

A MONTHLY LETTER

BY MANLY P. HALL



Twelfth Letter

DISCIPLINES OF MEDITATION AND REALIZATION

Luglio 1941.

Dear Student:

SUSPENSION OF THE OBJECTIVE MIND

As the Buddhist disciplines lead to the nirvana or absorption into the universal Self, and the Yoga philosophy teaches a union with universals through samadhi, so the Taoist doctrines of China have as their goal the identification of consciousness with Tao, the supreme principle of life. To the Chinese understanding, there are two modes or conditions of Tao—its relative and its absolute aspects. Every living creature at every step of its evolution participates to some degree in the mystery of Tao. This participation is relative adjustment; it is partaking of Tao. In distinction to this continuous process of adjustment is the ultimate identification with Tao. All growing results in growth. All growth ends in Tao.

As absolute Tao is beyond definition, it can not be contemplated by the intellect. It can not even be attained by the mind. It may be symbolized, set up as a goal, recognized as an ultimate, yet it eludes definition. Tao is. This fact is the supreme

reality which the mind is capable of framing. What Tao is can only be experienced through the mystical disciplines of realization and illumination.

When Lao-Tze departed from China, riding on his green water-buffalo, he stopped for a short time with the keeper of the northern gate of the great wall. It was on this occasion that he compiled the *Tao Te Ching*, his only literary production. This brief thesis extending to only five thousand characters is the foundation of all Taoist metaphysical speculation. It is concerned principally with an effort to expound that which is knowable by the human intellect concerning the mystery of Tao. Having delivered this writing to the guardian of the northern gate, Lao-Tze rode off into the mysterious depths of the Gobi Desert and never again was seen by mortal eyes.

He left behind him the mysterious symbol of Tao as the Law, the Way, the Means, and the End—one comprehensive idea that embraces both the seeker and the sought-for, the means and the end. We live in Tao; we desire Tao; we attempt to understand Tao; we strive to become Tao; and at the end of all seeking, we are Tao.

It is evident that so mystical a speculation can not be grasped by the mind which has been trained to the contemplation of formal and tangible matters. We lack the equipment to enable us to visualize in the abstract. To understand, we must bestow form and dimension. To formalize or limit Tao is a philosophical impossibility. Therefore, it remains like the mysterious swirling clouds, a force and a principle realized, yet not realized; its imminence is recognized as necessary, but unrecognizable in its very nature.

Buddha and Socrates both refused to attempt a definition of Absolute Being. Each gave the same reasons. In the first place, it was impossible; and in the second place, even were it possible, such definition would not be useful to the evolution of human consciousness. The mind, groping with an abstraction beyond its comprehension, inevitably will fall into error. It would invest Reality with the limitations and disfigurements of its own imperfect perspective. The mind then would worship these distortions as realities, and lapse into error. What the intellect can not understand, it misunderstands. Religious misunderstandings are especially unfortunate, even tragic. They will affect every other part of the life, reducing integrity and preventing normal growth on the various planes or levels of living.

It is not wise, therefore, that the average disciple attempt in any way to anticipate ultimates. His search for Tao should result in a series of personal discoveries. Each new aspect of Tao should dawn upon him; it should come as a beautiful experience in the personal extension and impersonal awakening of the Self. There should be no preconceived opinions as to that which lies beyond. There should be open-mindedness, absolute willingness to face Truth as it is, to rejoice in the glory of things as they are. Tao can not be theologized. It can not be broken up and distributed among sects. It can not even be taught. But it can be known. The disciplines of meditation and realization are not statements of Tao *per se*; rather they are an invitation to the Taoist life. They will lead grad-

ually toward the Real, but can not be understood as definitions of Reality.

We have attempted already to explain something of the mystery of the Transcendental Being, how the spirit of the personality is separated from the grosser parts to become an eighth sense. The Transcendental Being is the bridge between the objective and the subjective parts of man. Across this bridge the more refined parts of man may pass to and fro, but it is not strong enough to support the grosser aspects of the personality.

