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MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

Washington, D. C., May 1, 1935.

Dear Friend:

The second year of our *Student's Monthly Letter* begins with this issue. We feel that many people studying the Ancient Wisdom teachings will be interested in a more or less detailed consideration of vital problems which arise in the course of their studies. The pursuit of knowledge is beset with numerous hazards. Questions arise, problems present themselves, and the course of action becomes confused and tangled. In order that the mind may be left free in its quest for essential truth there must be a general sense of intellectual security. Benjamin Franklin is accredited with the adage: "Be sure you are right and then go ahead." In devoting our next twelve letters to vital questions dealing with metaphysical issues we hope to correct some popular misconceptions in the field and assist the average student to orient himself in the vast world of philosophy. Each month, therefore, we will take some major problem and after treating its general significance break it up into its lesser aspects and indicate a sound course of action in the department of thinking or living under consideration.

QUESTION: HOW CAN A STUDENT OF THE ANCIENT WISDOM TEACHINGS CONTACT BONA FIDE SOURCES OF OCCULT PHILOSOPHY AND SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION? WHAT IS THE SAFEST COURSE FOR STUDENTS OF HIGHER KNOWLEDGE TO PURSUE AT THIS TIME IN THEIR QUEST FOR WISDOM?

For thousands of years the wisest and noblest of human beings in every civilization and nation have

desired truth above any temporal position. The quest for truth is life's noblest adventure, and the achievement of truth is the perfect reward for perfect action. There is a well-worn path which Buddha called the Middle Way which avoids all of the extremes and inconsistencies of action and leads finally to a life of wisdom. Thousands of years of experience have established and developed, and to a relative degree perfected, the science of salvation through wisdom. There is one right way and many wrong ways to do anything. There is only one entrance to the great temple of universal knowledge. He who attempts to go in by any other door or to storm the high citadel of truth, the same is a "thief and a robber." Those who dedicate themselves to the processes of discipline and self-improvement set down by the old masters are preparing themselves to enter the house of wisdom by the proper gate. On the other hand, such foolish mortals as believe they can breathe, chant, intone, psychologize or affirm themselves into a state of all-knowing are trying to pick locks for which they have not filed the key. Such misguided ones are like the howling dervishes described by Omar who wail before the temple gates but have nothing in them that merits their admission.

As Immanuel Kant has pointed out, man searching for wisdom has two courses open to him. He may either direct his faculties INWARDLY to achieve an internal contact with the source of wisdom, or

he may direct his attention OUTWARDLY in an effort to know through an external contact with the phenomena of existence. In simpler terms, he can search for truth either inside or outside of himself. Truth from within or from Self may be termed INSPIRATION, and truth from without, from other persons or things, may be termed INSTRUCTION. Truth, either as inspiration or instruction, when applied, becomes experience. We may define experience as the test of action, and by experiencing man makes universal wisdom his own.

We will first consider the problem of INSPIRATION or wisdom arising from internal contact. It is theoretically evident that this approach has its hazards, as well as its advantages, and in practice these hazards in most cases assume formidable proportions. The three chief advantages of the inspirational approach are:

1st: Knowledge from within is unadulterated by opinion and interpretation, nor has it been subjected to the devitalizing influence of sectarianism.

2nd: Knowledge from within binds the student more closely to the source of wisdom, creating a state of mental and spiritual sufficiency not dependent upon the hazardous props of organized religion. Each man and the God within him constitute a majority.

3rd: Inspirational knowledge is always to a great degree attuned to the need of the individual who receives it. An inspiration does not flow into a consciousness utterly unfit to receive it. There is, therefore, a practicability and a reasonableness of relationship between inspiration and the one inspired.

To summarize, therefore, we may say that inspiration is a relationship with universal truth much to be desired and the end towards which all learning must eventually lead.

