



The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 2.2

The Spiritual Path

The Mechanism of Higher Evolution



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The Spiritual Path

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Contents

		Page
• Chapter 2.2	<u>The Spiritual Path</u>	1
	The Spiritual Path	C 18 2
	The Path and the Seven Rays	C 165 3
	The Triple Path	C 409 5
	The Formal Path 1	C 426 7
	The Formal Path 2	C 427 8
	The Formal Path 3	C 428 10
	Paths to God	C 793 12
	Pathquest	C 1434 13
• Section 2.21	<u>Approaching the Path</u>	16
	Paths of Approach 1	C 111 17
	Paths of Approach 2	C 1136 18
	Paths of Approach 3	C 1137 20
	The Call	C 189 22
	Group Approach	C 323 23
	Interest in the Path 1	C 649 25
	Interest in the Path 2	C 650 27
• Section 2.22	<u>Probation</u>	29
	The Path of Probation	C 22 30
	Preliminary Discipline	C 449 31
	Preliminary Endeavors	C 453 33

		Page
• Section 2.23	<u>Discipleship</u>	35
	The Path of Discipleship	C 26 36
	The Dharma of the Disciple	C 60 37
	The Head and Heart-Centeredness	C 1054 39
	The Heart and Head-Centeredness	C 1055 41
	Balance	C 1160 42
• Section 2.24	<u>Initiation</u>	45
	Ascension	C 289 46
	Initiation	C 1014 47
	The Path of Initiation	C 1015 49



Chapter 2.2

The Spiritual Path



The Mechanism of Higher Evolution

- While all lives evolve in consciousness to some extent in each incarnation, the bulk of lives and the bulk of incarnations are devoted to relatively unconscious evolution, subject to the gradual encouragement of karmic factors. The spiritual path begins as the soul of the aspirant makes a conscious commitment to cooperate with the evolutionary forces (and as the waking-consciousness of the aspirant makes a conscious commitment to the soul), thus hastening the student's evolution in consciousness and contributing more directly to the evolution of the group (race) (lifewave).
- In the broadest sense the spiritual path embraces all of human evolution. In the practical sense it embraces the actual (gradual) awakening of the human being, through consciousness, and the (subsequent) several formal stages of the path.

The Spiritual Path

The spiritual path is the path of conscious evolution. Though the bulk of humanity evolve gradually toward soul-consciousness, some souls choose to accomplish in relatively few lifetimes (incarnations) what would normally take many lives. The decision to tread the spiritual path is made by the soul, which then seeks to enlist the cooperation of the mind (and the entire personality). The soul must reestablish that cooperation and realization in each lifetime.

At first, the path is a most difficult undertaking. Each soul has an accumulation of karma to be fulfilled. The earlier lives generate much more karma than can reasonably be worked out in just a few lives. Normally karma is fulfilled through a relatively slow process. Those who are on the path invoke the rapid working out of karma and minimize the production of nonessential karma. The spiritual student must overcome the limitations of living in the outer world, learn the required lessons for graduation, and become free and qualified to serve mankind in a much more potent capacity. For the disciple, new karma is fulfilled almost instantly, for the (spiritual) path is rather narrow (and a slight deviation evokes an almost instantaneous response). The soul that is not committed to the path is free to wander to some extent.

Though there is but one path, there exist countless differentiations within that one path. The path of enlightenment is different for every individual. There are certain general requirements (in consciousness and experience) before the student can attain liberation, however, and each lesser path within the one path yields a measure of development or experience in a particular field. A soul majors in the path that is the soul ray, and minors in each of the other six paths (rays). Some paths are mystical (devotional) and some paths are more occult. Liberation implies considerable balance between head and heart. The one path is also divided into three major stages or paths that each soul on the path must pass through. The first stage is called the probationary path, the path of purification, aspiration, and preparation (where the student is concerned primarily with physical, emotional, and mental discipline and purification). This stage once required a teacher for direction, but today there is a wealth of information available and the student is generally on his own. The probationary

path may require a number of lifetimes for its completion, but when the student is sufficiently prepared, he can then pass on to the second stage (discipleship).

In the second stage, the student is primarily occupied with serving humanity according to whatever talents and opportunities have been earned. The disciple must be stable, strong, unselfish, and self-reliant. The student must depend upon the true teacher, the Christ-self or God within (the soul). The disciple is one who has aligned the personality and the soul, and who proceeds to do the work (service) that is before him. In the third stage, the disciple becomes an adept, a master of wisdom.

There are numerous (optional) schools and organizations (secret and otherwise) to help the evolving student. Each school is but a stepping-stone on the lower stages of the path. No school can provide assistance on the later stages without soul alignment. In the lower stages, affiliations are not necessary, for the needed teachings are always available to the seeker. From probation to mastery, the spiritual path requires considerable determination and sacrifice. But the rewards are also considerable: the joy of giving, the joy of consciously serving God (and therefore humanity and all of life), and the joy of living in accordance with cosmic law.

† Commentary No. 165

The Path and the Seven Rays

The spiritual path may be viewed in many ways or perspectives, each contributing its share to the clarification or elucidation of the path. One perspective involves the esoteric psychology and the nature of the seven rays. The basic idea is that each individual or group is a latent potentiality (synthesis) of all the seven rays, and that through successive incarnations, the individual or group develops the character or quality of each of the seven rays.

The relatively unevolved student is qualified by a relatively loose conglomeration of several rays within the personality ray; one ray each for the physical body, the emotional nature, and the lower mind. These rays (and the ray of the personality) may be relatively undeveloped, and may be characterized by the so-called weaknesses of each of the particular rays. As the individual

evolves in experience and consciousness, those weaknesses and limitations are transformed into the strengths and positive attributes of the respective rays. As the student progresses further, the three rays of the personality are gradually synthesized (integrated) (qualified) by (into) an increasingly dominant personality ray.

Each incarnation or lifetime of experience is an expression of one or another of the seven personality rays. In each incarnation the student normally develops along the lines of the personality ray. Through a succession of incarnations, the student is able to develop the positive characteristics of each of the various rays (the personality ray varies from one incarnation to another). Many such cycles may be required for complete development. This process is complicated (simplified) by the ray of the soul. Each soul is qualified by one or another of the seven rays, and that soul ray (in turn) qualifies the reflection (expression) of the soul through its personality. As the individual progresses, the soul ray comes more and more into play until it dominates the integrated personality ray. The soul ray is relatively permanent and offers continuity over a succession of lives.

Ideally, the development of the soul (and its personality) is perfectly balanced through the entire range of the seven rays. However, in practice, the situations or circumstances of each incarnation are limited (qualified) by certain rays which periodically influence greater and lesser cycles of evolutionary activity (for the various life-waves and for the planet as a whole) and the individual must adapt (the incarnation) to those circumstances. The result of this is relatively unbalanced development. An individual may be well-developed along certain ray lines, but relatively undeveloped along other lines. Particular incarnations (circumstances and opportunities through conditions) must then be chosen for particularly needed experience and development (and consequent contributions to the greater life).

There is a similarity in this approach to the astrological approach to the spiritual path, in which the individual (or group) passes successively through each of the signs in (some) sequence (time and time again) until the proper synthesis and balance of all of the attributes have been achieved. Yet there is no real difference, for the path is One, and each approach (perspective) is coincident (concurrent) with the other. In either case (and there are others), the soul must incarnate many times under varying circumstances and opportunities

in order to achieve completion. And completion does not imply that each person is identically (ultimately) completed; for in each completion, the student has traveled a different path to achieve the same (overall) degree or quality of consciousness; and in each completion, the student remains uniquely qualified.

† Commentary No. 409

The Triple Path

Though the spiritual path may be approached and perceived in many ways, there are three major aspects or dimensions of the path. Prior to making a proper commitment to the path, an individual (soul) is principally concerned with a single dimension (experience). But when the soul makes a commitment to the spiritual path, the experience evoked is increasingly qualified by the obligations of the path. And when the personality makes a conscious commitment to the path (in response to the soul's invocation), then the individual (aspirant) (spiritual student) is able to properly face the three aspects (dimensions) (obligations) of the path.

The three aspects of the path constitute a triple dharma: the dharma of the individual, the dharma of the individual in relation to the soul (and the esoteric group), and the dharma of the individual in relation to the race (humanity), and by extension (expansion), to all of life within the planetary scheme. This triple path is a balanced path, with no single aspect allowed to dominate the overall progress (evolution) (expression) of the student. Above all is the commitment to the path, with all personal, mundane, family, and professional considerations necessarily subordinated to the path.

The first aspect (the dharma of the individual) is essentially the obligation toward self-mastery, the effort leading to complete mastery of the personality. This first (central) aspect includes self-discipline, physical (emotional) (mental) purification, cultivation, and training; the proper integration of the personality; and the development and refinement of various talents and abilities needed to fulfill the other two aspects of the path. Though considerable progress in the first dimension is necessary before the student can effectively embrace the other dimensions, the student should nonetheless be aware of the remaining

obligations throughout the preliminary work. For the remaining two dimensions provide the necessary qualification of the first dimension, for no effort properly within the framework of the spiritual path is expended merely for the sake of the individual.

