers himself. In the Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra, the Lord Buddha is reported to have said:

Illustrious youth, when the world, weary of sorrow, turns away and separates itself from the cause of all this sorrow, then, by this voluntary rejection of it, there remains that which I call *the true self*.

What remains after the process of “voluntary rejection” is the true self. This is what is meant by the discovery of one’s self in the hour of complete negativity, when one is stripped of everything. Even the Master cannot be with the disciple on this path of negativity, for the disciple must be utterly alone. But when the disciple has discovered himself, then truly is he received by the Master along whatever path he elects to go for the unfoldment and the expression of that which he has discovered. The Master welcomes the disciple along whichever path he may approach. The path of discovery is one—the total rejection of all that we have accumulated—but the path of expression is manifold. And it is because of this multiplicity that the disciple has to make the right choice, a choice that is in harmony with the quality of his own being.

Here choice implies adoption of the right medium of expression. Whichever medium of expression is selected, the Master meets the disciple there. It is like the artist who has perceived Beauty and is now endeavoring to express it. In this endeavor he must select his medium of expression, whether it is sculpture or painting; poetry or drama; music or architecture. How will he select? Obviously, by experimentation. But behind all this experimentation there will be the vision of the Beautiful. If that vision is lost, the development of a technique of expression has no meaning. And so long as the Vision is there, the process of experimentation is all-absorbing. As a result of this experimentation, he will arrive at his own technique, his own medium of expression. He will create his own language in which to share the joy of discovery with others. He may be restricted as to the letters of the alphabet, for to coin new letters of the alphabet would mean making the language unintelligible. But to the same letters of the alphabet he can bring new combinations of words. And it is this which he does under the creative impulse of his inspiration, making the language rich and alive, making it a pliable instrument to convey the meaning of his great discovery.

Just as the artist is restricted by the letters of the alphabet in his communication, similarly the spiritual man is restricted by the means of expression available to him. But he can bring innumerable combinations to these media of expression so as to make his communications alive and vibrant. For such a combination, it is man’s imagination that is of fundamental value. But imagination that is not rooted in Reality is mere fantasy. When imagination works on the soil of inspiration, only then is it creative. It is this creative imagination that is needed to make spiritual communication vital and life-giving.

In practically all the religions of the world, three ways of communication are recognized for the conveying of spiritual experience. These constitute, as it were, the alphabets of the spiritual language. They are termed differently in different religions, but they may be commonly described as the Paths of *Bhakti* or Devotion, of *Gnāna* or Knowledge, and of *Karma* or Action. When a man has discovered himself—after a

process of “voluntary rejection”—then he selects one of these paths to share the joys of discovery, bringing into them diverse combinations through his own imagination. It is these three paths, which are indicated by the three vestures in Buddhism and to which HPB refers in the following passage from *The Voice*:

Out of the furnace of man’s life and its black smoke, winged flames arise, flames purified, that soaring onward, ’neath the Karmic eye, weave in the end the fabric glorified of the three vestures of the Path.

These vestures are known as Nirmānakāya, Sambhogakāya and Dharmakāya. They have been explained variously in books on Buddhism. But one interpretation that can be given of these vestures is that they represent the three Paths of *Karma*, *Gnāna* and *Bhakti*. Nirmānakāya is the Path of Action, as we shall see presently. Similarly, Sambhogakāya and Dharmakāya represent Paths of Knowledge and Devotion respectively. Sambhogakāya is associated “with great and complete knowledge” just as Dharmakāya is associated with the complete merging of “consciousness in the Universal Consciousness.” The first indicates the Path of Knowledge or *Gnāna Marga*, and the second the Path of Devotion or *Bhakti Marga*. All these paths are genuine paths of expression—and yet in every age special emphasis is put on a particular path. In *The Voice*, HPB lays special stress on the Path of Action, on the “doning of the Nirmānakāya robe.” This emphasis is to be seen in the Mahayana school of Buddhism, of which we find an exposition of in *The Voice of the Silence*. It is not so much the Sambhogakāya as the other two kāyas—the Nirmānakāya and the Dharmakāya—that have been discussed by HPB in this book. In putting the emphasis on Nirmānakāya, as against the Dharmakāya, she has described the former as the way of “deferred Bliss,” while describing the latter as the way of Bliss “immediate.” The way of immediate Bliss is sometimes known as the selfish way, and he who treads this way is known as the Pratyeka Buddha—the Personal Buddha or even Selfish Buddha in the Mahāyāna literature. Dr. Annie Besant in a footnote in *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. V, says:

The Pratyeka Buddha stands on the level of the Buddha, but His work for the world has nothing to do with its teaching, and His office has always been surrounded with mystery. The preposterous view that He, at such superhuman height of power, wisdom and love could be selfish, is found in the exoteric books, though it is hard to see how it can have arisen. (Adyar edition, p. 399)

The Pratyeka Buddha is really the Silent Buddha—the Buddha who does not preach. The Buddha who preaches is the Buddha of Compassion, and he arises out of the Bodhisattva who refuses to don the Dharmakāya robe but instead puts on the Nirmānakāya robe. HPB describes the Path of Dharmakāya as Path of Liberation, and the Path of Nirmānakāya as Path of Renunciation. The one is the “Open Way” and the other is the “Secret Way.” In this regard, HPB states:

The *Shangna* robe, ‘tis true can purchase light eternal. The Shangna robe alone gives the Nirvana of destruction; it stops rebirth, but, O Lanoo, it also kills—compassion. No longer can the perfect Buddhas, who don the Dharma-kāya glory, help man’s salvation.

HPB calls this the “*Open* PATH, the way to selfish bliss, shunned by the Bodhisattvas of the ‘Secret Heart,’ the Buddhas of Compassion.” Expounding the Nirmānakāya path, she says:

To don Nirmānakāya’s humble robe is to forego eternal bliss for Self, to help on man’s salvation. To reach Nirvana’s bliss, but to renounce it, is the supreme, the final step—the highest on Renunciation’s Path.

Know, O Disciple, this is the *Secret* PATH selected by the Buddhas of Perfection, who sacrificed The SELF to weaker Selves.

If we are not to fall into the error of regarding the Buddhas on the other paths as “imperfect” or “selfish” Buddhas, then we must conclude that they follow such lines of expression and communication as we do not understand. All that we can say is this: the Nirmānakāya robe represents the Path of Action, and it is this which HPB advocates in *The Voice of the Silence*. She indicates that the neophyte should make his choice and move along the Path of Right Action; he must use action as his medium of expression, as his technique of communication.

Many a time people posit liberation and action against each other, saying that they have no time for liberation, that they must concern themselves with action. But can there be Right Action without liberating oneself from one’s own limitations? Will not action be a merely a means for self-fulfillment, if the actor has not removed himself from action? And can such action truly be called service? An action done with a personal motive has no spiritual quality in it. If the plant of Action is to grow, it must be from a soil that is without motive; and the creation of such a soil is liberation.

But there is another question that inevitably arises as we consider the subject of liberation and action. Where will man go to liberate himself? Has he to retire into some far-off jungle in order to seek liberation? In actuality, there is no such far-off place, for if liberation is to be sought from the psychological entanglements of life, then how can it be found by running away from life? It is in the midst of one’s relationships, in the daily round of toil and struggle, that liberation is to be found. In other words, action and liberation are two sides of the spiritual coin—one does not exist without the other. Action is the *field* in which liberation is to be sought; liberation is the *background* in which action is to be performed. Dealing with this subject of action and inaction, HPB again and again refers to motive. Purity of motive is the *sine qua non* of Right Action. If a person refrains from action lest their own garments be soiled, then they are not pure in spirit although they remain clean in body! HPB says:

To perish doomed is he, who out of fear of Mara refrains from helping man, lest he should act for Self. The pilgrim who would cool his weary limbs in running waters, yet dares not plunge for terror of the stream, risks to succumb from heat. Inaction based on selfish fear can bear but evil fruit.

