

A MONTHLY LETTER

BY MANLY P. HALL



Seventh Letter

DISCIPLINES OF MEDITATION AND REALIZATION

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Dear Student:

The traditions of alchemy refer frequently to a mysterious order of adepts. These beings were believed to possess a complete knowledge of the mysterious elixir of life and to travel about the world, appearing and disappearing at will, and communicating their secrets to such as they deemed worthy.

These adepts carried with them the powder of projection which they called the "Red Lion." A few grains of the "Red Lion" dropped upon a molten mass of crude metal would cause its instantaneous transmutation into the finest gold. According to one account, the powder of projection could transmute one hundred thousand times its own weight. This same powder dissolved in wine was the philosophic elixir, the universal medicine against all corruptions of the flesh. According to von Welling, a minute particle of this "Red Lion" if placed on the surface of water would begin to rotate and revolve violently, passing through all the changes and periods which occur in the formation of the solar system.

In the majority of cases, those alchemists who claimed to possess the powder of projection had re-

ceived either the powder or the formula for its preparation from one of the nameless adepts. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, the veneration in which the invisible brothers were held, nor the great number of stories that got into circulation describing the curious circumstances under which the adepts revealed their secrets.

While undoubtedly it is true that advanced alchemists possessing profound knowledge of the universal mystery did wander about medieval Europe, the accounts of the adepts, like the story of the unicorn, were philosophic fables suitable to deceive the unwary into holding false opinions regarding the alchemical operations.

The adept is the *Self*, the divine principle that manifests within the human personality, the reality behind every man. This Self possesses the true powder of projection, *wisdom*, for wisdom, and wisdom alone, can transmute all the base substances of human experience into spiritual power. The inward quest is the search for the Self. The purpose of concentration is to discover the Self. The end of all seeking after spiritual things is to be united with the divine part within. This conscious union resulting from the release of principle from

personality, of the subtle from the gross, of the eternal from the temporal, is accomplished by means of the secret chemistry of the soul, the alchemy of the old world. Within each of us is the adept Self, the rose diamond. On rare occasions we glimpse for an instant the tremendous implication of the Self, we become aware that the personality is indeed merely a shadow of the real. These infrequent mystical experiences, these rare occasions when the sincere seeker feels himself to be in the presence of his own divine nature were described in the old books as a visit from one of the adepts. In the extension of consciousness which resulted from such rare spiritual experiences came a newer, fuller appreciation of the mystery of the quest. The personality was instructed in sacred matters; it participated for an instant in a larger fact, and in this way came closer to the universal mystery of knowledge.

The laboratory is life. The alchemist is the truth seeker. The formulas by which he attempts to control the metals are his disciplines of concentration and contemplation. The adept-teacher is the over-Self and the powder of projection is living wisdom which transmutes all substances and all natures into the imperishable truths for which all the world is seeking.

RETROSPECTION

One of the best-known of all philosophical disciplines is the Pythagorean exercise of retrospection. It is recorded that the members of the famous school of Krotona practiced a daily retrospection according to a formula laid down by the great master himself.

Retrospection is the mental process of reliving in reverse order the incidents of the day. The purpose of retrospection is to discover the moral weight of action. The average person passing through the experiences of daily living is only partly aware of the significance of passing events. Some of the most valuable lessons go unnoticed. Failure to heed and observe, failure to discriminate and place right emphasis, and, most of all, failure to be

thoughtful, all these shortcomings deprive the consciousness of the conscious experience of action, with the result that much valuable time is wasted.

By means of retrospection, we may live again incidents which have occurred; we may view them impartially; we may read our own actions as from a book. It is possible to see in greater perspective the intimate relationship between cause and effect. Theoretically, at least, retrospection enriches life, resulting in a greater thoroughness in thinking and feeling.

More recently, the discipline of retrospection has been interpreted as a form of vicarious atonement. The person performing the retrospection sets himself up as a sort of judge and jury over his own actions; reviewing the incidents of the day, he attempts to rationalize each of them. Subjecting his thoughts and emotions to a series of mental rewards and punishments, he sincerely regrets the mistakes he has made, and with equal sincerity acknowledges and applauds his more commendable accomplishments. This technic is regarded as highly beneficial in neutralizing karma. Unfortunately, it does not appear that this form of retrospection was practiced by the Pythagoreans. Therefore, we have no rule of conduct laid down by the master in this particular.