The second aspect (the dharma of the individual in relation to the soul and the soul's esoteric group) is essentially the obligation toward communion with that soul and, consequently, with the group life (ashram) to which the soul is obligated. This second (vertical) aspect includes refinement, adjustment, subordination, aspiration, alignment, and responsiveness to the soul (group). In a sense, all of the effort in the first dimension should be in consideration of the quality, character, and charter of the soul group to which the individual is related. In communion with the soul and its group, the individual receives qualification and guidance (training), to the extent of the rapport (responsiveness) so achieved. This second aspect also includes the dharma of the group relative to other groups and planetary (solar) aspects.

The third aspect (the dharma of the individual in relation to humanity) is essentially the obligation to serve God (the solar logos) (the planetary logos) (the Christ) (the hierarchy) (humanity) (life) (the plan) (the scheme of evolution), beyond any consideration of the student's own life (as is the dharma implied in the second aspect). The service motive (the horizontal aspect) is truly the driving force par excellence of the entire path, for the ultimate aim of the path is the perfection of all life, individual evolution meaning nothing without a corresponding progress on a meaningful group level. The third aspect is the integrating aspect for the triple path, for self-mastery, communion, and service are necessarily one in this greater context.

The Formal Path 1

In general, the spiritual path of conscious, accelerated evolution in consciousness and dedicated service to God and humanity can be divided into several significant stages: (1) the paths of approach, (2) the path of aspiration and the probationary path, (3) the path of discipleship, and (4) the path of initiation, including both minor and major initiations (i.e., for initiations, both minor and major, sanctioned by the Bodhisattva and/or the appropriate logos). In the sense of the formal paths, each of the various stages and grades are rather well-defined in terms of the quality of consciousness and the degree of self-mastery required of the student (candidate).

An individual is naturally attracted to the spiritual path when as a consequence of considerable human experience and development of consciousness, the quality of consciousness is sufficiently refined and the personality development is sufficiently accomplished for the individual to begin to respond to the call of the path and the subtle urging of the soul. There are many (informal) paths through which candidates might approach the spiritual path, but all naturally lead the student onto the path of aspiration (which may be predominantly head-centered or predominantly heart-centered). An individual becomes an aspirant as soon as there are a conscious interest in the spiritual path and an interest in the conscious development needed in order to make (and receive) a formal commitment. Those who are motivated primarily through ego and/or glamour are not considered aspirants.

By virtue of quality of consciousness, the aspirant is noticed by the guardians of the path, but no resources (energy, forces, attention, and guidance) are devoted until the aspirant has made considerable progress. When the aspirant actually understands the basic principles of the path (the esoteric philosophy) and has progressed to the point where no major obstructions or impediments (major weaknesses) exist within the karma and consciousness of the aspirant, then the aspirant becomes a probationary student, and then (and only then) are resources devoted to encourage and guide the candidate further.

That resources are devoted indicates only that an aspirant (probationary student) has sufficient potential for making a proper commitment to the path. At this stage (probationary student) the attention (guidance) is rather general (an overall qualification and testing) (personal attention is not appropriate within the context of the spiritual path, but the qualification received becomes more and more specialized as the student progresses (specialized in the sense of particular energies and forces and training, not in the sense of personal attention)).

As the paths of approach lead naturally to the path of aspiration, so does the path of aspiration lead naturally to the probationary path. The probationary path begins (informally) when the candidate (aspirant) becomes (also) the probationary student (one who begins the probationary training and discipline (largely self-directed)). The formal path begins as the aspirant (probationary student) becomes the probationary disciple. The difference between a probationary student and a probationary disciple is largely one of meeting (some) formal requirements and qualifications (quality of consciousness, degree of self-mastery, etc.) and being able to make (and making) a formal commitment or obligation to the path. The aspirant is largely concerned with his or her own progress. The disciple is concerned much more with the spiritual work (service), though progress is still an essential ingredient.

† Commentary No. 427

The Formal Path 2

Having made a proper commitment (on the level of the soul and with the support of the personality), the probationary disciple is further tested and qualified until additional requirements (qualifications) are met.

Then the probationary period is considered formally complete and the student becomes an accepted disciple. The accepted disciple is (simultaneously) one who is formally accepted into an esoteric group context and assigned various duties appropriate to the talents and abilities (qualities) of the disciple and the particular needs or charter (responsibility) of the group. When a candidate is finally accepted, it means that the group has made a commitment to and

accepts some responsibility for the candidate. Thus the accepted disciple is bound to (by) the group, while a probationary disciple is not.

The last stage of discipleship (proper) is that of obligated discipleship, as the accepted disciple becomes the obligated disciple. The distinction is one of further progress and deeper commitment. Obligated discipleship is the first stage in which the status of the student (disciple) is formally counted (measured) with respect to humanity, in the sense that the obligation of the esoteric group is related to the karma of the lifewave and planetary scheme. Obligated discipleship also means an acceptance at levels (extent) beyond the esoteric group (although the qualifications for the various grades are essentially the same (standardized) for all esoteric groups within a planetary scheme). As the student progresses through the various stages (grades), the rapport with the sponsoring (soul) esoteric group is deepened and broadened, the commitment (obligation) is strengthened, and effectively the student loses the entire personality (as an independent, self-centered entity) in the unity of the group and the unity of all life.

The path of discipleship leads inevitably (eventually) to the path of initiation. In the context of the (formal) spiritual path (proper), initiation refers to the formal acknowledgement and vivification of consciousness that follows and marks the achievement in consciousness of the (formal) final qualifications for human (relative) perfection (successively, there being a finite number of initiations leading the obligated disciple to perfection in the human sense). Initiation (in this particular, formal sense) comes without seeking, comes only within the esoteric group context (at some level), comes only with the blessing of the Spiritual Hierarchy (the Christ) and the Planetary Logos (or some higher authorities, depending on the degree), and comes only in that higher context (on soul levels). No outer organization is able to conduct initiations (in this higher sense). All so-called initiations of outer organizations are merely ceremonial and/or preliminary to the formal path (at best) and not necessary (and therefore should not be confused with the initiations of the formal (spiritual) path).

Thus are numerous grades extant upon the one (formal) path, from the aspirant to the probationary student, to the probationary disciple, to the accepted disciple, to the obligated disciple, and on through the various grades of initiations (both within and beyond the strictly human evolution). The higher is

ever inclusive in the sense that the initiate is also a disciple and a disciple is also an aspirant (and all are still human, albeit increasingly without the ordinary limitations and weaknesses of humanity) (until the initiate passes beyond the human domain entirely (effectively providing a link to the next higher lifewave)). The distinction of grade is a practical one, with no sense or implication of (personal) superiority (inferiority).

† Commentary No. 428

The Formal Path 3

For every human being in incarnation (and particularly for those who are (formally) upon the spiritual path), there are two associated grades that are measures of achievement (progress). One grade is the highest degree or grade (quality and character of consciousness) achieved by a soul in its various incarnations; the other is the degree or grade currently being manifested (through the current personality).

Both grades are significant, but it is the current grade that matters in all practical considerations. The quality and character of consciousness being manifested by a soul (via the personality) is limited by the quality and character of the personality. As the personality progresses in any given incarnation, it first (ordinarily) recapitulates earlier development and refinement, and gradually reaches the point (stage) (degree) of development and refinement (quality and character of consciousness) that is the highest yet achieved by that human being in any lifetime (which is generally the highest level achieved in the previous lifetime). For most that level is far short of alignment with the soul, but for the spiritual student, that level should involve some degree of alignment.

That a student will in the current experience (incarnation) reach the point of consciousness previously achieved is not assured, for each successive personality must be reconquered in turn (developed and refined) and that is a trial in itself (circumstances and opportunities vary considerably from one incarnation to another). However, once that point has been reached, then the real experience and development and service of the spiritual student actually begin (anew). Beyond that point of achievement, the progress of the individual

in incarnation contributes directly to the progress of the soul (which is the real unit of human evolution).

In the context of the formal path, it is the degree or grade (level and quality of consciousness) currently being manifested that determines an individual's status upon the path (although on subtle (soul) levels there is consideration for the highest degree achieved by the soul, for it is that achievement that is actually incorporated in the soul). In a sense, every time a soul incarnates as a personality, it forgoes the status already achieved and risks absorption in the lower worlds in order to serve humanity and further the development of the group. However, the potency of a soul that has taken initiation, for example, is considerable and (normally) gradually forces the refinement and subordination of the new personality. It is the potency (quality and intensity) of the soul that (indirectly) qualifies the personality throughout the incarnation. When alignment (of soul and personality) is actually achieved, then that potency (character) can flow unimpeded and directly qualify the entire lower (personality) consciousness.

For example, an individual who has achieved some degree (of discipleship or initiation) in a previous incarnation, who subsequently incarnates, recapitulates the progress that has led to that degree. In general, a student in incarnation is likely to be living at a level and quality of consciousness lower than that achieved previously, until the current progress is sufficient to fully overcome the personality (again) and allow the energy and quality of the soul to be properly manifested. Thus the important degree (grade) is the one currently being manifested, for it is the current consciousness that principally determines the extent of the energies and forces and opportunities (trust) permitted.