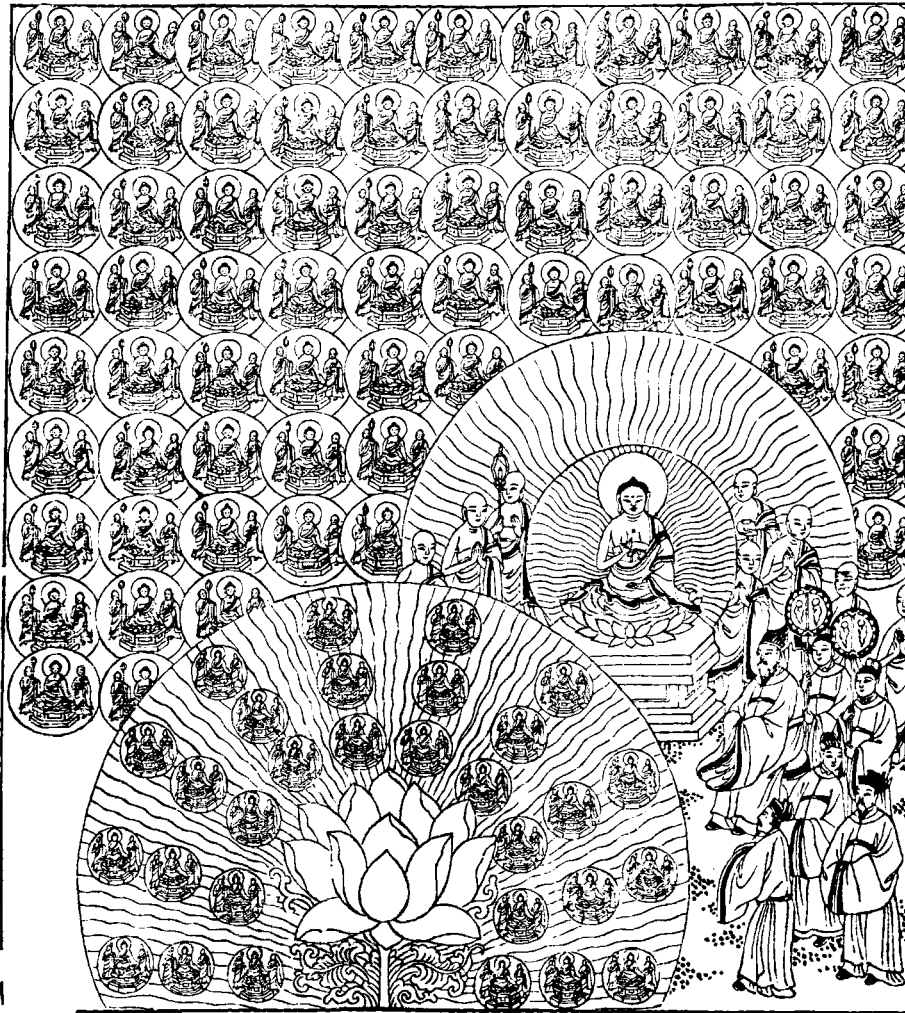
In the Nordic mythology the Transcendental Being is the Bifrost bridge, the bridge of rainbows which connects Midgard, the abode of man, with Asgard, the abode of the heroes. Across this heroic bridge Odin of the single eye passes to and fro. The other gods and goddesses of the mundane order frequently accompanied him—all except Thor, the Thunderer. Thor was of such gigantic structure and so heavy of stride that beneath his tread the bridge shook and threatened to collapse.

This charming allegory is the story of the difference between the personality and its principles. Thor of the mighty hammer, the destroyer of giants, is the human mind, the objective intellect. The mind is the conqueror of the mundane world, but it is not allowed upon the Bifrost bridge. The mind analyzes, criticizes, and divides. It constantly is given to opinions and attitudes. Its very processes shatter the subtle stuff of human aspiration. Soul power is too fragile in its early stages to bear the weight of mental criticism and intellectual analysis. Therefore it is written in the Eastern classics that the mind is the slayer of the Real. As the Minotaur wandered raging in the Cretan labyrinth, so the intellect roams the world, exploring, searching, affirming and denying, building up and tearing down, conquering and being conquered, living and dying according to the laws inherent in itself. As long as there is mind, there will be division. As long as there is division, intellect will contemplate and accept division. While intellect rules, there is discord; but when the Self rules the intellect, there is order, relationship, pattern, and purpose.