Unfortunately the course of inspirational knowing is beset with certain distinct hazards which are painfully evident among modern metaphysicians. To understand these hazards it is necessary to examine briefly certain aspects of the subjective life of man—his psychical anatomy and physiology, as

it were. If man consisted only of spirit and body, inspirationalism would offer no difficulties, but unhappily for the average mystic there intervenes between consciousness and form a considerable array of psychical impulses and forces. There is a psychical organism which is the power behind our sensory and emotional reflexes, and in the practice of mysticism these psychical equations often confuse the issues of inspiration. A man who believes that he has just received a direct message from the Infinite may be only getting a reflex from some psychological complex, reflex or inhibition which he is carrying about with him in his subconscious or subjective personality. As long as the human soul remains a tangle of instincts, appetites, antipathies and attachments, as it is with the average person, only a very wise man can isolate and identify a true inspiration.

From this it should be evident that inspiration is not a substitute for philosophical discipline. It is only after the individual has well organized his whole life, by self control and the rationalizing of all his perceptions, that he is really capable of measuring the merits and demerits of so-called inspirational flashes and revelations. The major hazards of inspirationalism and the various systems of metaphysical "absolutism" can be collected for practical purposes under three headings:

1st: It is almost impossible for the average person, even after many years of metaphysical study, to accurately determine the difference between inspiration and imagination. What may at first appear to be the very staff of truth may prove in time to be merely the substance of things hoped for.

2nd: The impossibility of determining with certainty the real source and substance of a presumed inspiration very often leaves the student a victim to the most grotesque absurdities of his own subconscious mind.

3rd: As efforts to develop the inspirational faculties are usually desultory, unscientific, and have about them much of a philosophy of self-negation, these efforts frequently lead to mediumship or even obsession. Under such conditions the source of the supposed inspira-

tion may be an obsessing or possessing entity utterly unqualified to regulate the affairs of the earnest seeker.

In substance then, while the true Self is beyond doubt the perfect teacher and the source of all eternal good, the way to that Self is so beset with snares, pitfalls and illusions that the novice cannot safely attempt this path until noble motive is supported by sufficient knowledge and a high measure of discrimination.

In this matter we speak from a wealth of experience. Scarcely a week goes by but some earnest and benighted soul brings to us a story of "cosmic revelation." Most of these people have left some orthodox faith behind them and are shipwrecked in a sea of notions. These poor folk bring their visions, intuitions, and psychical experiences to us for confirmation. If we point out the absurdity of that which is evidently absurd, we, of course, incur the displeasure of these people who feel that we have no right to question the validity of what to them is a real "inward experience."

It is useless to explain that "inward" is a very large term covering not only man's spiritual part but also his whole psychical organism, and to be exactly literal also his stomach and liver. In contacting hundreds of people obsessed by the significance of their "inward" experiences or visions, I have never yet found a case of real inspiration or spiritual vision apart from a well organized, well informed mind, well balanced and normally manifested emotions, and a high state of spiritual and intellectual superiority. Neurotic, inhibited people may have psychical experiences, and occasionally some of their visions may have a small personal fulfillment. The real philosopher, however, is not interested in ouija-boards even if occasionally they tell the truth. An acceptable quality of inspiration must transcend small phenomenal problems.

The monks of Zen Buddhism, whose whole doctrine is one of INTERNAL TRUTH, have left us some good precepts. They say that when a man talks with his Real Self, when through the highest of human accomplishments he is lifted up to that truth ever-abiding within him, he neither sees nor

hears anything. No elaborate or fantastic visions come to him, nor do beings of the invisible world deliver vast orations. The little self (personality), when elevated to temporary identity with the great Self (universality), neither senses nor perceives, but rather—KNOWS. For that which is known under such conditions there is no word.

He who possesses truth can neither describe nor define it but, momentarily BECOMING it, has a complete sense of participation in it. This highest wisdom is silent fact. Those who achieve to it in silence, preserve it in silence, and teach it in silence. Man can be instructed by word and act as to the way of accomplishment, but concerning the accomplishment itself, all of the great teachings are alike—silent.

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From the first approach to truth, that of internal contact, we shall now turn to the second, the path of EXTERNAL contact. It should be understood that truth itself is superior to any of the means by which we try to achieve it. All progress leads towards truth. Progress, growth and development are manifestations of the impulse towards truth, but the means should never be confused with the end. When we refer, therefore, to the achievement of truth by external contact, we do not mean that Reality itself is to be perceived outwardly, but rather that from certain outward contacts we may gain instruments of comprehension and understanding by which we are better fitted to approach the mystery of truth itself.

