

A MONTHLY LETTER

BY MANLY P. HALL



DISCIPLINES OF MEDITATION AND REALIZATION *Sixth Letter
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Dear Student:

There is an Eastern fable that explains part of the mystery of concentration. We can make use of this fable to convey certain implications that can not be expressed in direct words. All spiritual values must be realized, inwardly comprehended. They can not be communicated in the manner that mathematical formulas can be passed from one person to another.

The emperor of an Eastern country built a palace which he called the House of the Singing Floors. When the palace was finished, he desired that gardens be planted about it so that the palace itself should stand in the midst of an earthly paradise.

The emperor sent for the wisest and most skilled of his gardeners and commanded him to landscape the palace grounds. The gardener, who was very old and very wise, went out from the palace, and, selecting a place nearby, built himself a crude sort of chair with a canopy of branches as a protection from the elements. The old man then seated himself there quietly. Summer slowly passed and the man sat silently watching. Autumn came; the leaves of the trees changed their colors

and fell; the birds departed. The clouds gathered and, at last, the snows of winter lay upon the ground. Still the aged gardener sat and watched. The winds whirled the snow, banking it up against the rocks. The trees bent under the fury of the gale. But the gardener merely drew his woolen cloak about him and reached for another steaming bowl of tea. Then springtime came. The snows melted; the little streams were filled; the squirrels came out from their holes; the spring flowers sent their green leaves through the patches of earth and melting snow. The gardener sat watching the motions of the seasons.

At last the summer came again. Having remained for a full year sitting in his chair of tree branches, the gardener rose, entered the presence of the emperor, and announced that now he would plant the gardens.

A year later the earthly paradise was completed. Rare plants flowered on every hand. Curious fishes swam in the streams. Exotic birds nested in the trees. Little shrines stood upon the rocks. And old stone lanterns bordered the pathways. In all the world there never had been so perfect a garden.

When it was all in readiness, the gardener led the emperor out on the broad porch of the palace and said to him: "O Sun of Heaven, my work is finished. In every season and with the passing of every year this garden will retain its perfection. As each plant grows it will become a living part of a balanced completeness. When the leaves fall, they will form patterns upon the ground. And within the openings in the branches you will see the snow-capped mountains. When the streams rise, they will form pools and eddies, each of which will become perfectly patterned with the rest. It is for this reason that I sat in meditation for a year. There can be no conflict here. Each passing season will express its own beauty, in winter, in summer, in autumn, and in spring. There always will be harmonious beauty.

"As your majesty advances in years, your tastes will change, but the gardens will grow also. As long as you live you will find happiness in them. And when at last you return to the sky from whence you came, those who follow after you will find themselves in this garden as you have found yourself. I have built a miniature world that reflects the mysteries of a greater world. This, O Sun of Heaven, is the wise man's garden."

To every man the Eastern emperor is the *Self*; the garden, his life; and the aged gardener, his wisdom with which he must build his earthly paradise. Wisdom opens the way and gives the example of concentration. The exercise and discipline of philosophical attention which we call concentration is explained in the gardener's year of meditation. Through the observation and consideration of all the universal processes which go on about us, we become aware of the ever-changing seasons of the soul. In the thoughts of each man summer changes to autumn, and autumn to winter, and winter to spring, and spring to summer again.

This mystery of change can not be understood by the reading of words, but it can be felt inwardly as a spiritual experience during concentration. Not only must we focus attention, but we must sense as eternal truth, the gentle flowing of time through consciousness. We grow but in time toward eter-

nity, gently, peacefully, inevitably. There must be no haste, no tension, no strain, and no striving. We must behold all things, value all things, feel our participation in all things, and from all these experiences find the garden of our living. When we do this, year after year, life after life, we understand.

Tao, the way and the end in one, teaches that the method is forever flowing into the accomplishment, the things we do always are becoming part of the thing that we are. To understand this IS concentration; not merely the concentration of the mind with its tendency to scatter its resources, but more completely so to understand our relationship with life that the unity of our purpose is strong enough to bind all confusion together in one ever-flowing harmonious pattern.

