

Initiation

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There is an article by T. Subba Row, whom HPB held in very high regard as an occultist, entitled 'The Occultism of South India'. In that he speaks of the two Paths, one of which is the steady, natural path of progress, on which there is all-round and sure growth. The other is through a series of initiations, and only a few specially organized and peculiar natures are fit for this. People who progress along the easier, natural path do not in any way suffer by doing so, nor is the final attainment anything less, but the Path of Initiation is meant only for certain people, because it is really a forcing process. Instead of developing very gradually and comparatively easily, the chela is helped to hasten his own growth and attain prematurely, so to speak, a knowledge of his spiritual nature. There is a relation set up between the pupil or chela and the Adept who directs through the chela various occult forces which force his growth.

Subba Row says further that Sri Sankaracharya, whom HPB speaks of in *The Secret Doctrine* as the greatest Initiate in historic ages, recommended the natural, easy, steady path to those who followed him, and to his successors in that particular office. We must not imagine that Adeptship and Initiation are chance happenings; they are strictly a product of Nature. The Adept Hierarchy has its important function, which is to keep open the upward Path through which descend the forces needed for humanity's growth.

The forcing process can easily become dangerous to those who are not ready for it, and it does sometimes happen that one of those who is taken onto the pathway of Initiation drops off from it and temporarily comes to grief. Subba Row points out that 'it is eminently dangerous to those who do not hold the talisman of a perfectly unselfish, self-forgetting, self-annihilating devotion to the religious good of humanity, a self-abnegation which has no end forever'.

Initiation is not the fulfilling of a personal, spiritual ambition, the attainment of a height of greatness, or the coming into possession of extraordinary powers which one can imagine will be wielded for the benefit of mankind, but may in fact be for the pleasure in wielding such forces. Spiritual ambition is a contradiction in terms, and highly dangerous for the one who seeks to tread the Path. What is required, let us repeat, is 'the talisman of a perfectly unselfish, self-forgetting, self-annihilating devotion to the religious [we might say the "spiritual"] good' of humanity. Such abnegation means self-abnegation in action, as well as in motive, not saying 'I am willing to practise self-abnegation in order to gain something.' There is no self-abnegation if you consider the extent to which you will undergo various hardships, suffer humiliation, place yourself in the background in order to gain everything. No, it must be 'a self-abnegation which has no end forever'. Those are very beautiful words which we will do well to take to heart.

Subba Row goes on to say that without this talisman the progress of the chela may be very rapid for a while but the time will come when his upward advance will be arrested. So he says it is wiser not to seek the path of chelaship, because when one seeks there is always motive centred in the self. If you, the self, do not exist at all, how can you want something? The chela does not need to seek at all, for the path will not fail to find the fit person. This may sound discouraging, but it is in fact very thrilling: One seeks nothing, neither the Path, nor eminence, nor attainment, but only to give of what one has and if the Path finds you, well and good, you tread it. Otherwise you develop in the natural course of things. It is *very important* to stress this because there are so many people who seek a guru, chelaship, and Initiation, and who want to be advanced in various ways. Eventually they will find that such searching does not result in success. There may be success up to a point, but not in the real sense.

The simile which has been used to describe the Path is of a way which winds round and round a mountain to the summit. The mass of humanity are intended just to go round—the Fourth Round, the Fifth Round, and so on—and eventually all are meant to arrive at the summit. But there is also the possibility of ascending straight up the steep mountainside, not by the well-worn pathway, thus taking a shortcut to the summit. Naturally it is difficult. Pursuing this simile further, the straight shortcut will intercept the winding pathway at several points, and each of the intersecting points may be thought of as marking one of the Initiations.

Initiation is not for the personality but the Ego which is at the back of the personality and which puts out a new personality in each incarnation. It is an opening-up of the consciousness of the Ego, which has various possibilities on the spiritual plane, but which remain dormant for a long time. They are of course meant to come to flower and fruition, and it is possible by means of certain forces, of which we can have very little conception, to awaken these latent powers.

The Ego is the individual as he exists on the ‘higher’ mental plane, the plane of the mind which is not influenced by various material associations and desires, and which is the pure intelligence. Since this is our spiritual nature at a certain level, we must understand that nature in order to know how it may be forced into activity.