It is mind that has taught death—and according to the scriptures, death is the last great enemy. Death is a belief in limitation, a conception of existence based upon mental experience and by which the eternity of life is denied. Though all

Self between ignorance and wisdom. Ignorance is a conception of the mind. Wisdom is eternal.

To perceive, therefore, that the mind is the interposer of doubt, the very source of the impulse of negation, the root of fear, the origin of unbelief



A CHINESE WOODCUT REPRESENTING THE NIRVANA OF THE BUDDHA. Here the mystery is symbolized as the universalizing of the principle of realization through the medium of the endless repetition of lotus flowers. It is obviously impossible adequately to picture liberation. This is the way in which one artist attempted to express something of his conviction of the world mystery.

the selves may come and go, may be born and die, the Self is imperishable. There is no conflict between Reality and time. The conflict is in the mind. Reality is timeless. There is no conflict in the Self between good and evil. Evil is in the mind. Good is eternal. There is no conflict in the

and disbelief, to discover through realization that weakness is not in the Self, but in the mind—to accomplish this is to emerge victorious from life's greatest battle. Armageddon is the war against the shadows that have been set up by thought. To refer again to our Nordic myths, in the last great day,

the Gotterdammerung, the twilight of the gods, the heroic souls prepare themselves to do battle against the powers of darkness. And what are these powers? The armies of the shadow, the souls of the dead, wraiths riding in ships of mist, horrid apparitions loosed from the caves of Hel, monsters from under the earth, deceivers, false witnesses and false prophets, a host of vagaries riding in the ship of fools.

This is the pageantry of the lower mind, the mind which has filled the world with false doctrines and then bound men with them. The mind which has filled the air with demons and the earth with shadows, the mind which has conjured up fearsome ghouls and then prostrated itself before the productions of its own fears. The struggle between the Self and its lower selves, between realization and opinion, between illumination and thought, this is the last great war. Each must fight this battle within his own nature. Before he can proceed, he must emerge victorious in his battle with his own thoughts.

It is a strange war, the strangest war of all. He must fight without fighting. For if he opposes ignorance with any impulse of the will, his realization fades away and he is left helpless. His victory must be in the simple fact of knowing which scatters the ghosts opposing him. There is no true struggle or warfare between light and darkness. When light comes, darkness fades away. Man wins by the steadfastness of his light. His victory is a gentle becoming of Truth. His enemy can not strike back. Shadows and unrealities have no power except that which is bestowed upon them by one of the numerous attributes of ignorance. As ignorance ceases, the adversary is left powerless; but the ghosts do not return to their caverns and their grottoes. All vanish together in the presence of the knower.

The disciple must understand this without falling into further error. His realization of the unreality of the mundane order of life must not lead him into the illusion of denial. Thoughts can not be destroyed by denying their existence or by re-

fusing to accept them. There is not sufficient strength or courage in any man to impel him to think down the thoughts of his world. This is why so many reformers fail. They oppose one thought with another. They try to impose an intellectual formula upon an intellectual chaos, and their formula is torn to pieces by the mind of the world that can be conquered by realization alone. In the presence of wisdom, the world-mind is powerless.

Possibly this is why the world persecutes its dreamers, its mystics, its seers, its sages, and its saints. It knows that they possess a power greater than all the schemings of men put together. The intellect, like the fabled Herod, would protect itself by destroying the firstborn powers of the soul. The philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, India's great religious leader, the doctrine of harmlessness, is centered about the one fundamental truth, the inevitable victory of soul power over physical power.

Again realization must direct the course of action. The mind has its functions and its purposes. It can not be ignored or denied, nor its significance neutralized by a gesture. Thoughts have their place in the Plan. It is realization that must put all things in their proper places. The impractical mystic, clinging to only a part of the Truth, develops cults of absolutism based upon the ignoring of the mind and its phenomena. This wrong is discovered only after years of mistaken effort. We can not deny any aspect of life. We must understand through illusion, whatever it may be.

A concrete physical instance may help to clarify this difficult and delicate problem. Tyranny is evident in the affairs of men. Despots afflict their peoples; corrupt politicians exploit their states. Ambitious dictators lead their nations into ruin. To deny that such things are occurring is foolish. On the other hand, to accept the reality of tyranny, exploitation, and despotism is equally foolish.