The practice of retrospection offers certain advantages if properly understood. But like most esoteric exercises, it has been gravely misunderstood by most of those who have attempted to use it. It is the natural purpose of the universe to keep the attention of man focused directly upon that hypothetical division of time which we call *now*. Truly, as it is written in the Scriptures, "Now is the appointed time." Present action is the focusing of all the accomplishments and propensities of consciousness upon the problem of the moment. The *now* eternally is drawing out of man his resourcefulness, his courage, his integrity, and his understanding.

What we call time is so illusional that many philosophers have come to the conclusion that of all the dimensions of time, only the *now* is real. Any exercises which lure the point of consciousness

away from the *now* are dangerous to those who are not well-grounded in the disciplines of realization. He who lives in the future abides in a vagary of hope. He who lives in the past lives in the vagary of regret. Both hope and regret are inferior attitudes as compared to the active certainties of the *now*. A man working with a present problem is gaining much more of soul growth than can be achieved by dreaming after unborn tomorrows, or moping over dead yesterdays. When we become very wise so that we are untroubled by memories and are unmoved by re-pining, we then may find profit in the contemplation of our own misdeeds. Until such time as we have gained this philosophical equilibrium, too much retrospecting is likely to prove harmful.

There is a certain fatalism about the past and so little can be done to unmake or remake that which already has occurred. As we have done, we have done.

We may desire heartily and sincerely to take back the hasty words we have spoken, but we have spoken them to the air and the winds have carried them far beyond our reach. We never can bring them back. The kindly deed we might have performed is useless now. The occasion came and

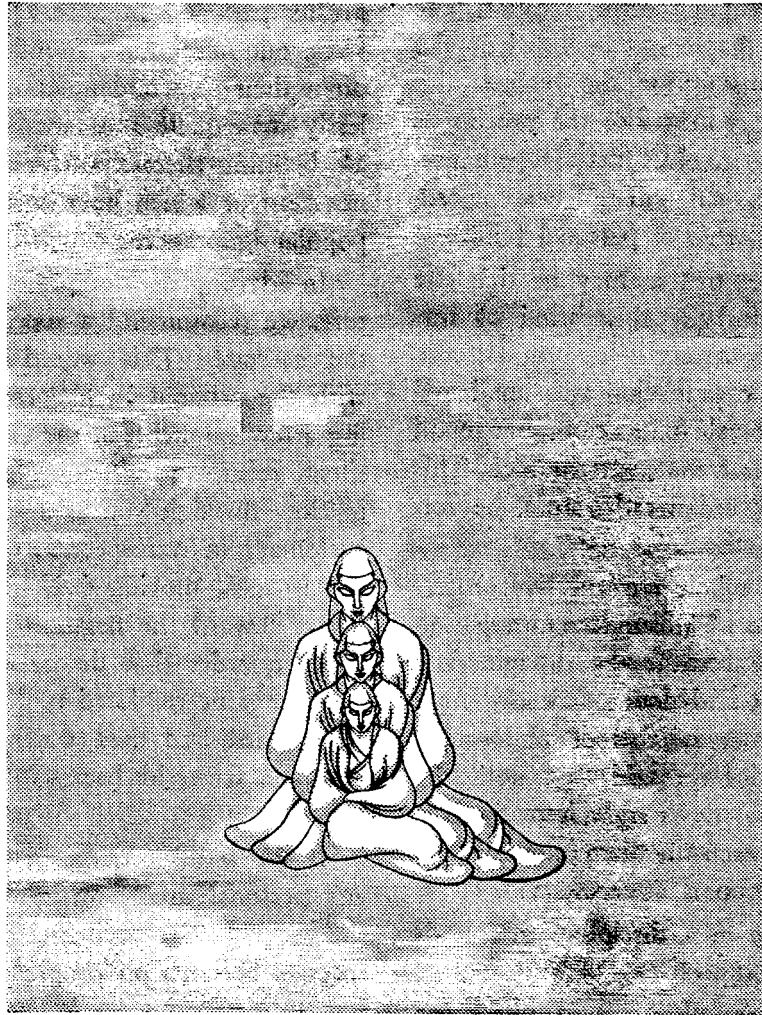
went. Performed tomorrow, it will be useless. The opportunity for experience which was offered and which we overlooked has passed on to others. We can not lure it back. All we can do is to settle back in the midst of our realization of failure and

disappointment, discouraged by the helplessness and hopelessness of our miserable state. This negative attitude robs us in a very subtle way of a certain vitality.