CONCENTRATION AS A FORM OF EXPERIENCE

Sometimes it is difficult to understand that concentration is not essentially an intellectual process. While the mind is the instrument of concentration, the exercises fail if they are regarded as directed toward mental control through effort. Also, it seems hard to understand that concentration involves the simultaneous activity of every part of the consciousness. There must be attention without tension. There must be feeling without emotion; visualization without fixation. And all must be bound together by an inclusive one-pointedness of purpose which does not include any inference of limitation. The process is more difficult to describe than it is to achieve because it occurs simultaneously on different planes or levels. It depends for its success upon the capacity of the student to realize the identity of the parts of his own consciousness, as, for example, that feeling and thought are one, that the things sensed and the power to sense are identical. There is no division between the flower and its beauty, the bird and its grace, or the river and its song.

We may become aware of all of the values at the same time. This is properly termed spiritual

perception. To the artist, the tree is form; to the woodcutter, it is fuel. The musician hears the rustle of its leaves. In it the mystic sees growth. To the pilgrim the tree is shelter; to the farmer its fruit is life; to the squirrel that lives in its hollow trunk it is protection; to the physician who makes medicine from its bark it is healing; to the carpenter it is walls and roof. The tree is all this and more to the sage in meditation beneath its branches. It is felt and known in all of its innumerable qualities and attributes. It is spiritual experience; it is Law; it is God; it is Truth. Concentration is the power or discipline by which all these values become simultaneously accessible as spiritual power.

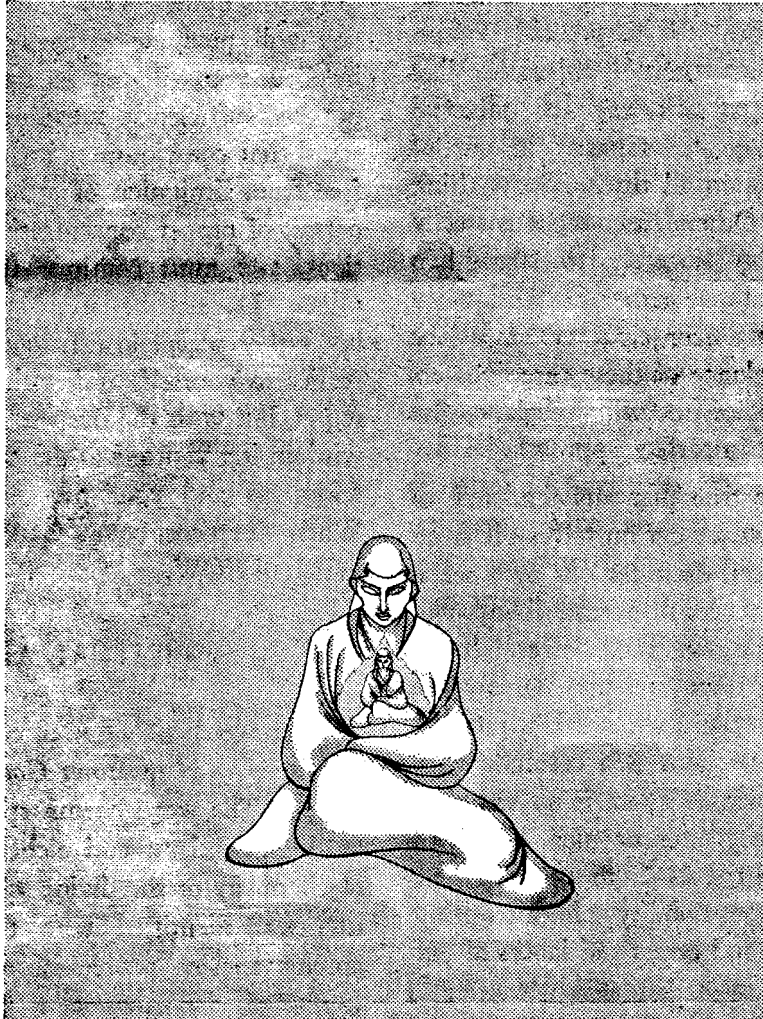
Most of all, it is realization. Truth brings to the wise man exactly what the wise man brings to Truth. Therefore, Truth is a sort of mystic fable, a living legend, which he interprets according to himself. Each finds

in Truth what he himself is; according to his own knowledge he understands.