The Selfish devotee lives to no purpose. . .

Thus action for self-fulfillment and inaction from fear of self-defilement are both wrong. What should man do then—should he act or should he not act? Such a question has place only in the realm of morality, but none whatever in the sphere of spirituality.

The question is not of action or of non-action, but one of motive. As stated above, the necessary soil is supplied by meditation, for whatever grows in that soil is beautiful and health-giving. The growth of the spiritual plant is natural in this soil, and only that which is natural can be truly spiritual. The spiritual person is not worried about the smallness or the bigness of any particular action. Every action is significant because of the Vision of the Whole that is reflected in it. Such a person does not chafe at karma for the small field of work given to him, since he knows that it is the Vision, and not the size, which makes a thing big or small.

If Sun thou can'st not be, then be the humble planet. Aye, if thou art debarred from flaming like the noon-day Sun upon the snow-capped mount of purity eternal, then choose, O Neophyte, a humbler course.

Point out the "Way"—however dimly, and lost among the host—as does the evening star to those who tread their path in darkness.

In occult literature, Initiation has been described as "entering the stream" (the Buddhist phrase is *Srotapati*). This phrase is very apt, for the stream or the river can be entered only when a person does not cling to either of the banks. The moment of meditation is indeed such a state, so that every time the neophyte comes to the state of meditation, he thereby enters the stream and is initiated into the greater Vision of Life. Initiation has two meanings—one occult and the other spiritual. In the occult sense it means reaching a particular *stage* or position. In the spiritual sense it means arriving at a particular *state* of consciousness. A person may experience expansions of consciousness without reaching the stage of Initiation. It is in this latter sense that we are considering the question of Initiation—as a state of consciousness, and not as a stage on the occult path. From this standpoint a person may experience expansions of consciousness constantly; in other words, he can be in the state of initiation, as it were, from moment to moment. And every time he comes to this state, he experiences a joy and a thrill in the refreshing waters of the stream.

Meditation is such an experience, and it is arrived at when both the banks of the mind have been discarded. This discarding of the banks is the process of *dhāranā* (concentration), the process of voluntary rejection—or rather the process where the opposites drop away and there remains nothing to hold on to. It is the mind stripped of everything that comes to the experience of entering the stream. And it is this entering of the stream which is the right starting point of action; it is the right starting point for the treading of the Path. He who has not entered the stream cannot begin the treading of the Path. The state of meditation is thus a critical state, and all fundamental changes arise out of such critical states. On either side of this balanced point there is activity—on the one side negative, on the other side positive. But between the two it remains undisturbed; in it there is a Deep Silence which nothing can move. HPB describes this condition as follows:

Be like the Ocean which receives all streams and rivers. The Ocean's mighty calm remains unmoved; it feels them not.

This is exactly how the Bhagavad Gita describes the man of "stable mind"—the man of "Poised Intelligence." HPB expresses it this way:

Aye, great is he, who is the slayer of desire.

Still greater he, in whom the Self Divine has slain the very knowledge of desire.

When the very knowledge of desire is slain, then there is no center of psychological recognition left in the mind. A mere slaying of desire deals only with the patterns and behaviors of desire, but it is when the knowledge of desire is slain that the mind is free even from the memory of that desire. A mind that has no centers of psychological recognition is truly ready for initiation. It is in a condition of *Gotrabhu*, so pliable that it is like a “pen in the hand of God,” like a tuned instrument ready to vibrate at the slightest touch of the Divine Musician. In this state the neophyte is able to “listen to the faintest whisper above earth’s loudest song.” It is only such a mind that can hear the Voice of *Nāda*, the Soundless Sound.

HPB describes this condition as that of “boundless Vision.” The hour of meditation is indeed the hour of the blooming of the spiritual flower.

. . . the holy flower that opens and blooms in darkness, out of the pure dew and on the frozen bed of snow-capped heights, heights that are trodden by no sinful foot.

It is only when the pure dew from heaven descends that the spiritual flower opens, and it is this pure dew which is the gift of heaven. But this happens only when the mind has come to the “snow-capped heights” by the process of increasing negativity, i.e., by rejecting the load of memory until even the “very knowledge of desire” is slain.

And now the Path of Arhatship opens out before the neophyte—the Path proper lies before him. Once again HPB gives a warning to the neophyte lest he may lose the boundless vision in the enthusiasm of treading this path:

. . . let not the fruit of action and inaction be thy motive, thou of dauntless heart.

This is indeed the secret of treading the path—no motive whatsoever either for action or for inaction. The neophyte must be completely indifferent to the fruit of action or of inaction. He must be willing to receive life as it comes, imparting to it his own quality of being. To receive life as it comes—that indeed is the code of behavior which one must learn if one is to tread the path successfully. HPB refers to this when she says:

. . . the ripple of effect, as the great tidal wave, thou shalt let run its course.

The world of manifestation is truly the world of effects—and when can one let the ripple of effect run its course? Only when one is rooted in the Vision of the Unmanifest. How true it is that “with perfect meditation comes perfect act”!

Is the Path of Perfection, a Path of Woe? If it is a path where the neophyte shares the joys of his discovery with others, how can it be described as Path of Woe? And yet why is it that he is called the “candidate for woe”? From where does this woe arise?

This problem of sorrow on the Path of Perfection has a two-fold aspect. Describing one such aspect, HPB speaks of “woe for the living dead.” And who are the “living dead”? They are the people “ignorant of the esoteric truths and of the Wisdom.” As the spiritual path is not something apart from men and things, it has to be trodden in the daily circumstances of life. The neophyte who comes with the boundless Vision of the

Unmanifest brings with him an extraordinary sensitivity of mind and heart. He cannot help it, and it is this sensitivity which makes him weep with the entire creation. He weeps because of the ignorance that he sees all around. This is one aspect; we may call it the objective aspect of woe.

But there is another aspect—the subjective aspect—and it consists in the inability of the neophyte to fashion effective and adequate instruments to convey in full the spiritual joy with which he has been filled in that indescribable moment of Meditation. He fashions instrument after instrument, but finds them all ineffective and utterly inadequate. With what shall he construct an appropriate Shrine for the Great Deity that he has discovered? And how can he install the Great Deity in an unworthy Shrine? This is the torment, the “mental woe unspeakable,” of the neophyte who begins his journey on the Path of Perfection.

It is these two aspects—the subjective and the objective—which may be described as woe with reference to this Path of Perfection. The unworthiness of the Form to convey in full the Beauty of the Formless—it is this which is the underlying basis of woe for the spiritual pilgrim, or the Lanoo, as he is called in *The Voice*. The ignorance of the people is so vast, and what he can give is so inadequate compared to what he has received. It is this realization which makes him a “Candidate for Woe.” But once again, the awareness of the unworthiness of the Form is also the real basis for action on the Path of Perfection. For here on this path it is the perfection and the refinement of form that is carried on until the form translates in a great measure the exquisite beauty of the Formless. When this happens the Perfection is reached. It is the Path of Seven Perfections to which HPB turns our attention in the third and the last Fragment of this priceless book, *The Voice of the Silence*.

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## Chapter VII

### THE TRANSCENDENTAL VIRTUES

There is a remarkable statement that Buddhists are fond of: “The Buddhas are but the fingers pointing the Way.” In terms of this statement, the spiritual pilgrim has to be entirely on his own, not relying on anyone—neither priest nor scripture—for the treading of the Path. But how can the pilgrim move unguided? Will he not lose his way in the intricacies of life’s environment? Is he not to receive any guidance whatsoever? If he moves unguided, what is the place of the Master in his spiritual life? In the Buddhist literature it is reported that when the Buddha was about to leave his mortal body, he saw his disciple Ananda lamenting bitterly. To him and to the other monks, the Buddha said as follows—and these were the last words uttered by Him:

Do not weep, do not despair, Ananda. From all that he loves man must part. How could it be that what is born, what is subject to instability, should not pass? Maybe, you were thinking, ‘We have no longer a master.’ That must not be, O Ananda. The doctrine I have preached to you is your master. He repeated: Verily, I say unto you, O Monks—All things are perishable; work your deliverance with earnestness. (Mahaparinirvana Sutra)

Work out your deliverance; be a lamp unto yourself—these were the clear instructions of the Buddha. And so the question arises: What is it that guides the spiritual pilgrim through the intricacies of the Path? What is the role of the Master in his life?