We shall now consider mediums of external contact or instruction in mystical matters under three headings:

1st: Institutions or individuals claiming to possess an exact knowledge of the disciplines by which man may be elevated to a condition of spiritual security.

2nd: The literature of the ages, including religious and philosophical books supposed to contain knowledge sufficient to enable the student to gain a solid foundation in the metaphysical sciences.

3rd: Nature itself with its numerous examples of spiritual processes, and all forms of example, action and reaction, through the observation of which a student may gain a reasonable education in universal law.

These three external paths to wisdom are a development of Buddha's Three Jewels, or as he termed them: The Life, the Word, and the Church, by which the tradition is perpetuated. By the church we are to understand all spiritual organizations. By the word, the world's vast literature of wisdom. By the life, nature itself and the example of truth in action.

These three media which exist in the material universe as means to the achievement of truth indicate the three steps of the philosophical temple which must inevitably be climbed by each truth-seeker. In the school of philosophy the lowest grade of novices is termed studentship and this corresponds to the philosophy of action, and its work is OBSERVATION. They are stewards in the temple of nature. The second grade is that of discipleship. They must achieve their knowledge through study and experience. The third grade is made up of the initiates themselves and they represent the secret orders and schools by which the tradition is perpetuated in an organized manner. These three grades are another interpretation of Buddha's Three Jewels. The analogy is evident.

In our quest for sources of spiritual knowledge, we must now examine in more detail the three avenues of EXTERNAL contact or instruction. We will consider institutions and individuals claiming at the present time to be perpetuating the ageless tradition. Let us first examine institutions:

From the most ancient times colleges, schools, temples and communities devoted to the study and dissemination of the spiritual sciences have flourished among men. Although the schools of philosophy established by the Greeks, Egyptians, Romans and Chaldeans vanished with the passing of these civilizations, similar centers of culture have continued in Asia even to this present time. There is ample proof in the writings of the world's most illumined thinkers that distinct spiritual benefit was

to be derived from participation in the teachings and disciplines of these sects and societies. The state Mysteries of the Greeks and the great ceremonial institutions of the Egyptians perpetuated the most obscure knowledge and bestowed upon qualified candidates the accumulated arcana of the race. If then, we may seem to criticize modern metaphysical organizations, it is not because we would depreciate the theory of philosophical societies, but rather because most modern orders have departed from the old footings and foundations and cannot be regarded as bona fide representatives of the older systems.

The important difference between ancient occult institutions and modern metaphysical societies may be considered under three headings:

1st: The great philosophical Mystery Schools of antiquity were administered by the state, whereas all modern organizations in the Western world are under private direction. This particular issue is more important than may first appear. Private organizations, struggling for existence, do not enjoy the security, authority or recognition necessary to a wide sphere of influence. A doctrine, which to be useful must be unified, is broken up into numberless relatively isolated fragments which can only exist by proselyting and competing one with the other. Where there are many sects there is little wisdom. The old Mystery Schools were not reduced to the dilemma of maintaining themselves through high-pressure advertising and salesmanship, nor did financial necessity force them to accept into their ranks persons possessing none of the actual attributes qualifying them to receive spiritual instruction. The ancient world functioned in the consciousness of quality, while the modern world seeks to perpetuate itself on the theory of quantity alone. When we hear of a religious order that has a million members, or some philosophical society with several thousand "initiates," we are forced to the inevitable conclusion that the membership of the organization is bloated by a large contingency whose only

active function is dues-paying. The ancient wisdom temples accepted only the best of men. Modern societies are forced, often against their own good judgement, to accept whoever fulfills the monetary requirement.