Where, then, is the middle ground of fact? How should a person live in our material world, feeling the weight of the afflictions with which it is burdened, and react to the conditions of his environment? The solution lies with his own inner

adjustment. If his consciousness is dominated by the principle of intellect, he will accept the reality of the failure and seek to reform or oppose it. He can follow no other course for the reason that he has no other instrument of understanding with which to meet the problems. That is real to us which is similar to our own understanding. There can be no other standard of reality.

If, however, through the development of realization and the practice of the philosophic disciplines, the disciple moves his inward foundation across the *antaskarana*, the bridge of consciousness, the world pattern changes because he brings a different degree of realization to that pattern. The unreality of tyranny, despotism, and exploitation is now accepted as the fact. From that time on the destructive forces of the lower world can exercise no influence upon the enlightened Self. Their significance slowly fades out. They cease, not because they have been argued down or reasoned through, but because there can be no place for them in the experience of one who has passed beyond the sphere of their influence.

A Buddhist saint once wrote: "Men drown in water and live by breathing the air; fish drown in air and live by breathing the water." This is a symbolic effort to express the mystery of realization. A condition which is death to one order of life is security to another. Realization causes man to change the order of his life. The enlightened and illumined soul belongs to a race apart. He lives in a different element. Therefore, to him the laws of life are different. He transcends the world by transcending the world thought in himself. When he accomplishes this, he fulfills the admonition of the Eastern classic: "Take the sword of right and slay the slayer."

CONCLUSION

This letter brings the present series of instructions to a close. It is now the responsibility of the student to continue the practice of the disciplines. Beginning with thoughtfulness, he must preserve a continuity of effort which will lead him ultimately

beyond the world of thought and into the sphere of union with the mystical principles of life. Bear in mind always the necessity for balancing and rationalizing each step of the way so that nothing impractical or unreasonable shall deflect the consciousness from its noble purpose. Be mystically thoughtful and thoughtfully mystical. Combine a gentle appreciation with the courage of continuous action. Permit nothing to move you from the foundations which you are building. Yet withhold, retain as much as possible of gentle human contact. Realize that wisdom brings you closer to the heart of things and sets up no artificial barriers against the free circulation of human relationships.

Do not spend too great an amount of time attempting to visualize some nirvanic state at the end of effort. Do not dream of release as freedom desired because it is the end of striving and trying. Remember that the means and the end are one. We shall never find peace apart from the quest for peace. Beyond us lie endless vistas of progress. The whole cosmos waits to be accomplished. Man's growing understanding and his unfolding consciousness go on in their ageless search for union with the immense principle which sustains all the mysteries of the worlds. It is not yet our time to contemplate finalities. The incomprehensible fascinates and intrigues, but can not satisfy. Our greatest peace comes from the recognition of our present place in the Plan. When we know that we are trying, when we have the solid assurance that according to our various lights we are earnestly seeking, and sincerely practicing the disciplines, we enjoy what Aristotle called *well-being*.

Right-mindedness is the direction of attention to those matters which are first in importance. Let us strive for a mood of mystic thoughtfulness, not merely intellectual analysis, but a kind of quickened appreciation which causes us to be attentive to the significance of living.

There was once an old Chinese scholar who enjoyed the patronage of a certain mandarin. This mandarin in a moment of generosity presented the scholar with a bullock cart. Now a bullock cart is one of the slowest methods of transportation yet

devised. The ambling ox will never hasten his gait, but plods along only slightly more rapidly than the average man will walk. The Chinese philosopher rode in the cart the first day, but thereafter walked ahead, leading the ox. When asked why he did not make use of the conveyance, the scholar replied that his newly acquired vehicle was destroying his perspective on life. Lapsing into a truly Taoist viewpoint, the scholar explained himself thus:

“A journey, regardless of its length, is not a motion from place to place, but an experience in moving through space from place to place. In other words, man grows not as a result of arriving at his journey’s end, but by the mystery of the journey itself. He learns most who travels slowly.”

The sage went on to describe the adventures of his daily travel. He observed the woods at the roadside and stopped to contemplate some small natural creature fulfilling its tasks according to the impulse of instinct. Every step of his journey was alive with living purpose, each of the objects which attracted his attention was a sermon, each embodied spiritual truth, each bore witness to some phase of the divine Law. To hasten was to be deprived of the privilege of contact with life. It was to place the journey upon a different footing. In the comfort of his ox cart the sage could travel, but when he went on foot he experienced.