Paths to God

From one perspective, there are many paths to God. Each of the great world religions, philosophies, mythologies, etc., can be seen as representing one path among the many paths. Each religion is appropriate to the consciousness and karmic needs of the humanity of the time and culture in which it is developed and sustained. In this sense, all of these many paths have an inherent appropriateness and worth for their adherents. Each person may further be viewed as traveling a different path from all other individuals to God. This is due to the variation in sequencing of ray qualification and karmic experience over the course of individual evolution. All are evolving (consciously or otherwise) toward God-consciousness (traveling a path to God), but the pattern of that evolution is unique to each individual.

While the perspective that there are many paths to God is quite valid, the perspective that there is but one path is equally valid. There is but one great pathway within which are differentiated all of the individual and group paths. This one path is the all-encompassing evolutionary force that draws all toward God-consciousness. Some individuals respond more readily to this force, and eventually begin to consciously cooperate with and serve the path. This realization of and commitment to the spiritual path leads to the various stages of discipleship and initiation.

If looked at superficially (as do many fundamental adherents), with focus on doctrine, dogma, and cultural overlay, the world's religions appear to contrast. When reduced to their core teachings, however, all major religions are found to reflect the essential unity of the one path (truth) by the similarity of the eternal verities they all proclaim. There is one eternal truth (approaching absolute) which all seek. All other truths derive from this greater truth. This greater truth cannot be confined to any single formula, nor can it be found in its entirety in any single philosophy or religion. Further, the gradual evolutionary advancement of humanity dictates that it cannot be dispensed altogether and for ever by any single teacher, thinker, or avatar, no matter how divinely inspired.

Adherents to some faiths often misinterpret the concept of “one” path to God in a manner that is unfortunately separative and exclusive. In self-righteous narrow-mindedness, some choose to believe that the “one path” is their own particular religion (i.e., the one to which they are attached and fixed upon to the exclusion of “other” truth), and that it is the only one among the many others that actually leads to God. All of the others are viewed as potentially encouraging proper social conduct within their own cultural context, but as essentially heathen, not blessed by God, or at the least, dealing with inferior aspects of truth for those of inferior mentality.

A statement, for example, such as, “There is one way to God, and that is through Jesus Christ,” is often cited as justifying such religious arrogance. The spiritual student would not disagree with such a statement, but he would interpret it in a more humble, more inclusive (broader) manner. The one way to God is through the soul (higher self), which is the Christ-consciousness within each person, regardless of whether or not that person deifies Jesus. The indwelling Christos (soul) is the personality’s link to the spirit (monad). Further, the hierarchical Christ serves as the world teacher (heart of love) for all of humanity, not merely those who consider themselves to be Christian. Thus, the spiritual student sees value in the many paths as they blend and merge, each revealing various aspects of the one beautiful path to God.

† Commentary No. 1434

Pathquest

The spiritual path is the conscious and deliberate path of evolution in consciousness. It is both a path and a quest. The object of this pathquest is to achieve union of personality with the soul or higher self. The more immediate object of the pathquest is to accomplish whatever preliminary and practical work is needed to facilitate that union. That work involves several fundamental dimensions or aspects.

The first and possibly the most fundamental aspect is simply purification or refinement in consciousness. It involves purifying the physical body through proper diet and proper drink and proper exercise and not engaging harmful practices. It involves refining the emotions through embracing the more noble emotions and not engaging the relatively more coarse emotions. It involves clearing the mind and tempering the entire personality nature. Ultimately it involves integrating the personality and uplifting the personality consciousness and achieving alignment or union with the soul. The keys to purification are discipline, temperance, and meditation. Many and diverse are the meditative exercises and other practices that help to refine the etheric, astral, and mental nature. The purification and refinement process is never-ending, but is not properly an end in itself. But it is the first dimension of self-transformation.

The second aspect builds upon the first and involves embracing various ethical and moral principles and practices, that in turn encourage a broadening and deepening of consciousness and contribute toward right human relations and goodwill. These principles have been collected and summarized in various forms and in various ways, and generally include the relatively more fundamental principles of honesty (truth), harmlessness (gentleness), and humility (reverence). It also involves learning to distinguish between the personality (ego) (mind) (lower self) and the soul (higher self) (atma-buddhi-manas) and identification with the higher rather than the lower. It involves becoming less self-centered and more selfless. It means embracing all of life without being entangled in life in the lower sense. It means engaging in right human relations and encouraging goodwill. It means being more heart-centered than head-centered. This selflessness (service) is, ultimately, the second dimension of self-transformation.

The third aspect builds upon the first and second and cannot be embraced effectively otherwise. The third aspect involves the continual process of learning and growing, both in terms of knowledge and understanding, leading to wisdom. But again this is not an end in itself, but simply a means toward an end (self-realization) (union). Learning and growing is not simply about knowledge and intellectual (superficial) understanding, but also about experience and realization that leads to deeper understanding (and to wisdom). Ultimately it is not so much about learning as it is about deepening, about becoming more perceptive and more aware, becoming more conscious and more

caring. It is about becoming self-conscious in the higher sense rather than being merely self-conscious in the lower (superficial) sense. It is about waking up and realizing the truth about oneself and one's surroundings (context). It is about transcending the ego and the intellect. And it is the third dimension of self-transformation.

This pathquest is an ever-continuing and ever-deepening three-fold journey and process of individual and collective self-transformation. As the student progresses on this journey, he or she also contributes to the whole.



Section 2.21



Approaching the Path

- The call of higher consciousness eventually draws the soul onto the path. Once the soul has made its commitment to the spiritual path, the call of the soul gradually draws the personality in incarnation toward the path. Much preliminary experience is necessary before a student can respond (intelligently) to that call, but when the character and temperament and values are sufficiently developed, then the experience of the student becomes more directly related to the spiritual path.

Paths of Approach 1

The approach of the individual to the spiritual path generally falls into one or the other of two categories, depending on temperament. One path is essentially mystical or heart-centered; the other path is essentially head-centered or occult. The true mystic is characterized by love, devotion, and aspiration; the true occultist is characterized by light and understanding. Important points on either path of approach are motive and intention. Both the head-centered nature and the heart-centered nature can be applied to selfish purposes or to spiritual purposes. The true occultist is as much a servant of God as the true mystic; and the untrue mystic can be as selfish as the most self-centered occultist. But where motive and intention are basically unselfish, then each of the two paths of approach leads into the spiritual path.

The heart-centered (mystical) path of approach leads directly onto the spiritual path, for great is the power of aspiration. The mystical path is basically spiritual, and it is the heart-centered student who becomes the spiritual aspirant. Where the aspirant is polarized emotionally, the path of approach and the subsequent probationary period can be quite lengthy. Where the aspirant is mentally polarized (but still governed by the heart-centered nature), the path of approach and the probationary period are relatively short. The emotional aspirant must develop the head-centered nature and balance the head with the heart before discipleship can be attained. The mentally polarized aspirant is simply better prepared for the tests and trials of probation and discipleship, and finds less difficulty in achieving the required balance.

The head-centered (occult) path of approach may or may not lead into the spiritual path. The occult path is the path of knowledge; knowledge can only lead into the spiritual path where knowledge is transformed into realization, through consciousness. The path of the seeker (the head-centered student) (the occultist) may be never-ending and fruitless; or it may gradually lead into spiritual matters as the objects of seeking are left behind, as spiritual values are realized, and as the complementary heart-centered nature is unfolded.

The emotionally polarized seeker usually faces the longest path of approach, having to deal with two significant hurdles: the undisciplined emotional nature and the self-centeredness of the unbalanced head. Even the mentally polarized seeker finds the way not easy, for the rational mind can be a formidable opponent for the soul, whereas the mind (head) that is aligned with the heart-centered nature is much more likely to respond to the intuitional guidance of the soul. But where the seeker does turn toward the spiritual path, the mind becomes a powerful instrument for constructive spiritual work, and more so as the heart-centered nature is developed.

For the aspirant and for the seeker, the transition from the path of approach onto the probationary path is based upon realization and commitment. The soul makes the commitment, and the personality comes to realize that commitment. The realization and cooperation of the personality may not be immediate; the path of approach may well be a battle and a struggle between the overshadowing soul and its reflection, the proud and independent personality. The unrelenting personality may continue the struggle (on subtle levels) long into the spiritual path proper, but eventually the soul gains the upper hand and the personality becomes subservient and responsive to spiritual purpose and higher guidance. The particular path of approach along which the student has traveled remains an influence well into the path, even though both the head and the heart may be nicely developed and properly balanced.

† Commentary No. 1136

Paths of Approach 2

There are many and diverse paths of approach. The first role of the various paths of approach is to lead the student from a strictly mundane life (absorption at the mechanical levels of fully-conditioned personality) to having a more predominantly spiritual focus, not necessarily metaphysical or theosophical, but at least spiritual. The second role of the various paths of approach is to prepare the student for the commitment that is required for the student to embark upon the spiritual path proper. Although the formal (spiritual) path has general requirements, each path of approach contributes something to the formal path.