Realization is not a discipline of repentance. It is positive statement of conviction. It flows along the impulse to do and to be, and it has little in common with vain regret. It is better for man to search for truth than it is for him to wrestle with his errors.

Another problem that arises with the discipline of retrospection as it now is practiced popularly relates to the implications of self-correction. Going through the experiences of the day, the disciple is supposed to administer his rewards and punishments accord-

ing to the merits and demerits of action. This implies that the student knows what he should have done, and also that he knows what he should not have done. A critical survey in many cases indicates that true knowledge of correct courses of action is beyond the capacity of most



THE THREE TRANSCENDENT ATTRIBUTES. *The realization of the three states of the Self. The highest, or supreme, state is that of Adibuddha, the Unmoved Mover of the World. The second, or intermediate, state is Avalokitesvara, the realization of the One, the Comprehender. The smallest figure is the terrestrial Buddha, the Observer, the Beholder of the Unreal, the objective personality with its attributes.*

students. Therefore, the judgments made during retrospection are opinions little better than the actions themselves.

For example, a certain sect or school may teach that a disciple should eat only a certain kind of food. Quite thoughtlessly on some occasion, the disciple eats something that is not included on the list. Later, in his retrospection, he realizes the enormity of his offense, enters into the process of self-chastisement which involves deep repentance, devout assurance that his sin will not be repeated, and feels a tremendous sense of personal failure.

Yet the truth of the matter may be that the group or sect which forbade the eating of the certain food was entirely wrong in its original condemnation. The dietetic restriction was not based upon a solid philosophical foundation, but upon the personal tastes of the founder of the sect. This gentleman did not like onions; therefore, he forbade his disciples to eat them.

In just this way the whole retrospective process becomes a vicious circle of misunderstanding and wrong emphasis simply because the disciple does not know what is right and does not know what is wrong. In the deeper systems of philosophy, the old teachers would have said that until the disciple actually knows *what is right*, retrospection is impossible, and that when the disciple does know what is right, retrospection is unnecessary.

There is little virtue in a discipline that leads only to an inferiority complex.

Retrospection arises in all instances where the element of forgiveness of sin is present in a religious system, where there is some compromise of basic integrity. If the human being believes that there is any escape from the consequences of action, the standard of living will be compromised. Thoughtfulness must come first, not afterwards. A little wisdom is more precious than an ocean of repentance. To do what is right first is to be wise. Therefore, it is the first duty of the truth seeker to search for the right. Having performed an action according to the noblest standard of consciousness, there is no cause for regret. If a mistake has been made, universal law will reveal it through

karma. There should be thoughtfulness, but not over-emphasis upon the daily process of living.

Often there is conflict between the larger vision and the smaller vision. I know individuals who have been possessed by regret and remorse for the greater part of a lifetime. Such persons sing their vices, but never have found their virtues. All too often their self-condemnation is based upon hopelessly inadequate standards of integrity, and they are blaming themselves for faults which either do not exist or which have been highly magnified by popular ignorance.

In advising the discipline of retrospection, therefore, we recommend a specially modified form of the exercise. This would agree almost exactly with the original Pythagorean formula. Appointing a few moments at the close of the day, become silent, relax, and permit the incidents of the day to flow through you as a series of pictures. It is customary in retrospection to reverse the order of the images, moving backwards from last occurrences toward the beginning of the day. This is done in order that the relationship of effect and cause may be rendered more obvious by observing effects first and then tracing the causes of those effects as we retire backwards along the line of incidents.

If the retrospection can be performed without any personal involvement, without any sense that the incidents are occurring to ourselves, the retrospection becomes philosophically useful. We should see, not the weaknesses of ourselves, but the *strength of the Law*. We should not see ourselves as poor mortal sinners forever wrestling with the hosts of evil like Jacob with his angel, but rather we should see Law molding us eternally into the shape and purpose of its own reality. Instead of worrying about our own soul growth, instead of being possessed by the desperate delusion of growing, instead of longing after some Elysian field, let us become aware of the workings of an ever-flowing Law by which all finite natures are being impelled and propelled.