We have seen that the Path of Ascent through *dhāranā* is the path of increasing negativity, the path on which the pilgrim must be stripped of everything. It has been described by Plotinus as “a flight of the alone to the Alone.” As the neophyte stands on the summit of this mountain in utter silence, he hears the Soundless Sound. This we have described as the Great Moment of Meditation, or *Dhyāna*. Filled with this Soundless Sound, the pilgrim descends from the summit and goes out to share what he has found. He is in a state of ecstasy because of the “faultless Vision” that has been vouchsafed to him. To move with the ecstasy of that vision and to share the gifts of heaven with others—this indeed is the condition of *samādhi*, or contemplation. But the question that now faces the pilgrim is a simple one: *How* to share?

It is here where the role of the Guru, or the Master, is crucial. Unless the question of *how* to share has arisen in the mind of the pilgrim, the function of the Guru cannot be understood. But when does the question of *how* arise? Simply put, when the pilgrim knows *what* it is that he wants to share. Obviously, the technique of sharing has meaning only if there is something to share. And this has to be discovered by the neophyte himself, for nobody else can tell him *what* he should share. Sharing has to be a spontaneous process, otherwise it is no sharing at all. Unless the neophyte has come to the state where he says, “I cannot help sharing,” his sharing has no naturalness in it. On the other hand, that which the pilgrim has truly discovered, he cannot help sharing with others. And so it is *discovery* that gives the answer to the question of *what*, so far as sharing is concerned.

We have already seen that it is in the moment of meditation that discovery comes. We have also discussed that the mind comes to the state of discovery only as a result of the process of ‘voluntary rejection,’ that is, rejection in which the thing drops away and

has not to be discarded. Such dropping away happens only when the neophyte raises the fundamental question of *why*. This is an inquiry into the very process of one's own thinking; it is an inquiry into the conclusions of thought—positive as well as negative—and the process by which those conclusions have been arrived at. And so it is the *why* that leads to the *what*. When the neophyte has discovered the *what*, he feels he must share it with others. Now, as we saw earlier, this *what* is the quality of one's own being, the fundamental and original nature of oneself. It is obvious that only when the neophyte is utterly alone can discover himself. In this moment of exquisite joy, the question that naturally arises is: *How* shall I share this joy?

In discussing spiritual matters, the inquirer often raises the question, how—*how* can this be done? Or, how can a particular ideal be translated into daily life? In the raising of these kinds of questions, he invariably poses insurmountable difficulties. This is the clever way the mind has of evading fundamental issues. Without going through the process *why* and arriving at *what*, the question *how* has no meaning; it is just an idle inquiry. In other words, unless there is a fullness of vision, the question of expression does not arise. If there is no experience, what need is there for expression? When the technique of expression is sought without the background of experience, then such learning is utterly tiresome. The learning of certain skills, the development of capacities, the acquiring of techniques—these have meaning only in the background of experience, i.e., in the background of Discovery.

And so when the question arises, “How shall I share?”—it is then that the Master comes into the life of the neophyte. If the Master had appeared before that question was asked, the neophyte would not have recognized him. As *Light on the Path* says, “When the disciple is ready, the Master is ready also.” It is in the moment of discovery that the disciple is ready, not till then. But what does the readiness of the Master mean? What does the Master do when the disciple is ready? We are told that the Master points the Way. The Master knows that if he had done so earlier, the disciple would not have seen it, would not have taken note of it. And so at the right moment of discovery, when the neophyte is eager to know the answer to the question how, the Master points the Way. It is the Way that leads to the unfolding of the fundamental nature of the disciple's Being, to the expressing of the Quality of Being, which he has discovered. In other words, the Master points the Way which leads the disciple to become what he is. And so it is the technique of becoming oneself that the Master reveals to the neophyte. So long as the neophyte wants to become something other than his true Self, the Master cannot reveal this technique to him. It is only when the process of becoming *something* ends and the process of becoming *oneself* starts that the Master truly enters the life of the disciple. The Third Fragment of *The Voice* begins at this point, for HPB says:

“UPĀDHYA, the choice is made . . . Thy servant here is ready for thy guidance.”

The neophyte addresses the Master and says: “The choice is made,” meaning thereby that “the process of becoming ‘something’ has come to an end, the Vision of my true Being has been vouchsafed to me—now guide me as to how I should proceed so as to become myself.” The Path of becoming oneself, which opens out before the disciple, is called the Path of Perfection. While liberation is awareness of the timeless in time, perfection is the unfoldment in time of that which is timeless. While the

former needs the cessation of time, the latter requires the continuity of time. In short, liberation is the vision of oneself, while perfection is the process of becoming oneself.

What is this process of perfection and how does it relate to contemplation (*samādhi*), the main theme of the Third Fragment? According to *The Voice*, the Path of Perfection entails the climbing of the steep “Pāramitā heights.” HPB warns the pilgrim: “Thou hast to fight thy way through portals seven” in order to cross these Pāramitā heights. The question is: Has this “climbing” any relationship with the condition of *samādhi*? One of the meanings of *samādhi* is “putting together.” It is in the light of the vision of the Whole that the parts can be put together. True meditation (*dhyāna*) is the vision of the Whole. *Samādhi*, which follows *dhyāna*, is a process in which the different parts of oneself become integrated. In other words, it is a process of evolving unity in terms of the Whole. So it becomes apparent that “to become what one is,” involves bringing the fragmented parts into a unified whole. In his translation of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, M. N. Dvivedi says:

*Samādhi* implies two distinct states of consciousness unified in one. The first . . . is the forgetting of all idea of the act, and the second, the more important factor, is the becoming of the object thought upon.

Now “the object thought upon” is the vision that comes to the mind in the state of absolute objectivity. But the mind is objective only when all the subjective projections have dropped away, a condition arrived at through the process of concentration (*dhāranā*). Patanjali says, “Being unconscious of oneself, there is the perception of the object alone.” This indicates a mind from which the Thinker is absent, and so there is just the pure act of perception. In this state, it is only the object that is perceived, for there are no subjective projections generated by the thinker. And so, “to become what one is,” to put together the parts in terms of the objective vision, is the meaning and significance of *samādhi*.

The perfection of life consists in bringing the fragmented parts together in a unified whole, thereby evolving a pattern of exquisite beauty. This is not a mere synthesis or coordination, since the harmony of parts exists due to the presence of the Whole, which is present in each of the separate parts. When each part of one’s life shines with the glory of the Whole, then it is that the individual is in a state of *samādhi*. When perfect harmony breathes through the parts, then it is that the neophyte has climbed the Pāramitā heights.

Human life contains innumerable details, small as well as big. These details of life lie scattered about in a confused and chaotic manner. They do not fit into any pattern of life. What is one to do? The details of life form the actualities of one’s existence; they cannot be thrown away, nor can they be altered. And yet they do not fit into the pattern. The question is: Can the pattern be changed? The difficulty with most of us is that our patterns of life are the products of our mental projections. We want the different parts of our existence to fit into these patterns, which are created out of the likes and dislikes of the mind. But the parts are not meant to fit into that pattern. And so we must know what the real pattern is before we attempt to fit the parts. The perception of the pattern is the Vision of the Whole; it is to see what one is. When this is done, the putting of parts in their rightful places will be no problem at all. For the evolving of a beautiful pattern of life, the parts do not require to be changed. What we have to

understand is the right relationship of each part to the Whole. The essential problem that the spiritual pilgrim has to tackle on the Path of Perfection is the problem of the relationship of the Part to the Whole.