Some of these paths of approach are structured, some are unstructured. Some have a cultural or religious context, others do not. Some paths of approach are predominantly head-centered. Some are predominantly heart-centered. The only commonality is the two-fold role that they serve. The spiritual path proper begins when the soul (not the personality) makes a commitment to conscious and deliberate evolution in consciousness, and begins to demand of the personality adherence to the way. That decision evokes a considerable hastening of the rate at which karma is evoked, making "life" rather difficult for the personality but resulting in considerable and rapid progress.

The elements of the spiritual path are very consistent in its various forms. Every metaphysical, theosophical, and occult group that is sanctioned within the context of the spiritual path embraces the same essential elements, even while the cultural setting and flavor may vary from one group to another. The teachings anent the path, regardless of particular religion or spiritual group or language, etc., are similar and consistent. When one understands the language-beyond-words (patterns), then one can discern the higher teachings within every framework and language, however the words may be used.

The spiritual path proper has three stages, probation, discipleship, and initiation. In the probationary path, the focus is necessarily upon the refinement of the personality and preparation for wielding the energies evoked along the way. The probationary path leads a student through the preliminary discipline (commitment to no smoking, no drinking, no eating of flesh foods, (meat, fish, fowl), commitment to daily meditation and other spiritual practices) and prepares the student for discipleship. The intent is to purify and refine the personality to enable it to sustain the pressures of more serious metaphysical work and to enable the consciousness to reach higher levels (enabling the student to respond more so to higher impression).

As the physical, emotional, and mental nature is refined, it becomes possible (necessary) to integrate these three dimensions into a single personality energy. Once that is properly achieved, the student can begin to transcend the intellectual and ego natures, becoming then more and more responsive to the soul. Alignment of soul and personality is simply not possible without considerable refinement and proper integration. As the student progresses, the preliminary discipline continues and expands to include more and more subtle

work. While probation is primarily a matter of development and preparation, discipleship is primarily a matter of service or application of one's quality of consciousness, within the context of the spiritual group. This does not imply or require any sort of guru-devotee relationship (which is more characteristic of some paths of approach). Indeed, discipleship in the framework of the spiritual path proper relies almost entirely upon the higher Self for guidance, in the context of some soul group (ashram on soul levels).

† Commentary No. 1137

Paths of Approach 3

Discipleship per se cannot be embraced until the probationary work is accomplished and the preliminary discipline is sustained naturally. Discipleship cannot be embraced until virtually all of one's karma is fulfilled. Otherwise the student would simply be unable to wield the evoked forces safely and effectively. For the soul (spiritual path) does indeed evoke almost overwhelming forces and energies, to be wielded and shared in the context of collective (human and planetary) evolution in consciousness (service).

The final stage is called the path of initiation and involves progressive and formal relationship within the context of the spiritual hierarchy or inner government and beyond. Initiation is never the result of seeking. It is always the result of being properly prepared. Anyone who claims to be an initiate is not, in this proper sense. Initiates and masters and adepts work anonymously, quietly, and behind the scenes, remaining unrecognized by humanity within the world.

In addition to the three stages of the spiritual path there is another dimension, that of the spiritual hierarchy and soul groups. Human (planetary) evolution is guided (not controlled) through the auspices of the hierarchy (comprised of human souls who have evolved beyond the need to incarnate, who have completely fulfilled their karma and have graduated from human-ness, who remain with the human evolution as an act of service). All human souls belong to one or another of the seven ray ashrams or one of the peripheral ray ashrams. Within each ray ashram are various component ashrams at various levels of

consciousness. Each soul belongs to a soul group within some ashram, according to the nature and character of the soul. The ashram (esoteric group) then provides encouragement and opportunities for service within the context of the path and in accordance with the abilities (preparation and fitness) and responsiveness of the individual in incarnation.

One should keep in mind that in this context (1) soul refers to atma-buddhi-manas, that which is beyond and transcends the personality-intellect-ego, (2) the words "ashram" and "initiate" and "master" and "disciple" etc. are often utilized within a more profane (human) (worldly) context of paths of approach. There is much glamour involved in the various paths of approach. As one progresses, one naturally works through and beyond glamour and illusion, achieving increasingly greater clarity and detachment from life in the material (ego) world. There are signs in the aura of every human being, signs that unequivocally indicate the degree of refinement of each of the bodies and the extent of integration (if any) and the extent of alignment (if any). There are signs that unequivocally indicate the extent of openness and health of each of the various chakras. There are also unequivocal signs as to the ray nature (personality and soul) and to affiliations with ray ashrams and soul groups. Of course these signs are only unequivocal for someone who has the training and ability to discern them.

The various paths of approach anticipate the requirements of the formal (general) (spiritual) path and the needs of particular students, and help prepare students for the commitments and dedication required. Depending on one's ray nature and depending on one's character and temperament, some of the preliminary work is embraced during approach (while all of the preliminary work is embraced once the student is placed on the path). The paths of approach are largely a matter of seeing to what extent one is responsive to the needs and demands of the path, and gradually cultivating responsiveness.

The Call

The call of the spiritual path is the sending forth of the characteristic note of evolution with respect to a particular lifewave of souls. Relatively few souls realize, accept, and heed the call to hastened evolution and the demands of such a path. Most continue along the gradual spiral of evolution, remaining unresponsive to the call. But for those souls which heed the call, the characteristic note of evolution is incorporated within the soul and the characteristic note of the soul is changed accordingly. The call of the path to the soul is merely an invitation, but the call of the soul to its reflection (the personality) is a summons of authority and potency.

As the soul is reoriented to the subjective realization of the path, its relationship to the personality changes markedly. Normally the soul relates to its personality only in an indirect fashion, slowly assimilating the experience of life in the lower worlds and having little to do with the instrument (the personality) itself. The soul simply qualifies the lower life indirectly until such time as the personality has virtually completed the lower experience. But the soul which responds to the call of the spiritual path begins to send forth certain energies (qualifications) into the life and consciousness of the personality, not really in a direct fashion, but in relatively subtle ways.

First the soul must issue a challenge to the lower life. This is effected through the sounding of the basic note of the soul. The challenge is primarily one of cooperation with the soul, of the subordination of the personality. If the mind is strong or if the personality is not reasonably integrated and coherent, then considerable conflict follows the challenge until the personality is finally integrated and the mind subordinated to the quality (will) of the soul. Much of the conflict occurs without conscious realization. The soul sends forth the call (challenge) and the battle is on (usually) long before the waking-consciousness becomes aware of the conflict (process). When the conflict is resolved and the mind has assumed its proper place (as the link between the soul and personality), then the personality is responsive to the call of the spiritual path and conscious cooperation becomes possible.

The continuing call of the soul to the personality may take any number of forms, depending on the ray relationships (of soul, personality, mind, emotions, etc.) and the degree of development. The call generally consists of a strong inner (mostly conscious) prompting to the particular course of action (preparation and purification of the personality) in anticipation of discipleship and a life of active spiritual service. But the response of the mind (and personality) may be quite slow at first, due to the natural resistance (inertia) of the lower life. A major breakthrough occurs as the waking-consciousness decides to cooperate with the soul and as the lower self makes its commitment to the soul (and to conscious evolution).

The soul continues to be characterized by internal recollectedness and impersonal meditation, yet the energy and quality of the soul naturally flows into the responsive personality (as the lower self is gradually prepared) according to the natural rhythm of the soul and its relationship to the path. The call of the path is transmitted through the soul to the personality and the lower self gradually withdraws from involvement (absorption) in mundane life and begins to focus on truth and reality. The energies of the path are transmitted through the personality into the lower worlds, as the summons is answered and resolved, and as the Voice of the Silence begins to dominate the life and affairs of the manifested personality.

† Commentary No. 323

Group Approach

Along the spiritual path, (substantial) esoteric progress can only be obtained in group formation (on soul levels) (in relation to an esoteric group (order)). The particular esoteric group (to which a soul is related by character and quality) (or to which a soul is beginning to relate) can be approached (directly) via the soul (which involves overcoming the relatively independent personality) and (where available) via a related outer (exoteric) group. Where such a qualified outer group is available, the individual is obliged to work through that group as much as possible.

The approach to the outer group should be both objective and subjective, as the individual works through the soul in linking up with the esoteric group via the

(corresponding) exoteric group. The availability of an appropriate outer group does not preclude the (necessary) soul alignment; in fact, the role of the outer group includes assisting individual members to achieve that alignment.

Assistance to outer group members is subordinated to the overall needs (service) of the group, but those needs are normally addressed coincidentally with the opportunities (involvement) afforded the members. Unaligned individuals (the majority of spiritual students) (not formally or consciously aligned (on soul levels) with any particular esoteric group) often work with one or more exoteric groups until they can recognize their inner (soul) loyalties and relationships and can align themselves with their proper esoteric (exoteric) group. Even after such alignment, individuals may continue to work with various exoteric groups (building bridges), but as an extension of and in cooperation with the group to which they are formally (properly) related. Independent (unaligned) activity is not as effective (as aligned work), but useful work (service) can be performed by isolated (aligned, interdependent) individuals, and useful (preliminary) work can be performed by unaligned individuals.