Law is real; we are not. Law is good; we are not. Law is immortal; we are not. This does not

mean that we are worms of the dust or insignificant, unimportant things, beings to live in misery and despair. Rather it means forgetfulness of ourselves. We turn the effects of attention away from self-condemnation toward the face of fact. We know that it is a physical truth that he who forgets himself is happy. We are reminded of the biblical statement that the man who saves his life shall lose it. This applies especially in the field of religion.

Throughout the whole world of belief, men are trying through their doctrines and their dogmas to save themselves. Through prayer and fasting, through rituals and dogmas, with candles and pyxes, self-centered mortals are bending to the task of saving themselves. Through self-abnegation, through self-denial, with flagellation and austerity, with gifts and offerings, the rich and the poor, the humble and the great are seeking divine favor, always for the same reason, always inspired by the same fundamental motive—self-preservation.

The soul must be saved, and, strangely enough, the salvation of an immortal principle is made to depend upon the ill-founded opinions of a frail and mortal part, the human personality. Men meditate to save themselves; and they practice retrospection to save themselves. Always, they are thinking of the self; always plotting and planning for the self. The lay disciple, falling into one of these pitfalls of the *Way*, comes inevitably to the conclusion that not only is he worth saving, but that he is in dire and constant danger of being lost. In this wild game of saving and losing, of being redeemed and then relapsing, the beauty and nobility of living toward Truth is totally ignored. And man, poised precariously between salvation and damnation, is not in a condition which induces an especially philosophic mood.

The purpose of realization is that consciousness shall flow away from the personality toward identification with Law and reality. Posit the real, not the unreal. This is not a platitude, but a great spiritual truth.

When Jesus and his disciples were walking along the country road and they came upon the carcass of a dead dog, the disciples with various

exclamations of disgust turned from the sight of the body which had begun to rot. But Jesus rebuked them, saying: "Pearls are not whiter than its teeth."

This parable, which originated somewhere in northern Asia and travelled far to be incorporated in the Christian traditions, is a statement of realization. It is applicable to the daily life of each disciple. By it we should judge others, and by the same rule we should judge ourselves. This does not mean that we should continue to cultivate old faults, but rather that we should strive to cultivate universal virtues. We should not excuse our own mistakes, but rather we should see through them and realize that they bear witness to a failure of adjustment between personal and universal understanding. We should not try to correct faults one by one, but rather with single-pointedness search for the one realization and the one truth that in itself corrects all faults.

Retrospection is serviceable if through the aid of it we come closer to the One. But if we are not more aware of good because of the exercise, then the exercise in itself is not good for us. If any discipline makes us feel our own inferiority, it is as wrong as though it made us feel our own superiority. Truly, man is neither great nor small. He is a channel through which eternal principle is flowing. He may think he is great, and then he truly is small. He may think he is small, and then perhaps he is great. But knowing he is a witness to a greatness that is not his own, which abides forever in the innermost and the furthest, he is a sage established in reality.

If retrospection appears to the consciousness as a practical method of growing, it may be practiced sparingly, but it never should become a crutch or an escape mechanism, or be thought of as a compensation for action or inaction. If practiced at all, it should be keyed to the realization of works. Through observation and attention we should become more observant and more aware of the workings of universals through us and in us. If this is possible through retrospection and the mind can protect itself from the processes so often associated with the discipline, then the effects can be beneficial.

Usually the discipline should be limited to from three to five minutes a day, and should be practiced regularly immediately before retiring. The mind should remain impassive and entirely calm. There should be no emotional reflex of any kind. It should be an experience in which we become aware, but to which we do not react as personal beings.

FURTHER NOTES ON CONCENTRATION

In the last letter was reproduced a figure representing the creation of the transcendental personality within the consciousness of the concentrating disciple. The present letter contains the next illustration of the same series, showing the extension or multiplication of the personality into three transcendent attributes. These figures require understanding and thought.