Through the practice of concentration, the individual finds himself in all things and through all things. This is the reason why the old Masters of the Hidden Road, as they were called in Korea, often gave contradictory definitions. Concentration, they would explain to their disciples, was a mental

process. Then, in the very next breath, they would insist that the mind had no part in it. The very contradiction itself was part of the fable, part of the mystery. It confused the foolish, but enlightened the wise.

When Plato pointed to heaven as the abode of the gods, and Aristotle pointed to the earth as the abode of the gods, the confusion and contradiction seemed hopeless. Yet it takes but a moment of real understanding to know that both were right, that all differences are proof of unity. The materialist will scoff and declare such reasoning to be little better than madness. But to the wise, the materialist is the maddest of all. Yet the sage and the materialist are both right. Realization will prove this, for realization is forever finding the right and abiding with it.



THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE INNER IMAGE. The discovery of the Self in the symbol of the not-self. The realization of the birth of the transcendental being within. The beginning of the discipline of meditation.

When you begin your practice of concentration, the rapidity of progress depends entirely upon the full understanding of what the discipline means. A bad start, that is an effort inspired by inadequate comprehension, will result in years of comparatively fruitless striving. Therefore, there should not be too much haste or too much eagerness. Success depends upon thoroughness of understanding. It is for this reason that we are reiterating in several ways the basic con-

cepts. If the foundation is right, all that follows will flow in the proper course.

It may prove beneficial to consider your own personal proficiency in three basic capacities—your capacity to think in terms of spiritual realities, to feel in terms of impersonal participation in a universal sharing of life, and to visualize in terms of seeing values through forms. This probably sounds rather confused, yet it is a common experience that the normal individual at this stage of universal growth usually has a greater capacity in one of these qualifications than in all three. Some think better than they feel. Others react more correctly to visual stimuli. Try sincerely to strengthen whichever of these qualities seems the weakest in yourself. Your spiritual consciousness must be compounded from a balance of these three powers of your soul. The lack of one will unbalance the others and result in an imperfect approach.

Also, it is definitely true that any tendency to introvert, the degree that we cut ourselves off from the flow of life in others, damages our own sensitivity. All of the experiences of normal living contribute their part to our own soul power. If we restrict the flow of our own lives and narrow the sphere of our personal experience, we frustrate the universality of ourselves. This is a common mistake among metaphysicians. There is no virtue in aloofness. We are not greater or more dignified because we separate ourselves from others. Our true greatness lies in the nobility of discovering ourselves in the dreams and hopes and labors of our world.

All of which means that the true concentration may be said to come about of itself. If we fulfill the Law in living, the Law sets up its own motion within our consciousness. We will then concentrate naturally as forms occur naturally. We will realize soul power as the tree releases its buds and branches. Concentration is natural to man, but only when man himself is natural. Concentration is normal to the normal. It is the next step in the unfoldment of the inner self. Man can not cause concentration, but he can prevent it. Unfoldment, therefore, is not the forcing of the exer-

cise, but the removal of the obstacles to a perfectly natural and beautiful process in the consciousness itself.

If you can understand, you will do. Your action must flow from your understanding as from a fountain. At this point there is little we can add to the discipline. YOU must find the way. But if you will meditate earnestly upon what we have implied, you will not go astray. If the words are not yet sufficiently meaningful, you must understand that consciousness itself is not yet sufficiently free from limitation of attitude and complexity to permit of proper concentration. Under such conditions, you must continue the preparational disciplines. Do not be afraid to admit insufficiency, but rather accept insufficiency as a challenge from reality to yourself, and without disappointment or regret, but with the deepest realization of universal wisdom, set yourself to the task of fitting your consciousness and your life into the universal plan. When the time comes and you are ready, YOU WILL KNOW.

SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY

The word alchemy is compounded from two words: *al* or *el* meaning *God*, and *Khem* meaning Egypt. The word chemistry literally is the science of the Egyptians, and alchemy the divine science of chemistry or the divine science of Egypt. Chemistry was identified with the Egyptians because among ancient peoples it was believed that the secrets of chemistry were first communicated to man by the priests of the Egyptian temples.

Alchemy is spiritual chemistry. It is the secret doctrine concerning the perfection of man, concealed under a terminology of chemical terms, allegories, fables, and symbols. Alchemy is not only an integral part of the European mystical tradition, but occupies a position of similar importance in the Taoist metaphysics of China. Many of the greatest of the Taoist saints were celebrated for their proficiency in alchemical research and experimentation.

We frequently have been asked why it was necessary or desirable to conceal spiritual truths in elaborate systems of fables and emblems. A student once asked me why it would not be much simpler and more helpful to leave all symbols behind and just explain the whole mystery in the beginning so that everyone could understand the facts themselves. We hope that by this time you have reached the point in this series of letters where you will understand why it is impossible to describe any spiritual reality except in terms of symbolism. No one can describe growth without recourse to a description of something that grows. Spiritual realities are internal, formless mysteries that truly are incomprehensible unless clothed in some body of tangible lore.

The fable becomes the vehicle of communication. A man crossing the void between one mind and another must be transported in some kind of a container. It is for this reason that the Buddhists call their sacred scriptures *baskets*. When you have received the idea and made it part of yourself, you then may discard the basket. One of the saddest tragedies of mankind is that the average human being saves the basket and throws away the contents; or mistaking the basket for the contents, he worships the basket in the belief that he is pious because he preserves the shape of the idea that has come to him even though he is unaware of the purpose.

Many students have objected to the extremely fantastic nature of religious and philosophical symbolism and fable. This wild extravagance of fantasy is part of a well-planned purpose. It is a constant reminder that the symbols obviously are too extravagant for literal acceptance by the thoughtful, and that they conceal principles which are beyond the sphere of our physical and so-called normal perception.

Take, for example, the alchemical symbolism of the unicorn. Out of fabulous antiquity has descended an account of a weird animal differing from any creature familiar to man. It was shaped like a horse, but had a cloven hoof. On its forehead grew a long slender horn of twisted gold.

The tail of the unicorn was similar to that of a lion. And its mane was of spun silver. It lived alone in remote parts of mountains, and there was but one alive at a time. It endured for many ages, and permitted itself to be seen at certain intervals. The unicorn of European mysticism is the Ki-lin of the Chinese, a fabled animal that announced the birth of Confucius, the lion horse with a single horn. How does it happen that two races dwelling on opposite sides of the earth should share a belief in this mythological creature?

How beautifully the story of the unicorn fulfills the purpose of the ancient priests who devised it. Medieval zoologists frequently included the unicorn as an actually existing animal, assigning as its habitation some little known and inaccessible place like the Sahara Desert. The museums of Europe include in their collections several drinking goblets that belonged to feudal princes, which are reported to have been shaped from the horns of unicorns. Men wanted to believe that the fable was true; therefore, to them it was true. There was no mystery to the unicorn. It was merely a rare creature that found its way into the heraldry of many nations and families who bore the symbol but never sensed the meaning.

With the coming of the modern world, there was considerable debate about this fantastic creature. One modern school decided that the unicorn was a highly glorified rhinoceros, that the single horn peculiar to this animal had given rise to a strange story in the disordered mind of primitive people. Still the symbolism was preserved and the modern scientist was happy at having solved the mystery to his own satisfaction.

The alchemical book of Lambspring gives the key to the real meaning. The unicorn, with its one golden horn, that lives alone is the human soul itself dwelling far distant in the impenetrable forest of the senses compounded from the numerous aspects of the *anima* itself.