No (true) esoteric group is manifested as an exoteric group. The primary responsibility for the functioning (activity) of a related exoteric group rests upon its incarnated (esoteric group) members (representatives). An important (practical) aspect of such an outer group is that it remain properly aligned with the esoteric group (order) and therefore remain relatively free of the associated personalities. The vast majority of (spiritually-motivated) (exoteric) groups are not aligned with esoteric groups due to (relative) personality-centeredness. Outer groups of various forms and degrees (qualifications) provide valuable experience (training ground) leading (hopefully) to compassion, patience, understanding, cooperation, etc., as well as meaningful service. The approach of an individual should not depend entirely upon an outer group (which may not be properly aligned), but should depend principally upon the soul relationship.

Due to the considerable quality inherent in an esoteric group, the various esoteric groups are themselves coherently (interdependently) (cooperatively) aligned with one another, even though many differences exist between the various groups (i.e., each esoteric group has a distinct character, temperament, area of expertise (and commensurate responsibility), etc.). Exoteric groups are not normally as well-coordinated due to the complexity of outer existence (in the

lower worlds) and the need for diversity. The inner (subjective) (qualitative) alignment of esoteric groups is far more important than that of their outer counterparts and unaligned outer groups. The approach of an individual to an esoteric group (via the soul or via an outer (aligned) group) must necessarily be on group terms, not on the terms of the individual (personality).

† Commentary No. 649

Interest in the Path 1

Interest in things metaphysical can cover a wide range of degrees and quality of interest in metaphysical matters, ranging from the entirely superficial to the very serious. At some point in a student's approach to or embrace of the spiritual path (and again, periodically), the student should carefully examine the degree and quality of his interest and consciously decide to what extent he (the personality) is determined (or not, as the case may be) to embrace the path (and what that embrace means).

That examination should produce a relatively conscious understanding or appreciation of the inner urging toward or within the path, even though that understanding may be heavily biased by the desire-mind and not necessarily consistent with the soul's relationship to the path (i.e., the non-serious student can hardly be expected to be able to honestly and correctly assess or realize the soul's commitment (or lack thereof) to the spiritual path).

Interest in things metaphysical generally falls into one or another of three broad categories, each (category) being governed or qualified by one of the three major rays. The first category includes casual or peripheral interest in metaphysics or metaphysical things (selectively or generally) and is qualified by the third ray of matter (and the strength of personality). The second category includes semi-casual or semi-peripheral (semi-serious) interest in metaphysics (more generally but not wholeheartedly) and is qualified by the second ray of consciousness (through its relationship to the fourth ray of balance (conflict)). The third category includes serious interest in metaphysics and the spiritual path and is qualified by the first ray of spirit. These ray assignments (realizations) do not

correspond (generally) to personality, soul, or monadic rays (i.e., personal or particular rays should not be confused with categorical ray qualifications).

Casual interest in metaphysical matters is possessed by the vast majority of those people who are (casually) approaching the spiritual path but who have no real (proper) understanding of metaphysics or the path, but who are curious about some metaphysical things or metaphysics in general, who are emotionally or intellectually attracted to the superficial aspects of metaphysics (theosophy) and/or the spiritual path, but who have no (real) concern for changing or improving themselves and who would not permit metaphysical interests to interfere with their mundane and personal pursuits (i.e., self-interest) (except to the extent that their metaphysical interests are mundane and superficial yet absorbing or stimulating in the sense of experience, sense-indulgence, or glamour). Thus casual or peripheral interest may be genuine (sincere) or otherwise, but merely superficial.

Serious interest in metaphysical matters (theosophy) and the spiritual path implies commitment to the path and a relatively whole-hearted embrace of the disciplines and (proper) practices of the path (to the extent that they are known and reasonably understood). In this sense, a person who has no (proper) conscious commitment to the path is not considered "serious." Serious interest (on the part of the serious student) means substantial focus of consciousness upon matters metaphysical in the constructive, spiritual sense and being substantially more committed to the spiritual path than to self-indulgence or personality endeavors (while the casual student is substantially more committed to personal experience and expression than to spiritual matters or the spiritual nature). The spiritual path is not the place for part-time endeavors; the path is a way of life that reaches into all aspects of the personality.

Interest in the Path 2

Semi-casual (semi-serious) interest in metaphysical and/or spiritual matters is the middle ground of not being fully or substantially committed to either the personal (personality-centeredness) (self-centeredness) (relative coarseness) or the spiritual (commitment to the soul and the spiritual path) (progressive refinement) (upliftment for service), which implies that both are attractive but cannot (at that stage) be reconciled, leading to some degree of confusion and inconsistency (i.e., the personality is still strong enough (in the sense of independence and separateness) to provide rationalizations for not proceeding toward the path).

The casual student makes no pretensions of commitment to the spiritual path (and the issue of such commitment is not even considered) (i.e., the concept is not understood by the casual student). Similarly, the serious student is not confused about his own commitment; it is clear and substantial, without appreciable reservation. The semi-casual or semi-serious student on the other hand is not clearly committed to the path, although such a student may believe that he is, but his demonstrated values will generally be contradictory (i.e., in some ways self-indulgent and in other ways relatively selfless).

The range of metaphysical interest (in this categorical sense) is broad and the three categories are merely generally defined. Likewise the (first) threshold between casual and semi-casual interest is merely generally (qualitatively) defined as is the (third) threshold between semi-serious and serious interest. The casual student has a merely superficial interest in metaphysical matters, while the semi-casual student is substantially (genuinely) interested in metaphysical matters, albeit without commitment and (generally) with some (considerable) glamour and illusion in effect. While the semi-serious student is definitely (consciously) approaching the spiritual path, the serious student is clearly upon the path, having made a conscious commitment to the path and all that it represents (that is understood).

A third (second proper) threshold is actually the more telling, that is the qualitative threshold between semi-casual interest and semi-serious interest.

The semi-casual student has a balance of personal forces and values that favor the personality (self-interest, self-indulgence, personal experience and expression, the desire nature (kama-manas) predominating) while the semi-serious student has a balance of personal forces and values that favor the soul (and the spiritual path). In effect, the semi-casual student expects the path to accommodate the student (sacrifices are made to the extent that they are convenient), while the semi-serious student is willing to (or at least seeks to) accommodate the path as it is understood. The casual and semi-casual students work against the natural resistance of the personality self-interest, and gradually (eventually) (ultimately) cross the threshold to semi-serious involvement. From that point onward spiritual momentum is achieved and improved, as the balance of forces has shifted in favor of the soul and the resistance of the personality becomes relatively subtle.

The casual student may remain casual, remaining part of the mainstream of casual evolution, or become semi-casual. The semi-casual student will eventually choose one or the other (casual evolution or semi-serious participation in conscious evolution), while the semi-serious student will necessarily be drawn onto the spiritual path proper. The continuum (from casual interest to serious involvement) persists, for a flow of souls persists that represents the evolutionary momentum of humanity.

Section 2.22



Probation

- The probationary path is the first stage of the spiritual path and leads a student through the preliminary discipline and preliminary endeavors and prepares the student for discipleship.

The Path of Probation

The probationary path is the first stage or phase of the spiritual path. It is a path of purification and preparation; it is the building of a foundation with which to support the intermediate and advanced work of discipleship.

Purification of physical, emotional, and mental faculties is a prerequisite for understanding, awareness, integration, and alignment. Bodies of low vibration cannot be spiritually integrated; a body of low (coarse) vibration cannot respond to the spiritual energies (guidance and enlightenment) which are of higher (fine) vibration. The three instruments (the physical body, the emotions, and the mind) must be purified and integrated into a single coherent and spiritually responsive mechanism before the personality can be properly aligned with the soul.

Physical purification suggests pure food (in moderate amounts): the incorporation of a sensible, nutritional, and balanced diet, and the gradual phasing out of animal (flesh) foods. Internal and external cleanliness is also required for the physical body, as well as sufficient exercise, sufficient (restful) sleep, fresh air, and a reasonable (moderate) amount of sunshine. This discipline should incorporate a reasonable, common-sense approach to purification. The physical concerns should then pass below the threshold of waking-consciousness, that the spiritual student can concentrate on higher work.

Emotional (astral) purification involves the calming and balancing of the astral (desire) body. The aura (and the astral body) must be purified and uplifted in vibration (quality) until it is a clear, calm, quiet, unruffled, stable, and controlled instrument for the highest emotions. A wildly fluctuating or passive aura that responds to the glammers, desires, and coarse emotions must be tamed and brought into harmony with the spiritual self if the student is to demonstrate the unselfish and impersonal love of the God within. Meditation is a strong aid to emotional and mental discipline (and bringing the emotions under the firm control of the mind). The power of observation coupled with the exercise of retrospection leads to the discernment of weaknesses and limitations, and to the appropriate methods of purification and discipline.