The treading of the Path is usually associated with the cultivation of virtues. But what is a virtue except right relationship between the Whole and the Part? Whether we consider virtues in an individual setting or in a collective setting, they constitute right relationships between the Whole and the Part. In other words, harmony between the Whole and the Part is true Virtue; where such harmony does not exist, there life ceases to be virtuous. Let us remember, however, that the whole is not the sum of its parts. The putting together of parts does not create a living, psychological whole, although it may create a mechanical whole. The Whole has to be perceived first before the Parts can be brought together in a harmonious pattern. The process cannot be reversed. Without perceiving the Whole, the problem of relationship cannot be effectively addressed. In other words, the cultivation of virtue—which is right relationship—without the background of the Whole is meaningless. It is no virtue at all. Some have described the Path of Perfection as being essentially the Path of Virtue. HPB describes this Path in terms of the Pāramitās, and she asks the pilgrim to be properly equipped for the climbing of those heights. The “equipment,” needless to say, consists of Virtues. She says:

. . . These Portals lead the aspirant across the waters on “to the other shore.”  
Each Portal hath a golden key that openeth its gate. . . .

The moment of Initiation, as we have seen, is the moment of “entering the stream. The treading of the Path is therefore going across the stream. But how shall we go across the stream? Obviously, by the acquiring of certain virtues or capacities. While describing the Path of Perfection, HPB gives the simile of the Seven Portals; she says we have to be armed with the necessary keys if the gates of these portals are to be opened. To phrase it differently, the Path of Perfection is the Path of Initiations. Having been spiritually reborn, the neophyte now enters the Path of Initiations. *The Voice of the Silence* portrays Arhatship as the culminating point on the Path of Perfection, for the very last verse of this book says:

A pilgrim hath returned back from the other shore.  
A new Arhan is born.

And so the Path of Perfection leads the pilgrim to the other shore. From the point where the neophyte emerges from the Vale of Bliss, to the state of Arhatship, there are—according to the Buddhist as well as the Hindu traditions—three stages. These are known as Three Initiations, the Arhat being the fourth. These Three Initiations seem to correspond to the Three Halls described throughout the *The Voice*. In Buddhism these stages are known as *Srotāpanna*, *Sakridāgāmin* and *Anāgāmin* meaning respectively: he who has entered the stream; he who returns but once; and he who does not return. In Hinduism these three stages are known as *Kutīchaka*, *Bahūdaka* and *Hamsa*. Corresponding to the stage of the Arhat in Buddhism, there is the stage of *Paramahansa* in Hinduism. The whole description of the Path of Perfection is fundamentally about these initiations even though HPB has used the allegory of the Portals and the Keys that open their gates. Now we have to consider these initiations as states of consciousness and not so much as stages on the Occult Path.

The Path of Initiations is a long journey and so it is possible that the pilgrim may lose sight of the vision he had in the Vale of Bliss—the Vision of the Unmanifest, the Vision of the Whole. Lest he forget, HPB has given two requirements for each of the initiations—the inner and the outer. The outer requirement represents the pattern of behavior while the inner requirement represents the background in which alone such a pattern can exist. In a mysterious way, this background is related to the vision of the Unmanifest, so that the Vision is always present during the long journey of the pilgrim. Thus for three initiations are needed three outer and three inner instruments. These indeed are the Six Pāramitās, the six transcendental virtues mentioned in the Buddhist literature. Although *The Voice of the Silence* mentions Seven Keys, the seventh is actually the stage of Arhat, for HPB says with reference to this key as follows:

. . . the key to which makes of a man a god, creating him a Bodhisattva, son of the *Dhyānīs*.

And so with reference to the Path proper, HPB mentions six Virtues (or six Pāramitās) which constitute, as said above, the inner and the outer instruments of the pilgrim. But whether we call them “keys” or “instruments” does not matter. Perhaps it may be more apropos to consider them as virtues required on the Path, which HPB has described as follows:

1. *Dāna*, the key of charity and love immortal.
2. *Shīla*, the key of harmony in word and act.
3. *Kshānti*, patience sweet, that nought can ruffle.
4. *Virāga*, indifference to pain and pleasure.
5. *Yīrya*, the dauntless energy that fights its way to Truth.
6. *Dhyāna*, the ceaseless contemplation of the Eternal.

She makes clear in the following passage that these six Virtues have to be mastered before the pilgrim can reach the other shore and reach the fruits of Arhatship.

Before thou canst approach the last, O weaver of thy freedom, thou hast to master these Pāramitās of perfection . . .

Because the path is long and weary, HPB reminds the disciple of his Great Vision. The neophyte discovered himself in the Vale of Bliss, and in that very discovery he came face to face with the Master. It was at this point of discovery that the Master pointed the Way. If the disciple loses this Vision, if the joy of discovery fades out, then the treading of the Path will become utterly exhausting. HPB reminds the disciple of this, when she says:

For, O disciple! Before thou wert made fit to meet thy Teacher face to face, thy MASTER light to light, what wert thou told?

In the Vale of Bliss the neophyte meets the Master, for the discovery of oneself is in a mysterious manner the discovery of the Master too. And so let not the neophyte forget the supreme state of discovery; let him be rooted there so that he cannot go astray. Let the state of discovery be his constant background in the midst of the innumerable details of the Path. It is this background which HPB has very beautifully described in the following passage:

Of teachers there are many; the MASTER-SOUL is one, Ālaya, the Universal Soul.  
Live in that MASTER as ITS ray in thee.

To live in Ālaya—the Universal Soul—that is to be in the Vale of Bliss, that is the condition where the ocean merges in the drop and the drop slips within the ocean. It is this which HPB had earlier described as the blending of the Create and the Uncreate. Once again she says:

Before thou standest on the threshold of the Path; before thou crossest the foremost Gate, thou hast to merge two into One, and sacrifice the personal to SELF impersonal.

It is necessary for the neophyte to keep this Vision undimmed, for without its light he cannot cross even the first stage on this Path. He has indeed to carry the full harvest of dhyāna into the land of samādhi. On the Path of Perfection, he goes out to share, but what will he share if the priceless gift has been left behind? The great boon of Ālaya must ever remain with him, as otherwise the journey on the Path will be devoid of all meaning. That this Path from Initiation to Perfection is the one where he disciple shares what he has received is evident from what HPB says in the following passage:

Hast thou attuned thy heart and mind to the great mind and heart of all mankind? For as the sacred River's roaring voice whereby all Nature-sounds are echoed back, so must the heart of him 'who in the stream would enter,' thrill in response to every sigh and thought of all that lives and breathes.

It is but obvious that he who goes out to share must be attuned to the heart and the mind of those with whom he wishes to share. If this attunement is not there, then the sharing has no meaning. Without this attunement, the sharing is artificial and lacks spontaneity; it will be like the superior bestowing alms on the inferior! No real sharing can be done in such an atmosphere of superiority. Sharing demands the climate of love where the heart of the disciple beats in unison with the heart of mankind. The whole act of sharing has been most beautifully illustrated by HPB in the following passage:

Disciples may be likened to the strings of the soul-echoing *Vīṇā*; mankind, unto its sounding board; the hand that sweeps it to the tuneful breath of the GREAT WORLD-SOUL. The string that fails to answer 'neath the Master's touch in dulcet harmony with all the others, breaks—and is cast away.