2nd: The instituted Mysteries of antiquity possessed an unbroken metaphysical tradition which had descended through a long line of hierophants from the dim beginnings of time. The merit of these systems can best be inferred by the high order of men and women who testified to the sublimity of the teaching. Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Proclus, Plotinus, Hypatia, Phidias, Hippocrates, Cicero and a host of others acknowledged the supremacy of the instituted Mysteries of the Greeks or Romans. Minds of this quality are not easily deluded by superficial doctrines. Orders which gained the admiration of such intellects must indeed have been admirable throughout. Most modern mystical societies are orders of quest and not orders of achievement. They are based upon the opinions and interpretations of individuals and not upon any collected body of learning. Hundreds of little sects spring up and gather small groups of earnest followers about them. Soon contentions and contrivings set in and these sects collapse into themselves and are heard of no more. Old experienced "joiners" of modern mystical movements are for the most part a disillusioned lot.

3rd: Institutions like the Mystery temples of antiquity cannot flourish in a social order essentially contrary to their principles. The state Mysteries of the older nations were part of the spirit of their time. Men, regarding wisdom as the chief of the virtues and not dominated by a vicious economic complex, respected their centers of learning and gave a large measure of moral support to these most prized of their institutions. Modern occult movements, drawing their membership from a commercialized, materialized and essentially selfish social order, are bound to be corrupted and finally dissipated by the char-

acter tendencies of their own members. A man can bring to a system of thought only what he is and when many selfish persons gather to support an unselfish cause, it is the common end that this unselfish cause gradually dies out, drowned in a sea of selfishness. When two or more are gathered together in this modern world, self interest is almost bound to be present also. Self interest is fatal to the common good, and politics has no place in the house of truth.

The path of organized mysticism in the modern world is therefore beset with many troubles, and persons associating themselves with modern societies are very apt to gain more exasperation than inspiration from their affiliations.

We should next examine existing occult movements by classifying them under two general headings which we will term simply sincere and insincere. This particular issue has nothing to do with the antiquity of the movement or its presumed relationships with older organizations. It simply is concerned with the question: Is the movement honest or dishonest? Of course it is not within the province of our treatment to refer to specific organizations or to list the names of those which we believe to be honest or dishonest. We must concern ourselves only with principles and not become confused with the much less important element of personalities.

We consider those movements sincere which have the improvement of man as the real reason for their existence, and we regard those as insincere and utterly despicable which are dedicated to profit and are exploiting for their own gain the spiritual aspirations of honest men and women.

It does not necessarily follow that even a sincere organization can completely neglect its financial problems. As long as philosophical movements are not supported by the state, they must be supported by the intelligent cooperation of their members. To be worthy of confidence a philosophical organization must indicate that it is capable of honestly and constructively administering its finances. On the other hand, nearly all religious and philosophi-

cal institutions of the Western world are incorporated as non-profit corporations. They must be supported and they must demand a reasonable measure of support, but when they enter into the field of exploitation and misrepresentation for profit, they forfeit the respect and support of all sincere students.

Students of a mind to affiliate with an occult organization should examine with the greatest of care the merits and demerits of the movement. It is the height of folly to impulsively link oneself with any organization which has not been thoroughly examined and analyzed with all discrimination. Fantastically named organizations with glamorous pretensions and impossible presumptions should, of course, be entirely avoided. Any group claiming to be the only possessors of most ancient and profound secrets should be avoided at all costs. Simple, studious groups of intelligent men and women, making no pretensions but doing and living a high standard of personal and collective integrity, without fads or fetishes, and with no elaborate political machinery, are the only groups worthy of even passing consideration. There is no question but that such groups exist, but they seldom publicize themselves. Functioning quietly, they are known by their works and not by their words. To the "joiner," one passing thought: Weigh all things, and cling only to that which is simple, good, reasonable and honest.

From the claims of modern organizations as sources of spiritual education, we must now pass to the claims of individuals presuming to be ambassadors of secret systems of knowledge. At the present time fraud in this field is particularly flagrant. Taken all together, individual teachers are a more hazardous problem than organizations. The latter have a certain physical tangibility about them and their claims are more easily checked, proved or disproved. The itinerant teacher, on the other hand, must usually be accepted upon his own word, or upon a critical examination of his doctrines or pretensions. There are numerous examples in history of illumined individuals who, as members of no organization; have contributed greatly to human good. The name of Socrates stands out, also Jacob Boehme, and Emanuel Swedenborg. In fact, many great

systems of philosophy were founded by itinerant teachers who developed no organization or institution during their own lives.