Theosophical literature provides a certain conception of the human constitution at different levels: beyond the Ego at a deeper level there is the Monad, which is the spiritual essence of the individual. When Initiation takes place, it is said that the Monad descends into the Ego and becomes one with it for the time being. These two levels of being become one. That is what is meant by saying that the Monad descends into the Ego. Even though the Ego is spiritual, incorruptible, yet the deeper nature which normally remains quiescent and aloof is brought into action through the Ego at the moment of Initiation when it is subjected to certain forces.

The superficial idea about Initiation is that a person goes to a certain room, somebody comes and tells him various things, he is told to put on a different robe, presented with a talisman and so forth. That would be a poor view. Initiation means that the deepest aspect of oneself

moves towards the surface, and the Monad takes the vow through the Ego.

This is really a vow of self-surrender, a resolve to give oneself completely to the service of humanity and all that lives. It is not administered from outside, and accepted for certain reasons; that would be a mental way of looking at the whole thing. In reality the vow is an evolution of the inmost purpose of the Ego himself, or itself. It is not merely accepted, saying you will carry it out to the best of your ability, but it means that you discover your own inmost purpose, your own inmost nature. It is really a translation of that nature into terms of the intellect or mind. And we must regard all this in the most natural terms possible; the more natural a thing appears, the truer it is likely to be.

But while the Monad descends into the Ego, or we might say the Ego unifies himself with the Monad, at the same time the Ego descends into the personality. There is dual movement. It cannot but be so, because all these planes are related to one another, and if the Ego receives certain forces of tremendous potency, they must to some extent filter down into the personality.

We cannot understand too well the relationship between the Ego and the Monad; we can think more easily of the relationship between the Ego and the personality. When the former descends into the personality it is at its best, nobler and more dignified than usual. It has a greater depth, expressing something which it does not normally do. But we must understand these things in terms of our actual experience, and not merely as a diagram. The Ego may be depicted as a triangle and the personality as a square, and a connecting line drawn between them; but we do not thereby understand the significance behind the diagram. All symbols and diagrams are meant only to be aids, so we must try to penetrate the inner meaning of it all. Each one can only do so by himself, and not just by writing down or listening to the words of somebody else.

When a connection is formed between the Ego and the personality, we must remember that this may fall into disuse and become blocked afterwards, for that is the nature of everything that belongs to the three mortal worlds. The spiritual remains uncorrupted as a channel, and whatever flows through it will continue to flow. But in the intellectual or psychic nature, the channel may widen and continue to function, or it may become blocked. There are always these two possibilities with regard to our intermediate nature, the intellectual or psychic, and the lower nature, and material and the physical. All depends upon the individual.

The word 'initiation' means 'a beginning'. We gain a definite touch with our spiritual nature at the First Initiation, first with buddhi, then atman. This beginning is really the planting of a seed. After gaining a little touch, one begins to be more and more aware of that nature. The seed will grow into the Tree of Wisdom. That is the meaning of the Sanskrit word *dvija*, twice-born, a symbolical way of referring to being born out of the mother's body into the physical world, and the second birth in spirit. What is born in spirit? It is the human consciousness, or mind; this is also referred to as the birth of the Christ, or the Christ-nature in the heart of man. There are two ways of looking at this: as the birth of the consciousness in the realm of Spirit or Truth, or the birth of the Spirit in the human consciousness. Both are correct. The connection established between *manas* and that which is beyond *manas*, that is, *atma-buddhi*, is the birth of the consciousness in the realm of the Spirit, and also the birth

of the Spirit in the field of the human consciousness.

The birth of the Christ, *atma-buddhi* or the divine principle, means that the nature of wisdom-love is born in the heart of man; consciousness becomes suffused with the quality of that spiritual nature. The very word 'birth' implies growth by stages up to a point which has been described as the fullness of the stature of the Perfect Man. This does not at all mean that the development stops after that point. It still goes on, but that is a different stage, that of the Perfect Man or the Adept.

The constitution of man envisages seven composite principles. The Perfect Initiate, the Adept, is one in whom the whole of the six principles merges into the seventh. That is how HPB describes the attainment in *The Secret Doctrine*. In ordinary people, the different principles are unevenly developed and uncoordinated; and although they are related to one another, the relationship is far from perfect. But the Perfect Man is one in whom the whole of his nature has become perfectly integrated, unified. He is essentially the seventh principle manifesting itself at the different levels. Each of the six principles becomes one with the seventh, and the nature of the atman is expressed by him at the various levels of the mind, the emotions and so on.

