

MASTERS AND GURUS STAGES ON THE PATH

Radha Burnier



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

With this publication we continue the series of Theosophical Study Papers directed, primarily, to Australian TS Centres, to members of The Theosophical Society in Australia and to those interested in the study of Theosophy, the Perennial Wisdom.

Throughout the publication of this series we continue to bear in mind the spirit of enquiry and search for truth which has animated the TS since its foundation 128 years ago. In an important Resolution in 1924, the General Council, the Society's international governing body, declared that "no teacher, or writer, from H.P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members."

These Study Papers are offered for the consideration and study of TS members and non-members alike who are interested in theosophical teachings. Only the individual student can ascertain, within the field of his or her own experience, whether the teachings can throw light on life's deeper aspects.

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Gender Usage:

In accordance with preferred editorial practices today, the use of one gender (usually the masculine) to cover both genders is avoided as far as possible in these Study Papers. However, the Education Unit believes that writings in which one gender is used in this way should be printed as originally written. This applies particularly to older writings but also to some contemporary ones.

MASTERS AND GURUS

Radha Burnier

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Theosophical literature speaks about the unfolding of consciousness through the evolution of forms and organisms. When the form is primitive, unorganized and crude in its response to the environment, consciousness is unable to manifest fully through it. As the form evolves, its ability to respond increases. There is greater sensitivity in the sense organs, the nervous system and the brain. Thus better organization of form enables the consciousness to reveal itself more fully.

Man, as he is today, is not the end of the process of evolution. Theosophical writing declares that there is further unfoldment before him. Truth, wisdom, love, bliss, peace and goodness are inherent in consciousness. In the Upanishads, Brahman is described as absolute universal consciousness, perfect in peace, beauty and the other powers mentioned above. In the Adept or Master, these virtues, which are of the very nature of consciousness, have flowered into perfection as his consciousness has blossomed fully in perfect measure, revealing powers as yet latent in the average man. So the Adept is one who is perfect in wisdom, compassion, love and selfless purity. Purity means the total absence of the sense of a separate self. Perfect love implies no choosing, not giving love in return for something else.

It is said that when a man is perfected, he is no longer under compulsion to reincarnate, for he has transcended Karma. It is attachment, selfishness—they are the same—which draws one into birth. Because there is the desire for experience, for stimulation from outside, the ordinary man is caught in the wheel of rebirth. But the Adept who is pure and free from attachment because there is no self in him is under no such necessity. But, out of compassion he may remain in touch with the human

world. We may say, why does not the Adept meet us? If we invite him to a convention, will he come? But he may not act according to our ideas or in any way that we may imagine. However, when there are people who are ready, the Adept affords opportunities for contacts, guidance, and teaching.

The word 'Guru', like many other words, can mean different things to different people. It is said to denote someone who dispels darkness. But often people think the Guru is one who imparts knowledge. Knowledge which is mundane—the lesser knowledge—can be imparted; not so spiritual knowledge. No subjective, inner experience can be borrowed from another. The *Vivekachudamani* makes it clear that one cannot have a substitute to perform the actions which will bring *bodha* or awakening in oneself. The awakening has to take place in each individual as a result of his own preparation and work. But very often people think that they do not have to do anything; they have only to attach themselves to a so-called Guru, touch his feet or sit in front of him and then he will take over the responsibility. This is a very convenient philosophy, for it allows people to go on with their worldly life of ambition, jealousy, money-seeking, desire for power and so on.

Because so many people find this way to their taste, there are others ready to play the complementary role. So there are pretenders who call themselves Gurus, who will give a feeling of security to those who ask for it. Turn your thoughts to me, says the self-styled Guru, and you will be protected from all trouble. If you want to indulge in pleasure—it does not matter what kind—go ahead and enjoy yourself, but turn the beads of the *mala* with my photograph on it and wear the uniform that I prescribe for you. The real Guru, on the other hand, is a true dispeller of the darkness in a person's mind and consciousness; he will not offer diversions or take away his sense of responsibility for his own actions. One of the 'Three Truths' of Theosophy is that 'Each man is his own absolute law-giver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.'