This is a very apt illustration, for it sums up the whole problem of the Path of Initiation most beautifully. It indicates that the individual string of the *vīṇā* must be perfectly tuned, but its tuning must also harmonize with the other strings. The individual string represents the disciple; the sound-board with the other strings symbolizes humanity. But who is the musician? It is the Master himself, for as HPB says, "the string that fails to answer 'neath the Master's touch in the dulcet harmony with all the others, breaks and is cast away." This is the essential condition of sharing on the Path of Perfection. The disciple must be attuned to himself, and he must be attuned to all that lives. But if he is attuned to himself, his true Self—to the Vision which he was privileged to see in the moment of Meditation—then he will naturally be attuned to all life. For in the attuning of himself to HIMSELF he becomes attuned to the Master—to Ālaya, to the Universal Soul. And since the Universal Soul contains all Life, the attunement to ONESELF is indeed the attunement to ALL. And so let the Vision of *what he is* ever remain bright, for only in the light of that Vision will he be able to walk on

the Path of Perfection. If the Vision is not there he is likely to become a victim to the many pitfalls that lie on his way.

Just as for *dhyāna* (meditation) there has to be a continuous background of *dhāraṇā* (concentration), similarly for *samādhi* (contemplation) there has to be a continuous background of *dhyāna*. These three states form an integrated whole, and therefore their nature can never be understood in isolation. It is interesting to relate these three states with the three qualifications of *viveka* (discrimination), *vairāgya* (desirelessness), and *shatsampatti* (good conduct) listed by Śrī Śankarachārya in his *Viveka Chudamani*. The condition of *dhāraṇā* is the condition of *viveka*, the condition of “voluntary rejection,” of dissociation from the Not-Self, the Self and from the very idea of dissociation. Again, the condition of *dhyāna* is the condition of *vairāgya*, the state of a completely de-conditioned mind, the mind stripped of everything so that it resembles an Empty Cup ready to be filled with the waters of Eternal Life. And the condition of *samādhi* is indeed the condition in which the neophyte is in possession of *shatsampatti*, the six Virtues. It is very interesting to note that HPB too speaks of the six transcendental Virtues—the six Pāramitās.

We must now turn our attention to the consideration of the six Virtues, so essential for the treading of the Path the Path that leads from Initiation to Perfection.

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## Chapter VIII

## THE CROSSING OF THE STREAM

In the course of more than three hundred verses, *The Voice of the Silence* gives a detailed description of the soul's journey from the Hall of Ignorance to the great heights of Arhatship. This journey has been described in Three Fragments—each Fragment representing an important aspect of the soul's spiritual experience. From pratyāhāra to dhāranā, from dhāranā to dhyāna, and from dhyāna to samādhi are the three stages of this fascinating journey. It may be described as the treading of the Path by the disciple in the light of the Great Vision, vouchsafed to him, in the condition where the mind is completely free from all distractions. A distracted mind cannot have a clear vision of life, and, without such clear vision the treading of the Path is utterly impossible.

The spiritual journey may be also depicted by the figure of a circle with its ascending and descending arcs. The ascending arc is the Path of Negativity representing the passage of the neophyte through the Three Halls. The descending arc is the Path of Positivity representing the movement of the disciple through the Three Initiations. There are two points where the ascending and descending arcs meet. They represent the Point of Meditation and the Point of Perfection respectively. They may also be called the Point of Self-knowledge and the Point of Spiritual Wisdom, or *Prajñā*.

While dealing with the subject of the Seven Portals in the Third Fragment, HPB describes *Prajñā* as the last of the Great Portals where the Disciple is created “a Bodhisattva, son of the Dhyanis.” It may be pointed out that the word *Bodhisattva* is used here in the usual Buddhist sense, and not in the sense in which it is used in modern Theosophical literature. According to the Buddhist conception, the Bodhisattva is a state—not an office in the Occult Hierarchy—a state that can be attained by anyone who qualifies for it. The Bodhisattva is not yet a Buddha, but he is one who has refused to accept the “immediate Bliss” of Nirvanā, choosing instead the Path of the Buddha of Compassion, the Path of the *Samyak Sambuddha*. Referring to this culminating point of the Path of Perfection, HPB says:

Yea; on the Ārya Path thou art no more Srotāppatti, thou art a Bodhisattva. The Stream is crossed. ‘Tis true thou hast a right to Dharmakāya vesture; but Sambhogakāya is greater than a Nirvāṇī, and greater still is a Nirmānakāya—the Buddha of Compassion.

It is interesting to note that at both the points, where the ascending and the descending arcs meet, the spiritual pilgrim is faced with choices. We may describe these points as the Point of Self-knowledge—the point where the neophyte enters the stream; and the Point of Spiritual Wisdom—the point where the pilgrim has crossed the stream. In the modern Theosophical literature we are familiar with the idea of the Seven Choices, the choices that open out before man as he stands on the threshold of Perfection. The Point of Spiritual Wisdom, the point where the initiate stands at the height of Arhatship, is the point where the spiritual pilgrim is faced with the Seven

Choices. It is at this point that he really decides whether to don the Dharmakāya or the Sambhogakāya or the Nirmānakāya vesture. But these Seven Choices are preceded by another choice and that occurs at the Point of Self-knowledge, the point of Initiation where the pilgrim enters the stream. Here the choice is of the Seven Rays. The neophyte determines his Ray—his true Type—for Self-knowledge is essentially the knowledge of one's own essential nature, the quality of one's own being. And the Ray is the original nature of man. The Ray is discovered in utter silence, in the moment of Meditation. As one reaches this state of Meditation, from moment to moment, one gets a clearer picture of one's own Ray, one's own original nature. And it is in the ecstasy of this discovery that the neophyte enters the stream and goes to the other shore along the Path of Perfection.

In the spiritual literature, *samādhi* is oftentimes described as trance. Now to be in a trance is indeed to be in a state of fullness. In the moment of such fullness, the duality of the subject and the object does not exist. It is the non-existence of duality that is the fundamental characteristic of trance. Paradoxically, to discover oneself is to forget oneself! The joy of discovery is such that the discoverer and the object of discovery have merged into one. The Path and the one who treads the Path are not two different things. The disciple has himself *become* the Path; when this happens the neophyte is in a condition of *samādhi*, or trance.

In the First Fragment, HPB mentions, "Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself." Such a state comes in the fullness of discovery, the discovery which is the pin-point of Self-knowledge. It is in the ecstasy of Self-knowledge that the spiritual pilgrim enters the stream; he begins his journey on the Path Proper, the Path of Perfection.

In the last chapter, we saw that the spiritual pilgrim needs inner as well as outer instruments—what have been described as the six transcendental Virtues. This idea of the inner and the outer instruments is to be found in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali where he unfolds the eightfold path of Yoga. According to this system, the path of Yoga has eight limbs, or instruments. Of these eight instruments, four are outer and the other four are inner. The Path of Perfection that is unfolded in *The Voice of the Silence* is one in which there are six instruments—the six Pāramitās—of which three are outer and the other three are inner. The outer instruments deal with the pattern of behavior, while the inner instruments deal with the source or the background of behavior. In other words, these instruments deal with the structural and the functional, the form and the life, aspects of the movement of the spiritual pilgrim on the Path of Perfection. Just as life and form must co-exist, similarly the inner and the outer instruments must remain together. The one is tangible, the other is intangible. The pattern or behavior is something tangible, while the background or the source of behavior is something intangible. But let not the spiritual pilgrim commit the mistake of regarding the intangible as unreal. Without the presence of the intangible background—the Source—the tangible pattern of behavior becomes only an empty form. This is one of the greatest pitfalls on the Path of Perfection. Many a time the disciple begins to emulate someone else's pattern of behavior, for example, that of the Master. But that which is imitated has no quality of life in it; it is not natural. An imitated behavior is an empty form, and the disciple begins to imitate only when the vision of Self-knowledge is

dimmed. Only a self-initiated behavior, the behavior that emerges from Self-knowledge, can be called spiritual, for it alone shines with the quality of one's original nature. Therefore the inner background of Self-knowledge is essential for the outer pattern of behavior, if the spiritual pilgrim is not to fall a victim before the pitfalls and temptations of the Path.