When all the lower principles are merged, they do not cease to exist, but become suffused with the quality of the seventh. Even at the level of the sixth, the nature of the seventh is expressed. It is because an Adept becomes an expression of this seventh principle, the Spirit in its pure, universal nature, that he becomes one of Nature's agents, and a member of what is called the Adept Hierarchy. Every Adept is a different expression from the others of the one universal principle, but there is a common basis: they are all inspired, informed, and animated by the same Spirit. The Adept hierarchy is a natural communion of like Spirits. That is why in the Christian church they use the phrase, 'the communion of saints'.

This Adept Hierarchy is described by HPB 'as an ever-living human Banyan Tree', with a single root and branches which spread, ever widening, but ever remaining the same Tree from the same root. And the Head of the Hierarchy is spoken of by her as 'the Root-Base'. He is also known as the One Initiator. In our scheme of evolution, he represents the seventh, the highest and deepest principle in Nature. It is from that deepest Source that the forces flow which enter into the nature of the Ego, and produce that result which is called Initiation. Therefore, to become an Initiate is to forge a link with the Hierarchy, with all the Adepts, to become part of a Brotherhood which includes all of them. It is only a *beginning*, an entry into a new realm, but even that gives a certain feeling of kinship not only with all the other individuals who have similarly become conscious of the unity, but also with all those lives which are still largely unconscious. An Initiate not only recognizes his brotherhood with other Initiates, but feels like a brother towards every living thing. If we think of Initiation as some peculiar event, an understanding is difficult, but if we think of an Initiate as one who is full of the spirit of kinship with all that lives, then we gain a true understanding. The Initiate enters into the kingdom of Life where no life is strange to him, he is a kinsman of everything that lives.

Of course this Brotherhood exists mainly at the level where the Brothers are conscious of their unity. Initiates on the physical plane, even though they might have gone through an experience which has assured them of the unity of all that lives, yet they are apt to forget that unity and behave as individuals separated from others. The Initiate is not a perfect being: he is only a beginner at living the spiritual life. But at the buddhic, atmic level, the unity is an ever-present, living fact, therefore the Brotherhood exists principally at those levels. Each Initiation—there are a number—is an entry into a new kingdom. There is an expansion of consciousness which becomes more sensitive and capable of functioning in various new ways. This also means a deeper knowledge, a wider consciousness or realization of one's spiritual nature. Therefore it demands the casting off of doubts, illusions, and limitations, which are all fetters. One limitation is uncertainty. When someone is uncertain as to the important things in life, he does not know how to act. If a person suffers from delusions, wrong ideas, prejudices, and fancies, that is also a fetter, as are various wrong reactions, which are all conditioning.

It must be remembered that there must be no suppression of doubts or of anything else. Though one of the fetters is uncertainty or doubt, and another is superstition, casting off does not mean that when there is a doubt, you should try to suppress it, otherwise it is a sin. Nothing is gained eventually by suppressing, which does not mean that you should indulge it. Whatever is suppressed will come up again with redoubled force. To control something with understanding is quite different from suppression, which is blind. What is required is freedom from these disturbances, and the transcending of limitations. This can only come through understanding them. Suppose a man suffers from avarice, lust, or whatever it may be, when he understands what it means, how it arises and acts, and what consequences it has on his own life and the lives of others, he will find he is able to transcend the particular limitation. The Lord Buddha spoke of the four Noble Truths, the last of which was called 'The Noble Eightfold Path', which indicates steps to be practised or requirements to be fulfilled. The first is Right Vision, seeing things rightly, and not according to how one would like them to be, or according to fancies or illusions. When you see things rightly, when you understand that there is no end to craving of whatever sort, that craving is fed by every indulgence, that it is a limitation, when you understand its action, and how it arises, that very understanding will bring about freedom from craving.