It has been made clear by the Adepts what conditions must be fulfilled in order to receive their instruction, help and guidance. In *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* we are told that only a person's evolving spirituality can draw him near to the Masters—

can 'force' their attention—and that wisdom comes only to the one who applies himself to the 'daily conquest of the self'. He must approach the Masters unconditionally, free from worldly and prudential considerations. But we do not want to go unconditionally. We want to keep our comforts, pleasures and ambitions and, at the same time, reach the world of the Holy Ones.

The Adept, according to Theosophy, never imposes his will on his disciple. He does not tell him what he must believe, because believing has no meaning. He wants the disciple's consciousness to awaken to the truth, which is something different. There are millions of people who believe that Jesus and the Buddha taught love. But they themselves have no love. Indeed, belief creates rigidity and fanaticism and is productive of harm, not good. In *The Mahatma Letters*, the Masters point out that religion is too often used as a crutch; but they want people to be self-reliant and free.

One of the greatest of Masters, the Lord Buddha, said, 'Be a lamp unto yourself.' He taught: do not make an authority out of tradition, the scriptures, other people, or me; find out for yourself what is the truth. The importance of enquiry (*vichāra*) is emphasized also in Vedānta.

In *At the Feet of the Master* it is said that one must listen carefully to what the Master says for 'He does not speak twice.' The lecturer on a platform may repeat his ideas, because he wants to make his audience agree with him and think as he does. An advertisement is repeated again and again in order to condition the reader's mind. But the Adept does not try to impose his ideas; he does not want conformity or blind obedience. He gives a hint, makes a suggestion, in order to help the person's intelligence to grow. If the student has learned to think for himself, if he has listened carefully, he finds out for himself what is the implication of a statement. If somebody else tells him what to think and believe, he does not touch the depths of the teaching.

The average Guru directs people what to do, what to think, what dress to wear. There are Gurus who like personal worship, who like their feet to be washed, who like being attended upon. There

are some who claim to be greater even than the Buddha Himself. On the other hand, the letters of the Masters reflect the humility and the anonymity in which they prefer to remain. Real teachers indulge in no self-publicity or self-glorification because there is no self in them.

So, there is a difference between those who are usually considered Gurus and the Masters as they are described in Theosophical literature. Personal worship, self-glorification, telling other people what to do, making them dependent, teaching them beliefs, imposing ideas on them, collecting money and becoming rich, having swimming-pools and private aeroplanes—all this is accepted as part of present-day Gurudom but it is entirely incompatible with being a true spiritual Teacher or Master.

Ramana Maharshi said once that the real teacher does not consider himself to be a teacher. The teacher sees no difference between others and himself; he does not make a division between the taught and the teacher.

It may be asked what should be the attitude of a member towards Gurus. There is freedom for the individual within the Theosophical Society to be wise or foolish! If he wants to make himself the disciple of a Guru, he is at liberty to do so. But it is a different matter for a Lodge of the Society, for a Lodge is a representative in its neighbourhood of the Theosophical Society as a whole and therefore it cannot have absolute freedom. If it gives itself over to a personality cult, if it proclaims or accepts somebody as the Guru and encourages personal worship, it is certainly not acting in accordance with the character and aims of the Society.

Another question is: Can a Guru give one an experience of Reality? Obviously not. A Guru cannot make another see what his eyes are not capable of seeing; no true Guru will pretend to do it or want to do it.

But a wise man can be helpful if one is receptive. It has been said that when the gods want to punish man, they listen to his prayers. Most people's wants are foolish. A person may want a Guru to do something for him but it may not be to his spiritual benefit. Trouble comes to us, and we generally would like to be free from it. But everything that comes as a result of Karma

brings a lesson with it. Therefore, Annie Besant said, looking back on her past, that while she would willingly let go of the pleasant things, she would not wish to forego any one of the difficulties she had had because she had learned so much from them.