With true Oriental politeness, he compromised. He took the cart with him, but walked so that he might continue to experience his daily contact with life and at the same time might not evade the implication that he must also experience possession of the ox cart. To have rejected or returned the cart would have been, from the Taoist viewpoint, to avoid the responsibility of possession.

There is a fine point in spiritual ethics in such a dilemma. Each student would have to solve the matter in his own way. But there is no virtue in rejection and no virtue in the performance of error to please a friend.

The most important lesson taught by the fable is that which relates to the simple journey of the

day. To make the journey not because we are striving to cover a distance, but because we rejoice in a series of experiences, each of which is precious in itself. It is common in religion for the spiritually minded to dream of the journey’s end. This is a false dreaming. Rather we should be attentive to all with which we come in contact along the way. Each day of living is an experience in mystical discipline presenting new opportunities for realization, new evidence of the spiritual purpose that stands behind the worlds. The mystic is unfolding himself not because he is primarily aware of some specific goal, but because he is supremely happy in the joy of growing, and in the knowledge that he is fulfilling the destiny that was appointed to him at the beginning of all things.

To preserve a normal viewpoint in troubled times demands a high appreciation of the dignity and significance of imminent and intimate experience. We must find the Law in that which is at our hand. We must release our spiritual impulses and express our spiritual convictions here and now. It is definitely a mistake to spend too much time dreaming of lost horizons and worlds beyond. Our hopes are not fulfilled by either the dead yesterdays or the unborn tomorrows. Now and here are the time and place of fulfillment.

Theoretically it is true that somewhere and sometime consciousness will expand and finally mingle itself with the great ocean of eternity. Sometime the oneness of life will be fully realized and only the One will remain. But for us such dreaming may lead to impractical vagaries of speculation. We may be deflected from the very end we seek by our wrong estimation of universal values. Let us, therefore, with all our studies be not only mystically aware of the Plan, but also practically aware that to serve the universe most adequately, we must function within the limited area of our own understanding. The moment we depart from experience, we depart from Reality.

The contents of these lessons will require years of thoughtfulness and practice. The rules which we have laid down and the intimations half-revealed in the text will require the most profound

contemplation. If you follow these instructions, it will be unnecessary for you to practice any other type of meditative or devotional exercises. We recommend that you read through the lessons again and again, approximately once in six months. You will be surprised to discover each time that there are points which you have overlooked, or which were not meaningful at the previous reading. As your own realization increases you will discover new meanings and more profound implications. You will remind yourself also of the principal dangers which unquestionably will recur as temptation as you proceed.

I can not too strongly warn you of the dangers attendant upon unfortunate entanglements in cults or creeds. There is no reason why you should ever join anything in order to practice the mystical disciplines. They are universal. All life is living them. As well bind the creatures of the air as to bind man to some circumscribed system of thinking or living. Live from within yourself. Let your actions bear witness to your convictions. You need no other code of spiritual ethics. If the best part of you rules the rest, you are well-governed.

Do not be lured by the hope that through some mystic formula you can advance more rapidly along the road to Tao. Even presume that such could be the case—which it can not truly be—remember the Chinese sage who preferred to walk. It is not the leisure at the end we are seeking, it is the leisure to live along the way and the mental capacity to live leisurely in a world of haste that reveals the scholar. He hastens most who is most uncertain of his destination. Short cuts in philosophy do not exist. But if they did, the wise man would choose the longer road. He would choose it because of the adventures along its way, adventures in the mystic processes of becoming. Do not grudge the years and the lives which stretch out ahead. These are not merely periods of trial and tribulation. They are adventures in the mystery of the soul. When we bring to each day a realization sufficient for the day, every upset incident becomes alive with purpose and rich with meaning.