In a way, the first fetter called the delusion of the self includes everything, and is the most important. What is meant by self is a question to be considered by each one. In one of the Mahatma Letters, there are the words, 'only a passing guest whose concerns are all like a mirage of the great desert'. A mirage exists for a time and then is no more. The self is like that. As we said, quoting HPB, the Adept or the Perfect Initiate is one in whom all the principles are merged in the seventh, that is, in the one, universal Spirit. If everything is merged there, then where is the self? It does not exist, because only the one Spirit exists, and every individual is a unique manifestation of that one universal Principle. It is in the meanwhile, pending that merging or realization, that there is what we call the self. In occultism there is a distinction between self and Spirit. The Spirit is one universal, but the self is different. The Spirit is indestructible, everlasting; it is neither born nor does it die; it does not reincarnate, because it is not the reincarnating principle. There is also a distinction between Spirit and soul, if we understand by the soul the Ego which reincarnates. The self is

identified with one or other of them: sometimes it is used as equivalent to the one Spirit, and sometimes to the soul. Whenever the word 'self' is used, we have to think of the context; otherwise we will be merely quarrelling over words.

The fetter called superstition is usually interpreted as a belief in rites and ceremonies, but that is a very superficial view. All forms of dependence on something external to oneself leads to superstition. In addition to these three, there are two more fetters to be cast off before one reaches the Fourth or Arhat Initiation, namely, attachment and anger.

If we think of treading the Path in these terms, it becomes real to us. The treading means that we must get rid of all these fetters. That is self-explanatory, we immediately see the rationale of it.

After the four Initiations there is the Fifth, that of the Adept, prior to which there are some fetters of a subtler nature to be cast off, but we need not consider them here. We have to cast off these grosser fetters before we can even begin to understand what those subtler ones are. We know what is anger or dislike, because we have experienced them. But are we sure that is a fetter? Perhaps if I am angry I feel better for it, it is a stimulant to be angry, but I have to realize it is a limitation, that it misleads me, produces wrong relationships with others, blinds me to certain conditions, and opens the way to action in a mechanical manner under the stress of the anger. We must realize that for ourselves, absolutely, quietly, then we will be able to break that fetter.

I dwell repeatedly upon this fact of realization, because we think that when we know the names of a few things we have gained the necessary knowledge. We think if we can repeat the *Bhagavadgita* by heart, we are holy, even though others may not realize it! There is this superstition, that just knowing the words produces the trick.

The Four Initiations are referred to also in Christian symbolism, where they are spoken of as the Birth of the Christ, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, and the Fourth, which is the combined Crucifixion and the Resurrection. A wonderful explanation appears in Dr Besant's *Esoteric Christianity* of the symbolism of the supposed events in the life of the Christ. The Birth of the Christ is the opening of the spiritual consciousness. Baptism is the descent of the forces through the opening which has been made, which brings the possibility of intercommunication between the inner and the outer. When these forces descend, they bring about the Transfiguration of the lower by the higher, a complete change in the nature of the individuality. The fourth stage is the death of all that remains, the hard core of the self, which is the cause of continuity and of repeated rebirths. The sense of I-ness, the hard core of selfhood, is really the cause of rebirth. When that is dissolved, where is the individual? He has become as nothing, which means nothing that he can think of, nothing in terms of the personal experience, 'I am the person who likes or dislikes, behaves in this or that way, remembers this, feels that', and so on. There are all these memories of myself, by means of which I identify myself. But that identification is gone with that Death.

At the end of each incarnation there is the death of the physical, astral, and mental bodies, but that is not a total death. Something remains which produces the new personality—the past karma, the past memories and tendencies. Crucifixion, the Death at the fourth Initiation is a

total death, when the individual is, so to say, dissolved. What remains is purely spiritual. This total death is the counterpart of a complete renewal, the arising of the phoenix or fire-bird out of its ashes. The individuality is the same but new, which is somewhat difficult to understand. Initiation is as mentioned earlier a forcing process; sometimes an individual may in that way be developed forcibly, in order that he may be of help to others. That is the only motive which counts with the Masters, the Adepts. They are not interested in glorifying one person above others. They are one with all. It would be absurd to imagine that because some person gives them great love or reverence, they put him on a pedestal. But if he can be prepared to help others, then perhaps it may be worthwhile, with his consent, of course. The Masters does not come and say, 'I am going to develop you.' But if a person offers to force his own development, then the Master can act as an instrument for the shaping; he can help, and be an accessory. That seems to be permissible under the laws of Karma.

The Lord Buddha is said to have forced His own development to an incredible extent. He was so full of sympathy and compassion, longing to do what he could to help others that he undertook this extraordinarily strenuous task. That must be the only motive for trying such a process of forcing, but growth for all takes place anyhow in the course of Nature, and everyone finally comes to the same level, to the same attainment.

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