The white horse with the horn is a proper symbol for the most profound meditation. There is no way in which its story could be told to the foolish, nor is there any way in which its mystery

could be concealed from the thoughtful. No man can describe the soul in direct and simple words. It is all subjective experience. But each man may restore for himself a certain pattern of the soul by meditating upon the appearance and temperament of this strangely docile animal which is described by Basil Valentine as so shy that it runs before the hunter can reach it, and so wise that it never can be captured in any net devised by man.

That which is a symbol of the soul must likewise be a symbol of soul power. The golden horn which is never used to injure any creature, but around which the knight errant tied the silken scarf is the power of concentration, the one-pointedness of the soul, the harmless strength of Truth. But how could this be explained to men who would prize the unicorn's horn as a wine goblet? Yet whoever the initiated guildsman who first fashioned that horn into a beaker was, he was acquainted with the mystery, for if there possibly could be devised a vessel to hold the mystic wine of the feast of Cana, it is the unicorn's horn.

And so the mystery grows, each part fitting into the rest, each circumstance conveying an inference that words could only literally crucify and destroy. As the soul must be sought in the furthest and the innermost intricacies of our lives, so Truth will be found hidden in the mystery of symbols. Symbolism is the old appointed way of telling the *Story*. The universe is the first symbol; man, the most perfect symbol; and Truth, the hidden reality behind all symbols.

THE CYCLE OF THE QUEST

The alchemists belong to that group of mystics who are said to follow the "cycle of the quest"; that is, their symbolism is based upon a search for something lost or hidden. The Knights of the Round Table seeking the Holy Grail, the Illuminati seeking the Pearl of Great Price, and the alchemists seeking the threefold Elixir, all belong to the symbolism of pilgrimage. Truth is viewed as separated from man by a strange, intangible sense of distance, a space of time or place that must be

crossed; but it is a distance of becoming, a search for that which is furthest from the known, but nearest to the Self. Woe to the foolish mortal who mistakes spiritual distances for material intervals, or permits himself to dream of Reality in terms of place!

Alchemy is devoted to the quest of three hidden truths which are three concealments of one Truth. The first of the veils is the transmutation of metals; the second, the discovery of a universal medicine; and the third, the creation of the elixir of conscious immortality.

There were two kinds of alchemists. To the first alchemy was a super-chemistry, the transmutation of metals a physical possibility, the universal medicine an actual compound against disease, and the elixir of life a subtle fluid which could prolong physical existence indefinitely. To the second kind of alchemist, the three quests were entirely spiritual, and were to be attained only through the practice of the mystical disciplines of realization that had descended from the ancient rites of the Egyptian temples.

In an old manuscript left behind by some unknown writer of the 17th century, a mystic alchemist sounds the note of warning: "Woe! Woe! Woe unto the goldmakers!" This is the burden of all alchemical writings. The fables are told, but woe to him who accepts them as the substance of the doctrine. They are but the shadow; the substance lies beyond.

To the modern truth seeker alchemy conveys the light of another facet of the philosophical diamond. It gives further instruction in the mystery of the search for the Self.

But first must come the mystery of the metals. There are two kinds of metals, the earthly metals and the philosophical metals. There is a kind of gold that is mined from the earth, and there is a philosophical gold that is mined from the air. There is a mercury which falls from the rock, and a philosophical mercury that abides as a vapor in space. There is mortal iron, and there is immortal iron. There is a tin in the earth, and a tin in the heavens; a copper that corrodes, and a copper

that is incorruptible. There is a lead that is heavy, and a lead that has no weight at all.

In the formulas of alchemy there are seven sacred and profane metals, as in the formulas of theurgy there are seven parts of the soul, rational and irrational. The seven irrational parts of the soul are the seven base metals, and the seven rational parts of the soul are the seven mysterious and perfect metals. Also, there are seven sensory perceptions of the soul which extend outwardly from within to comprehend the order of the base metals, and there are seven rational extensions of the soul which extend inwardly to contemplate the divine metals.