As contrasted to this type are the numerous tribes of metaphysical "carpet-baggers" who are indeed parasites which have attached themselves to the tree of philosophy. To the average person who lacks the ability to distinguish with certainty the merit of various claims and pretensions, there is only one reasonable, safe course to bear in mind. The fraudulent metaphysician is usually finally convicted by his own words and actions. Ten years is about as long as any of them can function, and many of the most startling claimants do not last six months. — That which does not stand the test of time is not worthy of acceptance. The metaphysical charlatan is generally not very ingenious and instinctively he follows lines of least resistance. Therefore his misrepresentations fall into a few categories easily detected if subjected to critical thought. His claims may be considered as follows:

a: He is generally the only possessor of some very superlative truth which he has received direct from the Mahatmas of India or some equally august source difficult to check on.

b: He is willing to communicate this extraordinary knowledge to anyone, who has from five to twenty-five dollars, in ten easy lessons which lead inevitably to adeptship. He may have stocks and bonds, oil wells or laxatives as a side-line.

c: He nearly always infers that possession of the peculiar knowledge of which he is the sole owner (copyright applied for) will inevitably cause the individual fortunate enough to receive his instruction to become healthy, successful, wealthy and wise. From the time when he finishes the course the student is predestined to opulence and a dominating will.

d: The means by which these miracles are accomplished include fancy breathing, assorted types of affirmations, "radiant thinking," the stimulation of the subconscious mind, raising the Kundalini, opening the third eye, and "going into the silence."

e: Numerous mechanical contrivances to aid in spirituality are sometimes offered for sale at reasonable prices, including psychic earmuffs to keep out the distractions of the outside world, phonograph records to impress the subconscious mind while asleep, etc. etc.

f: The newest, most refined form of metaphysical exploitation involves special revelations for the salvation of society from the impending social collapse. There is an unusual increase in the number of purported messages from various adepts at the present time—a state of affairs which must be viewed with some suspicion.

There are many variations in the technique of the pseudo-adepts, but always remember that any person at any time promising to any student or truth seeker any measure whatsoever of spiritual illumination is, of course, fraudulent or self-deluded. All spiritual development comes from within the individual, arising from discipline and self-improvement. No man can increase the spirituality of another. To attempt to do so is to disregard one of the most fundamental laws of nature—the law of Karma. Man earns wisdom by right thought and right action. The legitimate schools of the ancient wisdom, and the legitimate teachers of the doctrine offer spirituality to no one. They merely indicate a path of action, which, if followed with consecration and intelligence over a long period of years, will result in certain improvement of character and knowledge.

Esoteric secrets are never divulged by the ancient Mysteries or any of their emissaries to any student without a period of from five to ten years of probation. The prevalent idea that within a few months some individual, utterly without grounding in philosophy or comparative religion, can become worthy of personally contacting the Masters of Wisdom and receive instruction from them, leads to very sorry disillusionment.

To conclude, therefore, the problem of schools or individual teachers as sources of spiritual enlightenment, we can only warn truth seekers that they are confronted with a problem requiring an almost superhuman faculty of discrimination. The simpler

frauds, of course, deceive only the utterly uninformed, but there are elaborate falsifications which have deceived persons of high integrity and a considerable measure of judgement. To keep the law of Karma constantly in mind, and avoid everything which even in small measure violates this universal law of compensation, will prove most protective. If you know within yourself that you are not ready for illumination and that you have not for many years practised the disciplines of right thinking and right living, do not allow any man or organization to convince you that they can bestow upon you what you have not developed within yourself.

We will now pass to the second main division of our problem of gaining knowledge through external contact.

The LITERATURE OF THE AGES is to the beginner in mystical studies by far the safest approach. It is less dramatic than personal contact and less romantic than pseudo-adepts, but the hazards of deceit and misinformation are greatly reduced. The whole matter becomes susceptible of an impersonal analysis. We do not mean to suggest that all books are good or that all occult books are true. There are millions of comparatively worthless books, products of immature judgment, prejudice and unbalanced thought. On the other hand there are certain great literary remains of the highest significance and of the greatest integrity.