With all of your studies and all of your striving, preserve the inner calm which is the symbol of true spiritual development. This inward calm is not a negative impotence, nor a suspension of tension. It is true peace, strong, gentle, and filled with understanding. It is a sort of axis about which rotates the ever-turning wheel of your objective existence. Your own peace within is the motionless center of the moving world. As one of the great classics of the East says: The universe turns upon the axis of silence. This must be true in your own life. The calm serenity which circles all the phenomena of your living is your nirvana. It bears witness to the realization that you actually have achieved. It is the symbol of your real strength, the strength of silence, the power of quietude. Once having attained this inward poise, never depart from it. Cause it to increase. Transmute into it little by little all the elements of outer living, but accomplishing this end gradually.

Beware of early enthusiasm! It easily fails. So many persons start enterprises enthusiastically and far too energetically. In a short time they discover that they can not maintain the high key of their initial impulse. They begin well and end badly.

Do not begin the practice of the disciplines with some grand, intensive resolution. To do so is to become weary after a little time. Begin gently, satisfied to proceed at a rate of speed comparable with understanding and the restrictions imposed by environment. Be sure that your growth is not accomplished at the **expense of any responsibilities**, and be not over-hasty to convert others to your ideas. Let the obvious improvement in your own nature convert them. Do not become discouraged once you begin the disciplines. They must become as much a part of your life as eating or sleeping. They belong to you. They must be practiced from now on throughout time, not merely practiced as a ritual, but as a quality of yourself, with the same acceptance of them as is expressed by the natural processes of eating and digesting of food. After a time you will no longer realize that you are practicing a discipline. It will be part of your life. You

will instinctively include realization in all the modes and moods of your existence. It will be as natural to realize as to think, as normal to understand as to feel. Awareness and thoughtfulness will become part of you, and altogether your inward education will result in a great responsiveness to life—which is the basis of true greatness.

Under such conditions it will be impossible for you to determine with certainty where realization mingles with illumination, for each is a part of the other. You never will know the time when you transcend thought and rise into the mindless vistas of true spiritual apperception. Yet as you proceed, all of the transcendental processes which you are building up will manifest themselves until from their blending and mingling will come the true enlightenment of the initiated sage.

Most sublime of all is the mystic truth that long before illumination crowns your effort, you will have forgotten illumination. You will be so absorbed in the experiencing of God that like the Sufi in his rapture, you will forget to be mindful of yourself. The time never will come when you will rapturously exclaim, "I am illuminated." You never will stand aside to marvel at your own superiority. You never will ponder thoughtfully as to whether you are ready for nirvana, nor will you ever ask yourself what lies beyond the world. As realization brings these great extensions of consciousness to you, you will be so perfectly conditioned to receive them that you will neither wonder nor be surprised. You will be neither glad nor sorry in the terms of human emotion. You will experience merely an extension of the law of cause and effect. Illumination will come because it is necessary. You will need it in order that you may continue to experience your participation in Reality.

The mystical disciplines are the natural, human way to Truth. They are available to all men, and each who attempts the living of them is rewarded

according to his integrity and his continuity. As time finally mingles in the ocean of eternity, so all creatures who live in time finally will mingle with the one nature that abides in eternity. Our journey is from the here to the forever along gentle roads of growth. It is our own lack of understanding that has made these roads difficult and has obstructed nature with a thousand artificial hazards and predicaments. But as long as men remain, as long as humanity endures, the search for Truth will be the same search, the means will be the same, and the end will be the same. The disciples of all ages shall assume the contemplative life and through the harmless practice of realization seek *Union*.

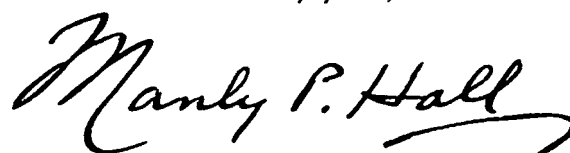
REALIZATION

As our closing realization, let us remember that we must be thoughtful through the years—not during the practice of a series of lessons, or even through a series of lives. Realization must go on until it achieves identity with the object of itself.

Let your realization through all this time be that simply, naturally, gently, normally, and happily, you are growing up through the many to the One, and that you are accomplishing this through the gradual processes of discovering as a series of joyous experiences the One in each of the many. Realization is the conscious understanding of the unity of life, and of the unity of the living Self with the deathless Cause which abides in the innermost parts of the world.

Be patient, and in all things be kind—and time and eternity will be patient and kind through you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Manly P. Hall". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name "Manly P. Hall".