It is customary in Eastern theories of metaphysics to represent the heart as a shrine. Often this shrine is shown as a small Buddha-like structure within the breast. In some systems, especially the Buddhistic, the heart is described as a lotus bud. When this bud opens under the gentle influence of the concentration, the seated figure of the meditating Buddha is found within. The heart is indeed a "House of Hidden Places," the very sanctuary of the body, the symbol of the throne of majesty in man. It is proper, therefore, that this, of all the organs in the bodily economy, should represent the Self, the reality, the most sacred part of the whole nature of the universe and of man.

The purpose of concentration is to become aware of reality. When this awareness is achieved, it is described as coming to the one who discovers it and taking up its abode in his heart. Of course, this actually is part of a symbolic story, but it conveys the idea.

In China, the oversoul or the reality sometimes is depicted as riding on the phoenix. It appears in the heavens and flies rapidly from cloud to cloud. At last, soaring downward, it disappears into the body of the disciple where it sits upon the

lotus throne in his heart. When this mystery has taken place, it means that a certain contact has been established, a bond between the personality and universal values.

This reality within is called the transcendent being. It is man's concept of the universal being. It is not the pure universal substance for the reason that the human consciousness is not capable of envisioning the Absolute itself. The transcendent being is the Absolute *as we are able to understand it*. It is the infinite made finite by our own perception, yet incredible and unknowable in comparison to the concepts of the uninitiated and the uninformed.

To the degree that we are able to preserve and maintain the beauty, impersonality, and dignity of the transcendent being, to that degree we remain true to our philosophy and to our doctrine. As the mother carries her children within her body, so the disciple carries the transcendent being within his heart. It must grow up within him, ultimately to be born from him as a free and independent spirit. But the personality can not survive the birth of the transcendent being. When the universal is born, the personal dies. For this reason, it is written in the East that the mother of the Buddha lived but five days after the birth of her child.

The transcendent being is the *abiding presence*. Once it has been realized by concentration, it dwells with the disciple. This transcendent being never questions, never speaks, never demands. It merely remains—waiting. Understanding increases it; lack of understanding apparently causes it to diminish. But through this it gradually strengthens, becoming ever more dominant.

It is variously figured in Eastern mysticism. Quite often it is called the Maitreya, the bodhi-sattva which is to come. In this aspect it is the universal Messiah. This is the true import of the Messianic doctrine. The coming Savior is the transcendent being. In China, Maitreya sometimes is represented as a very rotund, smiling personality whose body seems perpetually to be shaking with laughter. It is a happy spirit abiding in man. There is nothing depressing or introverting about

it. It is the joy of realization, the peace that Truth alone can bestow, a fortunate and desirable presence, the coming of which is to be marked by an appropriate rejoicing.

The disciple, having envisioned the real, that is, having become aware of his relationship to fact, is said to have attracted the transcendent being. From that time on, the being grows with the rapidity of the evolution of the disciple. This is Jacob Boehme's tree of the soul which grows up in the heart until it fills the whole world. Gradually the transcendent being increases until man's personality becomes merely a dying atom in the substance of this universal reality.

Man begins his growth as a lowly creature like an atom in space. In the end, however, he achieves space; his consciousness is identified with space. He no longer is isolated, but encloses space within himself. In the Brahmanic books, Krishna is described as towering far above Arjuna, his faithful disciple. The transcendent being, Krishna, so has increased gradually that in comparison to it, the personality of the human creature is as nothing. The development of the transcendent being requires many lifetimes to consummate its final emancipation in a life of realization.

If I can convey in some way to you the meaning of the transcendent being, you will share one of the choicest secrets of Eastern esotericism. Here again we can make use of a fable.

Once upon a time there was an emperor who longed to have a son. Although he had many wives, Allah, in his inevitable wisdom, gave him no sons. So the emperor resolved to go upon a pilgrimage to ask the advice and guidance of a great and noble saint who lived alone in the midst of a deep forest.

After many days of journeying and numerous hardships and troubles, the king reached the hut of the hermit. Here he was nobly received by the holy Sufi. And to this aged and learned man the great prince of the earth told the sad story of his longings, his desire that an heir might be born to him.

The Sufi listened to the sincerity of the king's appeal and said: "You shall have a son upon one condition."

"Anything that you ask," replied the emperor, "unto half of my kingdom. By Allah, whose name be praised, I swear it."

Within the year a son was born to the emperor. All his people gave thanks and the king was prepared to fulfill his vow.