Mental purification especially calls for meditation, retrospection, and the study of the self. Mental refinement implies clear, unbiased thinking on all matters and the elimination of critical, negative, and unpleasant thinking. Through observation, study, concentration, meditation, and visualization, the mind is trained and prepared for abstract thinking and enlightenment. This purification should not be a drastic discipline, but it should be a gradual and progressive reorientation to successively higher levels. Through mental purification the mind can be trained as a useful instrument of the soul, free from habits and personality-centered limitations and distractions.

As the process of purification proceeds, the probationer (probationary student) (aspirant) begins to integrate the personality and align the personality with the overshadowing (indwelling) soul, depending always upon the true teacher, the God within, for encouragement. Throughout the paths of probation and discipleship there is an accelerated working off of karma, resulting in greater strength, freedom, and preparation (in the form of virtues, qualities, talents, and abilities). Though the path is often difficult (challenging), there should be courage, confidence, perseverance, and a measure of happiness in spite of whatever circumstances (opportunities) may come. With the increased freedom from karma and limitation comes the opportunity to the spiritual student to place himself in service to a greater cause than his own.

† Commentary No. 449

Preliminary Discipline

A rather clear demarcation exists between the casual student and the serious spiritual student (candidate) in that the serious student has overcome the basic resistance of the personality and conscientiously embraces (at least) the preliminary discipline and preliminary endeavors of the (spiritual) path. The casual student may be nonetheless sincere and well-intentioned, but until the preliminary discipline is adhered to, the student cannot properly be trusted.

Adherence to the preliminary discipline is important for a number of reasons, all relating to becoming fit to channel the energies of the path effectively and

efficiently (and safely). Though moderation is a particularly significant keyword upon the path, any compromise with the preliminary discipline leaves a student below the threshold of significance. In other words, one who adheres to the entire discipline is normally trusted with advanced qualification and training (and concomitant energies) while one who embraces not all of the preliminary discipline is simply too weak from an occult point of view to warrant much attention. The casual student may very well be helpful in relation to spiritual work, but much of the qualification (energy) of the path must be withheld, for the relatively coarse personality (and lack of integrated strength) would simply compromise or short-circuit the more profound (potent) energies of the path.

The preliminary discipline is primarily physical albeit having significant effects on emotional and mental levels. The dietary restrictions of the preliminary discipline are simple and straight-forward. No meat, fish, or fowl is permitted for consumption. Some (nominal) care must be taken to eat the proper foods, but the important thing (occultly) is the elimination of flesh foods. Similarly, no consumption of alcoholic beverages (including beer and wine) is permitted by the preliminary discipline. Only drugs which are deemed medically necessary or medically expedient are permitted, and even those are discouraged. Likewise, no smoking is permitted by the preliminary discipline.

The elimination of these things (flesh foods, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, etc.) is a necessary prerequisite for the refinement and self-control required on the path. The consumption of these things sustains a certain coarseness in the physical body (with concomitant effects on higher levels) (from an occult point of view), burden the energy balance of the etheric body, and undermine the physical, emotional, and mental integration and self-control of the personality. Another important aspect of the preliminary discipline is adherence to a daily pattern of meaningful (spiritual) meditation (20-30 minutes minimum) and philosophical study or contemplation (consideration). This too is important to refinement and self-control and responsiveness to higher energies.

Many attempt the preliminary discipline gradually and piecemeal, and fail to make significant progress because the gradual approach merely strengthens the (subtle) resistance of the personality to these changes. The successful students are generally those who simply embrace the preliminary discipline in its entirety,

in a no-nonsense fashion. Of course, the preliminary discipline must be faced again in every succeeding incarnation (and the first time is potentially the most difficult (although in subsequent incarnations the resistance of the personality is likely to be more subtle)). The advanced disciplines of the path simply expand upon the preliminary, as greater and greater freedom (from coarseness and the bondage of personality-centeredness) and capacity for service are achieved. None of the disciplines of the path are imposed; all are simply accepted and embraced by the serious candidates.

† Commentary No. 453

Preliminary Endeavors

While the preliminary discipline embraces a number of necessary and relatively easily achievable adjustments to (in) the personality life (being well-defined and easily objectively realizable), the preliminary endeavors are a necessary complement to the preliminary discipline and deal with the more qualitatively realizable aspects of the spiritual path and approach thereto. The preliminary endeavors are well-defined and clear in concept and principle, but not so easily defined in practice. The preliminary endeavors require more attention (awareness) for accomplishment than does the preliminary discipline, but build upon the refinement and opportunities afforded by the discipline and gradually lead the spiritual student further and further into the light and love (and service) of the spiritual path (the soul).

To complement the preliminary discipline and realize the next step or stage in the process of transformation of the human personality, the student must endeavor to improve the quality of the body, the aura, and the mind, through conscious purification and qualification. The student must (likewise) endeavor to achieve and maintain an integrated personality (with a mental polarization) and a healthy balance between the head-centered nature and the heart-centered nature. In order to achieve these things, the student must necessarily overcome the physical and emotional appetites, desires, attachments, etc. which lend strength to the lower (coarse) (personal) nature and decrease the responsiveness of the personality to higher (soul) impression.

The spiritual student must also endeavor to live a relatively harmless life, becoming more and more aware of the cause and effect relationships and endeavoring to be as intelligently cooperative and constructive as practicable. The student must endeavor to be honest and truthful in all respects, to value truth, and to achieve the humility demanded of the path. The student must endeavor to overcome the tendency of the personality toward self-deception, glamour, and illusion; to overcome the resistance and inertia of the self-indulgent and self-sustaining personality, transforming that personality into a relatively selfless and spiritually responsive instrument (of the soul).

The spiritual student must learn to become and remain free from opinions and other mental attachments, learn to speak purposively and not needlessly, and endeavor to be free from personality absorption (which implies that the student must first learn to be aware of being absorbed at the personality level). The spiritual student must endeavor to be non-judgmental relative to others, yet nonetheless able to learn by observation and assessment. The spiritual student must endeavor to live constructively, in harmony with the spiritual path, with the environment, and with mundane humanity (without being absorbed in the mundane world or personal energies). The student must endeavor to moderate the entire personality at all times to insure self-control and a positive qualification of consciousness and activities.

The spiritual student must similarly endeavor to improve the quality of the daily meditation discipline and extend that meditation environment (energy) to application in the daily life. The student must endeavor to become more and more responsive to the spiritual path and to the soul, embarking upon and sustaining a life of appropriate service to humanity (according to the talents and abilities and significant opportunities afforded (earned)). All in all, the student must do that which is before him (her) to do, that which must be done (the preliminary discipline), and endeavor to do whatever is appropriate to do (the preliminary endeavors).

Section 2.23



Discipleship

- The path of discipleship is the second stage of the spiritual path. While probation is primarily a matter of development and preparation, discipleship is primarily a matter of service or application of one's quality of consciousness, within the context of the spiritual group.

The Path of Discipleship

Discipleship is the second stage upon the spiritual path. The path of discipleship begins when the probationary student has sufficiently purified and prepared himself for service and when he is reasonably free from karmic limitations. Where probation is a path of preparation (primarily self-centered), discipleship is a path of conscious activity (fulfillment). The disciple is pledged to serve humanity, to cooperate with the plan of the planetary hierarchy as he perceives it and as best he can, and to continue to develop the powers of the soul (following the guidance of the higher self) through study, meditation, and various service activities.

The disciple continues to build upon the foundation created as a result of the probationary work, but the primary activity is service to humanity according to the needs of the world around him, his particular talents and capacities, and the opportunities that he has earned. The disciple must know himself fairly well, including his strengths, weaknesses, and capacities. The disciple must be relatively free from the glamour and illusion of the outer world. He must be strong in character, for many are the tasks and responsibilities. Harmlessness, cheerfulness, humility, perseverance, and impersonality are only a few of the many virtues that must be present to some extent. The disciple must have an integrated and cooperative personality, aligned and responsive to the direction and the encouragement of the soul and its esoteric group. The disciple must have a pleasant, loving, and stable disposition.

The student upon the path of discipleship must be dependable and self-reliant yet ever aware of the inclusiveness of the world of souls and the purposes of objective and subjective manifestation. The disciple is a focal point of spiritual energy, transmitting and sharing the light, the love, and the power of the fifth kingdom (the kingdom of heaven) (the world of souls). The disciple is also an observer, an onlooker in the world of humanity, an agent and instrument of the world of God. The disciple must fulfill his responsibilities in both worlds, without interfering in the lives of others. The disciple is always available (without question or hesitation) (by commitment); there are no rests or

vacations subjectively, yet the worker will rest (release unnecessary tension) objectively (in moderation) in order to maintain his health and capabilities.

The disciple is ever willing to give of himself and his resources without any thought of compensation. Thus the worker will find his resources and energies always replenished and equal to any and every worthy task that is set before him. Where mistakes are made, the disciple will learn from the effects, limitations, and experiences produced and make the necessary and appropriate adjustments within his life. There can be no discouragement and there can be no failure, for the only true failure is failure to learn the lessons of the mistake. So mistakes are recognized, the lessons are learned, and the worker pushes onward, never allowing failure to impair his continuing work.