The six Pāramitās—or the six transcendental Virtues indicate both the source and the pattern of spiritual behavior. They begin with *dāna* (charity). One of the most outstanding characteristics of a spiritual man is his generosity. He is generous to a fault. The basis of true spiritual life is a charitable view of all that exists. As HPB says, *dāna* is the “gate that standeth at the entrance of the Path.” Without crossing this gate it is impossible for the spiritual pilgrim to move further. Why is charity placed at the very entrance of the Path? We must remember that the Path of Perfection is the path where the disciple shares what he has found. And how is sharing possible without charity? To be charitable is to give of oneself unreservedly. If there is any holding back, any reserve or hesitation, then the pilgrim is not armed with the key of charity. And when is there a holding back? Usually when we are afraid of losing something. We cling fast to that which we fear losing. And so with one part of our being we guard that to which we are clinging, and with the other part we try to give whatever we can. Obviously such giving is calculated, without the fullness of heart. In such giving there is a motive—the motive of earning some kind of reward. Therefore it is neither natural nor spontaneous. There may be an outward pattern of giving, but not the heart of giving. Such a pattern of giving is an empty form, its source vitiated, its background impure, for where there is clinging, there is impurity.

If our charity does not emerge from the background of *shīla* (harmony), it is not charity at all. HPB describes *shīla* as harmony in word and act. Essentially, it means character, and it is this aspect of character that must exist as the intangible background of charity. Character is something intangible, yet it forms the very foundation of the spiritual life. But what is character? We might say it is the fundamental quality of one's own being. He who is aware of the quality of his own being is well established in life. The Bhagavad Gita describes such a person as “satisfied in SELF by SELF.” He is complete within himself, and therefore does not crave for something with which to fill his incompleteness. He who has a feeling of incompleteness is devoid of character. It is out of a feeling of incompleteness that he clings to something, and thus makes his charity halting and hesitant. But what has a man of character to lose? How can he lose his original nature, the quality of his own being? Only those things which are acquired can be lost, but that which is original remains. It is of this that the Bhagavad Gita speaks when it says:

Weapons cleave him not, nor fire burneth him, nor waters wet him, nor wind  
drieth him away.

And so where there is character, there is no fear. It is only those without fear who can show forth *dāna*—true charity—for they have nothing to lose and therefore give fully and unreservedly. Let fear creep into the heart of the disciple, and then will the key of charity grow rusty and fail to open the gate giving entrance to the Path. HPB says:

Beware of this, O candidate! Beware of fear that spreadeth, like the black and soundless wings of midnight bat, between the moonlight of thy Soul and thy great goal that loometh in the distance far away.

When the vision of the Self becomes dim; when that Vision which the neophyte had perceived in the moment of Meditation has faded away—then fear enters. The undimmed vision of one's own true nature—that indeed is *shīla*, or character. And it is this which must remain as the intangible background of *dāna*, or charity. While the one is an inner instrument, the other is outer. In other words, *dāna* is the pattern of behavior even as *shīla* is the source of behavior. Without character, our charity is only an empty form. If we are not able to show forth real charity in our life, it is because we have not found our true character.

It is this character which represents the first of the great Initiations on the Path of Perfection. In the Hindu tradition this is known as the stage of a mendicant, called *Kutīchaka*—one who has built a hut for himself, meaning that he is firmly established in the hut of Self-knowledge. The *Kutīchaka* is no longer restless, finding stability in the awareness of his own original nature, content to live in his own dwelling, not craving for the palace of another. This awareness fills him with limitless joy, and it is in the fullness of joy that he shows forth *dāna* in his daily behavior. The charity that comes out of the fullness of heart—that alone is natural; all else is cultivated and artificial. As mentioned before, a virtue that is not natural is a pseudo-virtue, which is to say, no virtue at all.

Very often we see display and ostentation in acts of charity. Needless to say, such display negates the very spirit of charity. In public display, there is an underlying desire to seek recognition from others. But who seeks recognition from others? Obviously, he who has not recognized himself! The charity of one who has recognized himself remains forever anonymous. He who knows himself does not require to be called by the name that others have given him. His true name is much too sacred to be uttered. Thus the *dāna* of one who is rooted in *shīla* remains anonymous, something that requires tremendous strength; and such strength comes only from character. The disciple who has come to the First Initiation is well established in his character; he lives in the hut of his own Nature and is therefore boundless in his charity. And the greatest charity is that in which the individual gives of himself freely, without the slightest reservation. When the pattern of pure charity is visible in the life of a disciple, then has he mastered the two *Pāramitās*—he has taken the first of the Great Initiations on the Path of Perfection. And pure charity is that which emerges from the source of *shīla*. HPB rightly says:

If lacking in the *Shīla* virtue—the pilgrim trips, and Karmic pebbles bruise his feet long the rocky path.

With *shīla* as the intangible background and *dāna* as the tangible pattern of behavior, the spiritual pilgrim can climb onwards to the further heights of the great *Pāramitās*.

The next stage on the Path of Initiations is *kshānti*, meaning fortitude and patience. Earlier HPB describes it as “patience sweet, that nought can ruffle.” But

referring to this stage, she asks the disciple to “be of sure foot.” Why is this warning given to the disciple as he approaches the gate of kshānti? The reason is that patience is sometimes mistaken for mere passivity. If the disciple relapses into a passive condition, then he will become prey to various temptations, which will assail him on this part of the journey. The patience which “nought can ruffle” does not arise out of a passive condition. As the next passage indicates, such patience needs a tremendous amount of strength.

The path that leadeth on, is lighted by one fire—the light of daring, burning in the heart. The more one dares, the more he shall obtain.

One does not usually associate the element of daring with the quality of patience. And yet, does not patience demand extraordinary courage? To be patient when one’s plans and designs lie shattered in dust is not easy. To be patient in the face of life’s adversities requires the heart of a lion. What is it that sustains such patience? Is it some vague hope? If so, it will get ruffled in no time. For in such a case, there is not a willing acceptance of the present, but rather the looking forward to a brighter future. This hope surely is caused by some lingering fear in the heart of the disciple. HPB refers to this in the following passage:

For as the lingering sunbeam, that on the top of some tall mountain shines, is followed by black night when out it fades, so is heart-light. When out it goes, a dark and threatening shade will fall from thine own heart upon the path, and root thy feet in terror to the spot.

*The Voice of the Silence* warns the disciple against “that lethal shade.” If patience has not to derive its sustenance from hope, then how will it be sustained? What is its life-giving force? At this point HPB asks a question to the disciple:

O fearless Aspirant, look deep within the well of thine own heart, and answer.  
Knowest thou of Self the powers, O thou perceiver of external shadows?

Obviously the patience that nought can ruffle has to be sustained from within, from the true vision of the Self. The patience that depends upon external shadows, in the shape of hope, will not last for long. It is from the very depths of one’s own being that the sustaining life-force of patience has to be derived. Without it, patience is an empty form, a mere outer pattern subject to destruction by the storms and stresses of human existence. And what is the life-giving force of the patience that nought can ruffle? To understand this, one must ponder deeply over a very significant passage in *The Voice*:

Thou hast to study the voidness of the seeming full, the fullness of the seeming void.

This is obviously a paradoxical statement. It indicates that that which is seemingly full is utterly empty, and that which appears to be void has a fullness in it. To see void in fullness and to perceive fullness in void—this is what the Bhagavad Gita describes as the state of the *Muni*, the Sage “who has forever cast away desire, fear, and passion.”

To regard night as day, and day as night, as the Gita suggests—this is what HPB calls “void in fullness and fullness in void.” He who understands this knows the “patience that nought can ruffle.” This is what is described in *The Voice* as *virāga*:

“indifference to pleasure and pain, illusion conquered, truth alone perceived.” It is virāga, or dispassion, which alone provides the sustaining life-force for kshānti, or patience. Without dispassion, one’s patience will be weak and trembling, the passivity of a timid person. It is virāga that gives strength to kshānti and sustains it in the midst of life’s vicissitudes.