The average man or woman can sit quietly in the relaxation of his own home or study and through the pages of a great book receive instruction from the very sources of this world's knowledge. The average person who pays twenty-five dollars to some charlatan or only partly informed teacher can secure better and more knowledge in his subject by spending a few evenings reading authentic textbooks from his free public library.

If we are to study science, let us study it from its greatest masters—Bacon, Descartes, Copernicus, Vesalius, Huxley, etc. If we are to study philosophy and religion, let us derive it from its sources and prefer Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tze, Pythagoras or Plato to the petty sophistry of their uninformed modern exponents.

Every student of the ancient wisdom should accumulate for himself a small but choice library of

original source material. In our own wanderings we have contacted hundreds of occult students who have spent comparatively large sums in the quest of spiritual knowledge. Only recently one person told me that she had just paid a hundred and fifty dollars to a fraudulent teacher in return for spiritual instruction which she never got. All she really received for her money was a serious nervous ailment brought about by trick breathing. This hundred and fifty dollars, if expended upon a few choice books, would have greatly enriched the person in the knowledge she so earnestly desired. She would have had to spend four years at least reading these books, studying them and thinking about them. She would have finished this task several times better informed than the itinerant teacher who cheated her out of the money.

People sometimes say that they do not want to study at home, that they find no pleasure in long evenings with heavy books. If such is the case, three or four kindred minds can study together, using the book as their text and teacher, and creating what the Greeks called a symposium. Larger groups are usually unfortunate even if sincere, but a half a dozen or less, meeting regularly over a long period, can accomplish a great deal. At least they avoid the exploitation and disillusionment met with when accepting the words of unknown and unqualified persons.

My experience with books in the field of occultism is reasonably wide. I have often thought about practical libraries for occult students, ranged according to levels of cost to meet the needs and financial limitations of students. An amazingly good library can be accumulated for as low as fifty dollars, and for five hundred dollars as a maximum a working laboratory of knowledge can be accumulated which will enlighten and enrich the thinking man or woman throughout life. Of course, if books are used as ornaments for the library shelf, they will do no good, but if studied intelligently and diligently and their principles applied, they will not only enrich the mind but will to great measure

RELEASE THE
STREAMS OF INWARD INSPIRATION.

As a working basis, let us assume a library of ten books, carefully selected and fitted to the needs of the individual who is reasonably familiar with

the general principles of philosophy and the occult sciences, but who desires to perfect and direct his knowledge:

1. * THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY, by Thomas Stanley.
2. * PROCLUS ON THE THEOLOGY OF PLATO, translated by Thomas Taylor.
3. * THE RESTITUTION OF PLATONIC THEOLOGY, by Thomas Taylor.
4. * ANACALYPSIS, by Godfrey Higgins.
5. ISIS UNVEILED, by H. P. Blavatsky.
6. THE SECRET DOCTRINE, by H. P. Blavatsky.
7. MANKIND, ITS ORIGIN AND DESTINY, by an Anonymous Master of Arts of Oxford.
8. THE ROSICRUCIAN COSMO-CONCEPTION, by Max Heindel.
9. MORALS AND DOGMA OF THE SCOTTISH RITE, by Albert Pike.
10. THE BHAGAVAD-GITA, a fragment from the Hindu classic The Mahabharata.

At the present price of books, this library would cost about a hundred and seventy-five dollars. The four books marked with an asterisk (*) are expensive and can only be secured through a rare book dealer.

Any person possessing these ten volumes has a life work ahead of them to master and apply the knowledge contained in them. In the presence of such literature as this, words of power that will live through the ages, no student of the ancient wisdom needs to feel that he is without a means of knowing truth. The knowledge is here and awaits the industry of the student. No further revelation is necessary while these textbooks remain easily available and comparatively unread and undigested.

A good book is the modern occult student's safest approach to the teachings of those old masters whose wisdom we so sadly need in this world of materialism.

In our next letter we shall take up the third branch of our study of external means of contacting wisdom. We shall consider Nature as a textbook of the divine law.

Yours very sincerely,

MANLY P. HALL.