The disciple differs markedly from the aspirant or probationary student, not only in terms of preparation and service, but also in terms of consciousness. Proper motives, understanding, a certain commitment (dedication) (obligation), and a certain level of consciousness are required for the path of discipleship. The way of the disciple (regardless of soul ray) is the way of love and wisdom, of goodwill in action. The way of the disciple is to obey the inner impulses of the soul, to do the work that is before him to do, and to live a life that is an example to others.

† Commentary No. 60

The Dharma of the Disciple

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

Purification is a continuous process for aspirant and disciple alike. Always there exists the need for further refinement of the lower self (the physical, emotional, and mental instruments) to be attained while on the path of ascent. The early probationary stages deal with the coarse, more obvious needs for the purification and transmutation of weaknesses and limitations. But throughout discipleship this process continues on successively higher levels as well as during each recapitulation of earlier development. Purification also implies discipline and the process of self-analysis.

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

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

Purpose is an inherent quality of manifestation. With experience, knowledge, discipline, realization, and aspiration, the disciple becomes aware of his relationship to the purpose of humanity; he knows why he is here, what he is doing, and what he should be doing. Then he adjusts his life accordingly.

Realization of purpose leads directly to service. Service is the life's work of the disciple, a natural response to the energy of the soul. The disciple must recognize his talents and his limitations and weaknesses. He must recognize talents to be developed (in response to needs and the work to be performed), the plan itself (or portion thereof), the immediate work or needs before him, and the opportunities for service. With intuitive insight, the disciple can then contribute further to the welfare and progress of mankind and the greater group.

† Commentary No. 1054

The Head and Heart-Centeredness

One of the principal objectives of the spiritual student is the achievement of balance between the head and the heart, between the head-centered aspects of human nature (along the lines of the first, third, fifth, and seventh rays) and the heart-centered aspects of human nature (along the lines of the second, fourth, and sixth rays).

Most people develop in a moderately unbalanced manner and subsequently need to achieve balance by developing and blending in the hitherto missing qualities. Thus those who have developed largely along emotional, intuitive, and heart-centered lines need to develop along intellectual lines as well, and those who have developed largely intellectually, need to develop and integrate the higher emotional and intuitive features of heart quality (e.g., kindness, compassion, consideration, unselfishness) (and in doing so tempering various head-centered tendencies (e.g. the critical, judging nature)) (whereas characteristics like selfishness, self-centeredness, egoism, defensiveness, reactiveness can be manifested through either the head-centered or heart-centered nature (while overcoming these limitations requires somewhat different techniques depending on the extent of head-centered or heart-centered development)).

The principal objective then of the heart-centered person is the development of intellectual abilities without losing the heart-centered focus. If the person is emotionally-polarized (rather than mentally-polarized) it is primarily a matter of

purifying and tempering the emotions and allowing the mind to develop into prominence while retaining the essential heart-centered nature. If the person is mentally-polarized (yet heart-centered) it is simply a matter of balance between the two aspects so that neither really dominates. At that level it is also a matter of transcending whatever elements of egoism remain within the personality.

A distinction is made between being intellectual and being mentally-polarized; one can be intellectual without being mentally-polarized and one can be mentally-polarized without being intellectual. Being intellectual is seen as a necessary and precursory stage that must eventually be transcended. Being predominantly intellectual is seen as a condition which inhibits the needed balance. The heart-centered person is rather unlikely to over-develop the intellectual nature (unless the heart-centered nature is suppressed or abandoned (which is not healthy)), but the transcendence of ego can be quite difficult in the emotionally-polarized and/or unrefined heart-centered student. With refinement comes humility, and so the refined and heart-centered person is generally rather well-placed with regard to the needed development.

The three keys to balance for the heart-centered person are refinement, temperance, and humility. Through these three keys the heart-centered person is able to develop mentally without losing the heart quality and without being lost in the head-centered nature. What follows (beyond balance) is the cultivation of the intuitional nature which lies beyond mental polarization. The heart-centered person who achieves the proper balance is better placed to unfold the intuitional nature than the head-centered person, resulting in strength of understanding in the sense of feeling or realization, while the head-centered person who achieves the proper balance is better placed to understand things more conceptually. In the best of both worlds, the esoteric student, perfectly balanced between head and heart, enjoys the breadth and depth of full realization, unimpeded by intellect (intellectual distortion) and unimpeded by emotional distortion.

The Heart and Head-Centeredness

The problem for the head-centered nature is often a matter of lack of heart quality, of relying so much upon the intellect that the various qualities of the heart are understood merely intellectually, i.e., that one's heart is in the intellect and is therefore merely conceptual and not real.

Many head-centered people, whether they are emotionally or mentally-polarized, do not pay much attention to the qualities of the heart. And many of those who do pay attention do so with the delusion that their understanding of heart quality is sufficient to manifest that quality, when in fact, an intellectual understanding of a quality and a (mental) commitment to embrace that quality does not suffice to actually embrace and express the quality. One must necessarily and actually feel the quality of the heart, in the higher, inner, deeper (but not merely intellectual) sense, in order to evoke the quality. But the mind, given its self-delusional nature (self-protective, egoistic posture), tends to interpret experience and expression in a self-biased (self-centered) manner, thus serving as an impediment to actual evocation of heart quality.

The three keys to balance for the head-centered person are the same as for the heart-centered person, namely refinement, temperance, and humility. Through these three keys the head-centered person is able to develop and unfold the heart nature without losing the abilities of the head-nature and without being overly absorbed in the heart. This leads ultimately to moderation of the head nature and a sensible (reasonable) (but not intellectual) approach to the evocation of heart quality. What then follows (beyond balance) is the cultivation of the intuitional nature which lies beyond mental polarization.

While glimpses of (true) intuition are available to the heart-centered person, by virtue and to the extent of his or her heart quality, the ability to correctly understand the products of intuition is generally lacking or limited by the reaction of the emotional nature. But when the heart nature is balanced by the not overly-developed head nature, then the products of intuition are recognized and understood much more sensibly. But for one who is head-centered, the intuition emerges generally only in rather subtle ways and generally without

conscious realization or recognition of same. Thus, the head-centered person cannot generally distinguish between intuition and intellect (comparably, the heart-centered person cannot generally distinguish between intuition and instinct (what is generally (popularly) but incorrectly called intuition but which is really emotional (astral) impression rather than buddhi)).

The real key is humility. For humility eventually and successfully undermines (overcomes) (transcends) the pervasive (and sometimes subtle) hold of egoism that generally accompanies the developed personality. Without humility people are generally self-deceived in many ways (whereas with humility people are generally less self-deceived and only in relatively subtle ways). Thus the principal impediment is the ego and its tendency toward self-delusion (defensiveness, reactivity, insecurity, taking things personally, separativeness, etc.). Humility is the most synthetic and most fundamental of the heart qualities, ultimately enfolding and engendering all of the heart quality (qualities), and is absolutely essential for the heart-centered student in order to achieve balance and transcendence, and for the head-centered student likewise. And for those who are properly balanced, humility is the means of passing beyond the distinction between head-centeredness and heart-centeredness, beyond ego and intellect, to the truly quiet realm of God-ness.

† Commentary No. 1160

Balance

The path of discipleship is that part of the spiritual path in which balance is achieved, balance between the head-centered and heart-centered natures, balance between the soul and the personality, balance between the individual and the group (humanity), balance between the objective consciousness and the subjective consciousness, and balance between all seven of the rays. In other words, discipleship is the process of becoming oneself, one's true Self, in group context.

Prior to discipleship, through the various paths of approach and through the probationary path, it is mainly a matter of acquiring experience and gradually embracing more and more of the spiritual practices of the path, primarily a

matter of development. But through discipleship, the qualified student must relatively quickly fill in all the developmental gaps and achieve balance between development and service, with service gradually becoming the primary focus of endeavor (and consciousness). Discipleship is, in this sense, very much a fourth ray endeavor, with emphasis on harmony and equilibrium. The disciple actually represents the higher dimension or aspect of humanity, in manifestation.

While probation is primarily objective, and often takes place in the context of some (outer) mystery school, discipleship is more subjective and takes place in the context of subjective group consciousness. On the probationary path, the preliminary discipline is achieved and preliminary endeavors are embraced objectively, with deliberate intent and through deliberate (conscious) (directed) means. In discipleship, the preliminary discipline is maintained and the preliminary endeavors are continued (even expanded), but balance is not achieved through these objective means. Balance is achieved through allowing the forces to complement each other, naturally, which means being able to perceive the balance, even unconsciously, and then cooperating with that balance. Balance is achieved through transcending limitations rather than dealing with limitations at their own level. While the probationary student can be (is) head-centered or heart-centered, the disciple can (properly) be neither. The disciple must be able to work simultaneously through the head and the heart, meaning with heart quality and without the intrusion of the intellect or personality-centeredness.