But what is meant by dispassion? Is it indifference and insensitivity born out of the suppression of emotions? If so, the result will not be patience, but cynicism.

Stern and exacting is the virtue of Virāga. If thou its path wouldst master, thou must keep thy mind and thy perceptions far freer than before from killing action.

Thou hast to saturate thyself with pure Ālaya, become as one with Nature’s Soul-thought. At one with it thou art invincible: in separation thou becomest the playground of Samvritti . . .

Here HPB has explained the whole nature of virāga. It is a condition where the mind is utterly free. But this freedom comes only when the disciple is saturated with pure Ālaya—in other words, when he has “become as one with Nature’s Soul-thought.” To be one with Nature’s Soul-thought is to be free from the conflict of wills. In our life, there is a ceaseless conflict between the Will of Nature and the will of the mind. We identify ourselves with the will of the mind and call it ‘Our Will.’ Man forever tries to subdue the Will of Nature, but here he fails again and again. He ascribes this failure to the workings of Karma. But if he would only dissociate himself from the will of the mind, he would realize that his will and the Will of Nature are not different. HPB says: “At one with it thou art invincible.” He who is one with the Will of Nature is indeed unconquerable; in fact, he has transcended the plane of conflict. The man of virāga, or dispassion, is invincible and therefore he accepts life as it comes. He has no desire to wish for life other than what it is.

The state of virāga is associated with the Second Initiation. In Hindu tradition this is known as *Bahūdaka*. This is the type of ascetic who receives whatever is given to him by way of alms. He is a person with no attachments and no repulsions. To receive life as it is demands great inner strength. It is no gospel of passivity. Only the person who has conquered all desires can have the courage to accept life as it comes.

It is this strength of virāga, which expresses itself as patience, or kshānti, in the outer pattern of the disciple’s behavior. The former is the source while the latter is the outer form of behavior. The spiritual pilgrim has reached the second of the Great Initiations, showing forth charity and patience in his outer behavior because he is rooted in character and dispassion. The latter two represent his communion with Ālaya; they indicate the Great Vision of the Self which was vouchsafed to him ere he entered the Path of Perfection. At this point, the disciple has conquered four of the six Pāramitās. But he has yet to move to greater heights if he would attain to Arhatship.

In the religious philosophies of the world, God, or the Ultimate Reality, has always been regarded as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. In Hinduism, this triple aspect of God is symbolized by *Sat* (existence), *Chit* (consciousness), and *Ānanda* (bliss). A familiar but very significant aphorism states: “As above, so below.” And so

the Sat, Chit, and Ānanda of the Supreme Godhead are reflected in the human being as will, wisdom, and activity (or love). The disciple on the Path of Perfection is essentially concerned with the unfoldment of these qualities.

We have so far considered two of these attributes under charity and patience—charity representing the divine attribute of love, and patience representing wisdom. These are once again the reflections of Ānanda and Chit, or existence and consciousness. Interestingly enough, Ānanda is represented by *shīla* (character) even as Chit is represented by *virāga* (dispassion). Perhaps this needs a little explanation.

Charity can be genuine only if it is a reflection of Ānanda (bliss). If giving is not a joy, then it is no giving at all. When the individual begins to feel the strain of charity, when a thought arises—“how long have I to give?”—then charity becomes a sterile, lifeless pattern. Therefore it must exist in the continuous background of bliss, so that the giver is not even conscious that he is giving. Now what greater state of bliss can there be than the awareness of the quality of one’s own Being? This awareness leads to an indescribable joy, which is reflected in that activity called *dāna*, charity immortal. Whichever activity emerges from this source of bliss is true charity. It alone can be called Service—all else is self-seeking.

Similarly *kshānti*, or patience, is the wisdom aspect of the human individual. In fact, patience is wisdom incarnate, for it is only the wise who can be patient. But sometimes this waiting is actually a sign of weakness, of timidity. Afraid to act, a person may appear to be patient, but this is the patience of the weak and not of the strong. What is the patience of the strong? It is the reflection of *Chit*, or consciousness. The consciousness that is free from all modifications is what is known as *Chit* in Hindu philosophy. The consciousness which is subject to modifications is described by HPB as one that is the “playground of *Samvritti*.” Now *virāga*, or dispassion, is that condition of consciousness where no modifications occur. Where this background of non-modification does not exist, there patience is but an empty pattern, motivated by hope and fear. It represents only the unruffled body, but not the unruffled mind. How long can such patience last? The disciple will be constantly thrown off balance because of the modifications occurring in his consciousness. True wisdom consists in the non-modification of consciousness. And so patience, which is the symbol of wisdom in the human being, can function only in the background of dispassion. In *virāga* is reflected the divine quality of Chit or consciousness.

The disciple has now climbed the four Pāramitās. He shows forth activity and wisdom as reflections of Ānanda and Chit. But in his journey towards Perfection he must become an embodiment of Will—the Will which is the reflection of Sat or existence. It is to this that HPB turns when she speaks of *vīrya*, “the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal TRUTH, out of the mire of lies terrestrial.” And *vīrya* is indeed strength. “It is not the weaklings who can tread the Path of the Spirit”—such has been the saying of the ancient sages of India. Spiritual life demands inexhaustible strength. HPB says:

Make hard thy Soul against the snares of self; deserve for it the name of  
“Diamond-Soul.”

Diamond-Soul—*Vajrasattva*—is a title of the Supreme Buddha. In Sanskrit, *Vajra* is the thunderbolt. And so the Diamond-Soul evidently means as strong as the thunderbolt. In the Sanskrit literature, the spiritual person is sometimes described as one who “is as strong as the thunderbolt and yet as tender as a flower.” HPB gives the same idea in the following passage:

. . . thy Soul has to become as the ripe mango fruit: as soft and sweet as its bright golden pulp for others’ woes, as hard as that fruit’s stone for thine own throes and sorrows, O Conquerer of Weal and Woe.

Thus the quality of *vīrya*, or strength, is essential if the disciple is to move further on the Path of Perfection. In the climbing of the *Pāramitās*, this is perhaps the steepest climb—but climb he must if he is to rise to the heights of Arhatship. After dealing with the Virtues of *kshānti* and *virāga*—patience and dispassion—HPB goes on to say:

Thou hast now crossed the moat that circles round the gate of human passions.  
Thou hast now conquered Māra and his furious host.

Thou hast removed pollution from thine heart and bled it from impure desire.  
But, O thou glorious combatant, thy task is not yet done.

She describes the disciple here as a “glorious combatant,” indicating thereby that it is the strength or *vīrya* that is now required of him. She has described most graphically the condition of this glorious combatant in the following passage:

The fearless warrior, his precious life-blood oozing from his wide and gaping wounds, will still attack the foe, drive him from his stronghold, vanquish him, ere he himself expires.

What is this fight in which the disciple is asked to engage on this Path to Perfection? Why is the strength of the Lanoos called for? It is to build the dam which will protect his mind “from pride and satisfaction at thoughts of the great feat achieved.”

Aye, build it strong, lest the fierce rush of battling waves, that mount and beat its shore from out of the great world Maya’s Ocean, swallow up the pilgrim and the isle—yea, even when the victory’s achieved.

It is the “sense of pride that would mar the work,” for pride is the greatest obstacle in the path of man—one of the fetters which clings to the disciple up to the last.

But will not this very strength shown by the disciple give rise to subtle pride? Will not the thoughts of “the great feat achieved” assail him even more? Will not the wall that “shall hedge in the Holy Isle” cause him to be separated from Ālaya, rendering him a “playground of Samvritti”? That indeed is the great danger which faces the disciple at this stage. His strength must be mellowed down if it is not to shut him away from communion with Ālaya. While strong as a thunderbolt, he must be tender as a flower, for otherwise the pride of achievement will drag him down even from the threshold.