In addition to the metals, there is *VITRIOL*, not the vitriol of chemistry, but the Vitriol of the philosophers which is the devourer of the metals, the slayer of the metallic souls. This Vitriol is the indispensable solvent of the metallic principles; it destroys them as metals and mingles their essences; it dies with them and produces from their minglings the supreme mystery of the philosophers' stone. This is the stone *petra*, the rock upon which must stand the temple of Truth. This is the stone that the builders rejected; the stone that destroyed the giant of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This is the sling stone of David; the white stone; the magical stone of the Shedd that gave Solomon power over all the worlds. This is the emerald of the Sangrail, and the sapphire stone of the Commandments. This is the diamond soul of the Tibetan lamas, the priceless jewel in the forehead of the Buddha.

Words can but imply the meaning, for in alchemy, as in oriental mysticism, we are dealing with wordless principles and nameless facts. But dimly we may perceive or sense the majesty of the concept. Omar Khayyam knew the secret of the metals when he wrote:

The Vine had struck a Fibre, which about
If clings my Being—let the Sufi flout:
Of my Base Metal may be filed a Key,
That shall unlock the Door he howls without.

The mystery of the metals is the mystery of the recognition of the twofold nature of all con-

sciousness, all form, and all thought. When the alchemist wrote: "You shall take one part of the philosophical iron and add thereto three parts of the philosophical mercury, and be sure that they have been properly distilled and augmented," he was using his own quaint, picturesque terminology to convey a truly transcendental secret. Those searching for the mystery of the inner life can use in their quest only the higher and most attenuated faculties of sense and thought. The ordinary human mind is of very little service; the human emotions, of very little good. We must seek within and find the spiritual powers of the mind, the spiritual powers of the heart, and the spiritual powers of the hand. In other words, we must use only the spirits of the metals.

It is useless to bring only the mortal perceptions and the mortal limitations to bear upon the problems of the immortal Self. Our physical experiences are not enough; they must be distilled and augmented. Our physical education is not enough; it is but a base shadow of something greater. Our thoughts, our sciences, our emotions, our arts, our actions, our crafts, are mortal and physical symbols of immortal powers. We must read all the symbols; we must seek all the shadows. This is the beginning of alchemy, that we shall discover our every word and deed to be but symbols, our hopes and aspirations only fables, our histories and traditions, legends. All that we know, like the symbol of the unicorn, is an indication of that which lies within.

REALIZATION

This almost inconceivable reality beyond our experience and all our knowledge is an essential subject for our meditation. Yet it must be a very sane and gentle meditation. It must not lead off into absurdities, but should lead inwardly toward reality. Of all the fables in all the world, we ourselves are the most fantastic. We are a stranger creature than any sphinx or chimera. The sphinx has the head of a man and the body of a lion, but what of man himself? He has the spirit of a god,

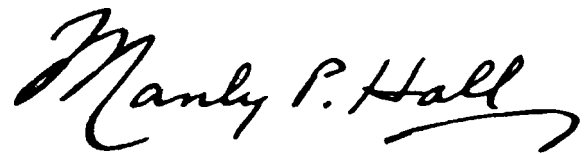
the soul of a mortal, the body of an animal. He has dreams of space, the longings of the air, and the motions of the cosmos. Yet he is bound down like some Gulliver chained by Lilliputians. He is, of all creatures, the most mysterious, composite monster that dream ever fashioned.

In the ancient temple of Serapis at Alexandria stood a gigantic image of the weeping god. His body was fashioned out of the twigs and branches of trees; his hair was grass and grain; his eyes were precious stones; his garments were made of metal; and his body was overcloaked in the skins of animals. He was crowned with the feathers of birds; flowers bloomed in his hands; and insects gathered honey from his mantle. This weeping

god upon whose head light shone down through the open roof of the temple, is man himself, the symbol of all nature who bears within him all questions and all answers.

Thus we learn from the story of alchemy that each must gather the Elixir from all the lives that make up mankind and compound therefrom the Elixir of his own life. From all the secrets that are man shall be fashioned the secret power that shall save man.

Sincerely Yours,



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