The number of probationers is relatively large (yet very small compared with the number of souls in incarnation). The number of disciples is relatively small. But the role played by disciples is substantial, as disciples embody the balance or equilibrium between the individual and the group (humanity). Disciples also play a substantial role with regard to the karma of the race, embodying much of that karma, collectively. By virtue of their service to humanity, disciples achieve balance (fulfillment of karma) on a much broader scale than that of the individual. All spiritual students (probationary students, disciples, and initiates) provide subjective encouragement to humanity by virtue of their practice, by virtue of their consciousness, and serve, collectively as an instrument for conveyance of higher (qualifying) energy for all of humanity.

In the final analysis, the two dimensions of discipleship are (outer) service and (inner) balance preparatory to initiation. One cannot embrace discipleship without being qualified (through probation) (seeking). And one cannot then embrace initiation without being qualified (through balance) (non-seeking).



Section 2.24



Initiation

- The path of initiation is the third stage of the spiritual path and involves progressive relationship, within the context of the spiritual hierarchy or inner government and beyond.

Ascension

In the metaphysical context, advancement refers to a progressive upward movement (in consciousness) (along the spiritual path), while ascension refers to the final transition between the human stage and the next higher stage, the culmination of at least several lifetimes of conscious and deliberate evolution. Advancement can be accelerated as the student begins to master his own consciousness, but ascension remains a consequence of advancement and activity.

Many substantial prerequisites exist that must be fulfilled before ascension can occur, virtually all of which involve quality rather than specific achievements (quality is the integrated result of specific achievements and general accomplishments). All of the various prerequisites are interrelated and are normally fulfilled together, as ascension implies an overall, highly integrated balance of all pertinent forces. One of the most obvious prerequisites for ascension is the attainment of sufficient (earned) objective and subjective experience, both general and particular, and the corequisite karmic fulfillment. All individual karma must be fulfilled (released); ascension is not possible where any karmic ties and responsibilities continue to exist. The student must (ultimately) achieve sufficient detachment (freedom) and subjective polarization (the esoteric student is increasingly detached from objective involvement as he works on more meaningful (subjective) levels).

Another obvious prerequisite is self-mastery (and the mastery of the physical, emotional, and mental planes of consciousness). The candidate for ascension must have developed sufficient (objective and subjective) abilities and talents for working in each of the seven ray domains (and have mastered each of the seven ray energies), and he must have completed several major initiations in consciousness. In addition to potency, the candidate must possess sufficient quality of consciousness. One can master a plane of consciousness with or without the sufficient quality of consciousness and conversely, one can develop sufficient quality of consciousness with or without sufficient mastery; both quality and mastery are required for ascension. In addition to the complete fulfillment of individual karma, the student must also contribute sufficiently to

humanity and the planetary consciousness (he must fulfill substantially more than his share of racial (human) and planetary karma). The fulfillment of group karma in no way implies (or allows) the fulfillment of the individual karma of other persons.

One of the more difficult requirements for ascension is a lack of interest or desire for ascension (coupled with a lack of interest or desire for remaining within the human lifewave and/or lower worlds). This requires the achievement of a very delicate balance of desirelessness with service and a responsible commitment (to humanity and to the spiritual path). Since the student is denied interest in ascension (at least at the level for which ascension is possible), it follows that ascension cannot be evoked consciously by the student. Ascension is, however, an inevitable process that can be neither evoked nor deterred, a necessary product of spiritual momentum.

The role of ascension is to encourage the progress of the entire planetary life. The esoteric student, who, fully qualified, withdraws from the world of activity and begins the ascension in consciousness creates a (very potent) magnetic path that embraces probation, discipleship, initiation, and ascension (obscuration). That magnetic vortex (fully integrated and impersonal) continues as a subtle beacon of encouragement to all who are responsive to the magnetic currents of the esoteric path.

† Commentary No. 1014

Initiation

Initiation is the “process of being initiated” or being introduced to something beyond one’s direct experience to date. There are at least three particular meanings of initiation. There is (1) initiation in the sense of progressive, individual, self-revelation, (2) initiation in the sense of being formally or ceremonially initiated into some (exoteric) group or organization or practice, and (3) initiation in the sense of the path of initiation which is the highest stage of the spiritual path.

Initiation in the first sense, of progressive, individual, self-revelation, is a continual experience. As people learn and grow in consciousness they naturally

and to some extent assimilate that experience (however unconsciously the process of assimilation may be) and continually "realize" something as a consequence, the fact that that realization may be slight or modest and largely unconscious notwithstanding. As people progress further in consciousness, these realizations or mini-revelations become more frequent and more conscious. In this sense, every change in attitude, every recognition of significance, etc., is an initiation of sorts, as it is a new beginning, based upon the experience and understanding achieved to that point in evolution of consciousness.

Initiation in the second sense of being formally or ceremonially introduced or initiated into some (exoteric) group or organization or practice covers a wide range of conventional (cultural) (fraternal) (professional) (religious) and unconventional (metaphysical) (theosophical) (occult) practices. Generally there are (real or superficial) qualifications involved, but in this second sense there is not necessarily any real significance to the process or ceremony (or qualifications). There may be, or there may not be (significance), depending on the particulars (the individuals involved, the character of the organization). Many initiations of this second sense are merely superficial and concerned with (artificial) (social) (professional) status, although they may convey certain rights or opportunities not otherwise afforded. Some initiations of this second type are meaningful in the sense that the qualifications may be substantial (i.e., the initiation is earned or merited) and/or the ceremonial aspects may be meaningful and/or the rights and opportunities afforded may have some value. But the "student" should be wary of the glamour of these sorts of things and should therefore look carefully at the character and quality and temperament and values of the associated organization and members.

So-called "occult" initiations or initiations into presumed mysteries (fraternal orders, secret societies, etc.) should also be carefully considered before the student becomes entangled in processes beyond his or her control and/or entangled in associated and unsuspected unsavories, however sincere the members and however noble the organization and its apparent objectives may appear to be. Invariably, these "occult" initiations are all personality-centered experiences, despite whatever claims may be made to the contrary. In the case of the "better" groups there may indeed be relatively noble purposes and no real dangers (and some worthwhile opportunities). But in the case of the "darker" groups (which often appear otherwise) there is real danger for the unwary

participant (and even for the wary participant). Ultimately, there are no initiations in this second sense that are required for further evolution.

Initiation in the third sense of the path of initiation which is the highest stage of the spiritual path is another matter altogether and directly involves the spiritual hierarchy of the planet and the soul or higher self of the individual candidate.

† Commentary No. 1015

The Path of Initiation

The path of initiation is properly that part of the formal spiritual path that is common to all religious and spiritual disciplines (approaches), that is sanctioned by the planetary hierarchy and involves the soul or higher self of the spiritual student (disciple).

In this context there are both major and minor, formal and informal initiations, with a relatively wide range of significance. In the minor and informal sense there is naturally a succession of revelatory and sanctioned experiences that are evoked for the properly qualified student. In the broadest sense, every major expansion or repolarization of consciousness is a significant new beginning (initiation) that involves the soul or higher self (which may or may not involve the waking-consciousness of the personality or lower self). The repolarization of consciousness from the physical plane to the emotional plane, or from the emotional plane to the mental (manasic) plane is a major informal initiation of significance. And the repolarization of consciousness from the mental plane to the intuitional (buddhic) plane is a major and formal initiation of significance.

But there are three very definite requirements for an initiatory process to be properly considered as being sanctioned by the spiritual hierarchy (and therefore real in the context of the formal spiritual path). The first requirement is simply one of qualification. The student invariably must have achieved whatever level of or ability in consciousness is required for admission to the next stage of evolutionary opportunity (experience, expression, and (but mostly) service). The second requirement is that the soul or higher self be actively involved in the process (the soul generally only touches the lower self directly during the

process of (proper) initiation (which is mainly a matter of selected vivification)) (those who are not receptive to or responsive to the soul in any real (mature) (sensible) way are simply not (yet) qualified). And the third requirement is that the initiation be conducted in the context of an affiliated esoteric group (i.e., within the context of the planetary hierarchy).

The problem with the path of initiation is the breadth of delusion (glamour) that exists in the metaphysical and theosophical and occult field concerning initiation. Many people and organizations make claims pertaining to (their) initiation as being hierarchically sanctioned, etc., when in fact no such person or organization (anyone who makes such claims) is so sanctioned (although some may be deluded into sincerely believing they are so sanctioned). No one who is an initiate in this higher sense would ever make such a claim. And no organization truly (directly) affiliated with the spiritual hierarchy would ever sanction such claims. In contrast, the actuality of the path and process of initiation in this higher (proper) sense is that initiation occurs only for those who are both qualified and non-seeking, and that no outer or physical plane ceremony is involved. That leaves the problem of delusion of astral experience involving initiation. Of course anyone who claims such experience (initiation) is either deluded or dishonest (or both). The maturity required for such experience precludes any such claims-making. But since initiation in the higher sense can only occur through non-seeking, it is simply not a subject that the serious spiritual student is interested in.

Real initiation is simply the accomplishment or achievement of the level of or ability in consciousness implied therein. Formal initiation in this sense is simply an acknowledgement of that consciousness and a vivification process (of spiritual renewal on subtle levels).