And so *vīrya* must exist in the background of *dhyāna*. Here *dhyāna* is not meditation but pure contemplation. Patanjali in his *Yoga Sūtras* gives a two-fold aspect of *samādhi*. In one form of *samādhi* there is the “object thought upon.” But there is a

higher form of samādhi which is described as *nirvikalpa samādhi*—a state in which there is not even the existence of object thought upon. This is indeed pure contemplation. HPB has beautifully described this condition as follows:

Thou hast to feel thyself ALL-THOUGHT and yet exile all thoughts from out thy Soul.

To feel ALL-THOUGHT and yet to have no thought—that is the state of pure contemplation, or dhyāna. It is this pure contemplation that must become the background for vīrya, for then the disciple will be able to show forth the hardness of the thunderbolt with the tenderness of a flower. HPB explains this condition of pure contemplation further in the following passage:

Thou hast to reach that fixity of mind in which no breeze, however strong, can waft an earthly thought within. Thus purified, the shrine must of all action, sound, or earthly light be void.

The disciple must have fixity of mind. Since thought is the movement of the mind, it is only when the shrine is completely void of all “action, sound or earthly light” that fixity can come into existence. HPB here quotes from the Bhagavad Gita:

“Ere the gold flame can burn with steady light, the lamp must stand well guarded in a spot free from all wind.”

In the circumstances of life, fierce winds will blow; they cannot be stopped. But they will not “waft an earthly thought” within the mind of the disciple. If the flame of his mind flickers, then the strength that he displays will destroy and stifle others. Such strength will tend to move him in the direction of power and authority, the instruments of spiritual and material exploitation. If vīrya does not shine in the setting of dhyāna (pure contemplation), the strength of the disciple will be oppressive. It is pure contemplation that surrounds strength with humility. In its absence, it will be a pattern of domination and not of protection. How can the Buddha of Compassion be born out of such strength? Vīrya that is mellowed down by dhyāna—such strength alone has a spiritual quality in it. What happens when this mellowing influence is absent? HPB describes it in the following passage:

And then, O thou pursuer of the truth, thy Mind-Soul will become as a mad elephant, that rages in the jungle. Mistaking forest trees for living foes, he perishes in his attempts to kill the ever-shifting shadows dancing on the wall of sunlit rocks.

Very often man mistakes the aggressive and dominating tendencies of his mind to be his will. But, in fact, will is indeed the most quiet thing in the world, for it derives this quietness from the condition of pure contemplation. For this, the will of man must become a reflection of Sat, or Existence. When human will ceases to reflect this quality of Sat, then truly it runs like a mad elephant destroying itself in the pursuit of “ever-shifting shadows.” HPB states this idea as follows:

Beware, lest in the care of Self thy Soul should lose her foothold on the soil of Deva-knowledge.

It is the “soil of Deva-knowledge” which truly is the condition of Sat—and the disciple must see that he does not lose his foothold on that soil. The strength of man must have its roots in the soil of Deva-knowledge. When this happens the disciple has ascended the steep climb. He has mastered the six Pāramitās, he is endowed with the six transcendental Virtues. He has reached the Third Initiation—that of *Hamsa*—he, who rooted in the soil of Deva-Knowledge, discriminates the Eternal from the transitory.

Thus *dāna*, *kshānti* and *vīrya*—charity, patience, and strength—represent love, wisdom, and will in man; but they do so only inasmuch as they reflect in *Ānanda*, *Chit*, and *Sat* as symbolized by *shīla*, *virāga*, and *dhyāna*—character, dispassion and pure contemplation. Without the inner background of the three virtues, the outer instruments have no significance. They are mere empty patterns. He who imitates the outer patterns of charity, patience, and strength does not climb the Pāramitā heights. It is only when the content of character, dispassion, and pure contemplation shine through the outer patterns that the disciple stands on the heights of the Pāramitās, ready to enter the realm of *Prajñā*, or Spiritual Wisdom. The entry of the disciple into this realm of *Prajñā* has been colorfully described by HPB:

. . . all Nature thrills with joyous awe and feels subdued. The silver star now twinkles out the news to the night-blossoms, the streamlet to the pebbles ripples out the tale; dark ocean-waves will roar it to the rocks surf-bound, scent-laden breezes sing it to the vales, and stately pines mysteriously whisper: “A Master has arisen, a MASTER OF THE DAY”.

He standeth now like a white pillar to the west, upon whose face the rising Sun of thought eternal poureth forth its first most glorious waves. His mind, like a becalmed and boundless ocean, spreadeth out in shoreless space. He holdeth life and death in his strong hand.

The disciple has crossed the stream—he has reached the shores of *Prajñā*. He has passed the Seventh Portal and now shines with the glory of Spiritual Wisdom. He becomes a co-worker of *Amitābhā*—the Boundless Age—shedding the “light acquired upon the span of all three worlds.” He is described as the Channel of *Ālaya* “pouring forth into another bed the stream of superhuman knowledge and the Deva-Wisdom” he has won.

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We have described the Path of Perfection as the Path of Positivity. On this Path the neophyte passes through the Three Great Initiations and comes to the Fourth wherein he has the Vision of Perfection. This Path of Perfection in many respects corresponds to the Path of Liberation—the Path of Negativity. On the Path of Negativity the neophyte passes through the Three Halls corresponding to the Three Initiations of the Path of Perfection. The passage through the Three Halls results in the neophyte freeing himself from the conditioning factors of the Three Gunas—*Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva*—Inertia, Activity, and Equilibrium. On the Path of Perfection the neophyte passing through the Three Initiations unfolds the Three Qualities of the Soul—Will, Wisdom, and Love. From the Three Halls the neophyte enters the Vale of Bliss with his mind

utterly unconditioned and therefore reaching the state of Spiritual Individualization. On the Path of Perfection the neophyte passes through the Three Initiations and enters the realm of Prajñā, reaching the state of Spiritual Perfection. The Path of Liberation is the path where the neophyte frees himself from the conditioning factors of the mind. The Path of Perfection is the path where the neophyte unfolds the inherent qualities of his Being. On the former Path he ceases to become “something”; on the latter he *becomes what he is*.

It needs to be remembered that the neophyte can successfully travel on the Path of Perfection only if he brings with him the harvest of the Path of Liberation. And what is the harvest of the Path of Liberation? It is utter Negativity, the vast Nothingness, the absolute Void. It is this which must remain the constant background of all that the neophyte does on the Path of Perfection. We have seen that the inner virtues of *shīla*, *virāga* and *dhyāna* contribute this background of Negativity to the positive patterns of conduct represented by *dāna*, *kshānti* and *vīrya*. Thus the treading of the Path of Perfection is possible only if there is the co-existence of the Positive and the Negative—the co-existence of Action and Inaction.

The man of Prajñā, he who follows the Path traversed by the Buddhas of Compassion, becomes a living stone in the Guardian Wall which “shields mankind, protecting it from further and far greater misery and sorrow.” He renounces the joys of heaven, the Bliss of Nirvanā, for how can he enter the region of Bliss when all that lives must suffer? He has made the choice: “Not until all men are freed from sorrow and suffering shall I enter the Bliss of Nirvanā.” In this declaration the entire creation doth rejoice, for:

Behold, the mellow light that floods the Eastern sky. In signs of praise both heaven and earth unite. And from the fourfold manifested Powers a chant of love ariseth, both from the flaming Fire and flowing Water, and from sweet-smelling Earth and rushing Wind.

Hark! . . . from the deep unfathomable vortex of that golden light in which the Victor bathes, ALL NATURE’S wordless voice in thousand tones ariseth to proclaim:

JOY UNTO YE, O MEN OF MYALBA  
A PILGRIM HATH RETURNED BACK  
“FROM THE OTHER SHORE.”  
A NEW ARHAN IS BORN . . .