The holy Sufi came into his presence and the emperor said to him: "Ask what you will."

The Sufi replied: "While I sit quietly in my hut in the deep forest, I wish you to remove the forest and to build in its place a great city so that without leaving the little garden around my house, I may see the whole world go by and be among the concourse of peoples."

So the emperor built the city just as the holy man had desired. In the very midst of the city, protected by a beautiful marble dome, was the little hut of the holy man with its square of earth.

The holy man sat and watched the princes, the merchants, and the travelers from all over the world pass up and down before him. Several years had passed when he sent for the emperor. "I have seen enough," the saint observed firmly. "Remove the city."

So the emperor took all of his people and all of the merchants and their shops, and the palaces and the gardens, and had them moved. What he could not move, he deserted. And the holy man was alone again in the silence, surrounded by the ghosts of an empty city.

This is the legend of Fatehpur Sikri, the city of red stone and marble that today stands deserted. But it is more than a deserted city. It is the story of the transcendent being.

The emperor is the truth seeker himself. The son he desires is his own immortality, that is the continuance of himself as a spiritual truth. The holy man is the secret doctrine, the wisdom which finally becomes personified as the transcendent being.

The pilgrimage to the holy man's hut in the forest is the practice of the disciplines. The city

that the emperor builds represents the cycle of incarnations in which the pageantry of lives takes place. The concourse of people that pass to and fro before the holy man's hut represents the various personalities that comprise the cycle of incarnations.

The holy man around whose hut has been built the temple with its marble dome is the transcendent being seated in the heart of the city, a spectator of all that occurs. After the passing of many years the transcendent being demands that the city be moved and deserted so that it may be left to sit alone in peaceful contemplation. This shows how the transcendent being comes into complete rulership over the life.

Finally, nothing remains but the transcendent being, a creature built from the noblest hopes and aspirations, which is the real Self; the ego of the personality is dissolved in a universal essence. Man no longer lives for himself or by himself. He exists to fulfill the impulses of the transcendent being. He lives to bear witness to the will and purpose of the universal spirit that has taken up its abode within him.

Through contemplation and concentration it is possible to realize the transcendent being as very real and entirely substantial. It is a substance akin to the substance of a fact, shrined within the holy of holies of man's temple. The transcendent being becomes purposeful living, and our objective personality becomes its willing and obedient servant.

"I bow before the lotus throne," chants the enraptured Buddhist.

He means just that. As a personal creature, he bows before the lotus throne of his own heart where sits Sakyamuni, the light of Asia and of the world, the priceless jewel, the transcendent being.

REALIZATION

It is a great experience in consciousness to feel oneself or to realize oneself as the keeper of a sacred trust. In some way it adds to our dignity while at the same time keeping us very gentle and humble. It is thus that each becomes his own high priest; his heart, the altar; and the transcendent

being, the god that dwells in the holy place. Religion becomes an intensely intimate and personal matter when the transcendent being is the direct object of all religious observance. It is the god which abides with man. It is not a god, but a ray of the God, the Principle, the Truth. It mingles through a mysterious alchemy with the mortal parts of man, though it never is limited or destroyed by them. It stands, has stood, and shall stand. It remains the silent watcher. It is not the voice of conscience, for it never criticizes, never blames, never doubts, never questions. Like the passionless face of the meditating Buddha, it sits in the heart and waits, waits through the ages during hundreds of lives, unmoved and unchanged, with ever-closed eyes and imperturbable, passive features. It waits for the day of liberation. There is no hurry, for there is no time. There is no delay. There is only a timeless mystery waiting for liberation—waiting and yet not waiting, for here waiting has no reference to time. But this timeless waiting is a mystery that is all wound up in realization, in the sublime secret of personal awareness.

Of all the mysteries of Asiatic metaphysics, there is none more sublime in its concept than the doctrine of the transcendent being, the ever-coming Self. While man builds his own soul, he really is building the universal soul with virtues not his own; he is building virtues with wisdom that rises not in himself; and he is perfecting a wisdom apart from himself.

All the constructive and creative powers which man expresses fall into his personality from some deep and hidden source. Their purpose is not to build his personality, but to perfect the transcendent being, which, born in the manger, a symbol of its material environment, unfolds and develops until it becomes a world savior, truly the savior of each man's world.

Sincerely Yours,