A spiritual man may not, therefore, give the sort of help that a person might wish for. His way of helping might be from a completely different point of view.

J. Krishnamurti pointed to something important when he asked why we think that *only* the Guru can help? Everything in life can help—the people around us, the leaf that falls from the tree, the beauty that is everywhere—everything can help us if we are sensitive and receptive. Our receptivity must be equal to the Guru's desire to teach. Einstein's physics cannot be grasped by a man who is totally ignorant of mathematics. Even the greatest of musicians cannot teach a person who is too lazy to learn. One who plumbs the depths of what a teacher says (which may not be conveyed verbally at all), must be receptive. And it is not possible to be insensitive to life in general and receptive to the Guru alone. Either a man has receptivity or he does not. Again and again those who are not receptive have abused the spiritual teacher; they do not listen to his words; they reject him because they do not recognize him; they crucify a Christ.

How many of us would be able to recognize a truly holy person were he to appear in our midst without a label? Labels may be false. To recognize a holy man, there must be something within us which vibrates in harmony with him; there must be the capacity to respond. If this is lacking, how can we profit from a teacher? A Guru cannot help the man who is not ready to be helped, and it is only when the disciple is ready that the teacher appears. 'You must light the soul, in order that the teacher may see it.'

STAGES ON THE PATH

Radha Burnier

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It is important to grasp, not merely as a concept, but as a fact, that the Path is oneself. *The Voice of the Silence* states that one cannot travel on the Path until one has become the Path itself. The Path is the qualitative change which takes place in one's consciousness and in the vehicles through which consciousness functions.

It is said that consciousness, in its absolute form, is ever pure and that no change can, or needs to, take place in it. But 'consciousness' is an ambiguous term. The Sanskrit *chaitanya* is more accurate and indicates the ever pure, ever free, unlimited consciousness which does not change. Eastern philosophy speaks of two kinds of truth: one is *pāramārthika satya*, absolute truth; the other is *vyāvahārika satya*, relative truth. From the absolute point of view, consciousness cannot change, but, from the relative point of view, change must take place. Consciousness is identified with and entrammelled by the material vehicles through which it acts and, practically speaking, works in ways which are not natural to itself. It is unable to express its natural purity and freedom so long as these vehicles are not made into perfect instruments able to respond to its every vibration.

Theosophical studies show that all the bodies—physical, emotional and mental—have their own consciousness. In fact, every particle in every body, as a living unit, has its own consciousness, for life, functioning at its own level and in an appropriate manner, is found in all matter. The aggregate which is the body—whether it is the physical, emotional or mental aggregate—also has a consciousness of its own. There is also a further aggregate which is the physical-astral-mental body consciousness, and which is the 'personality' of man in Theosophy.

This body consciousness is activated by habits. What is habit? When certain vibrations pass through matter and are repeated again and again, that substance is liable to fall into the pattern of those vibrations, facilitating further repetition. For example, nature herself has built into the physical body the desire for survival. This is an instinct, a strong force animating the physical body consciousness. In *The Years of Awakening*, it is described how at times when J. Krishnamurti's consciousness was far away, the entity left behind would cry, 'Where is Krishna? Where is Krishna?' and also say, 'I must not call him back. I have been told to keep quiet. He will not like it if I call him.' It seems as if the body consciousness is often alarmed when the real consciousness is absent.

The body consciousness, impelled by its desire for survival and separate existence, makes all kinds of demands. It lives on sensations, it wants excitement, and so forth. The transformation or change mentioned earlier lies in the body consciousness surrendering its own habits, vibrations, and modes of functioning, and becoming an instrument. As *At the Feet of the Master* says, the body must become like a pen in the hand of the writer—a fine instrument which will respond to the slightest touch of the inner *Ātmā*—the consciousness which is ever pure, free, and boundless. The bodies must cease to pull in different directions as they have been accustomed to do. This is the beginning of the Path. There is no one in whom change is not taking place—slowly, in the course of long ages, through many incarnations—but a time comes when a person at last understands and says, 'I shall not wait for the change.' He takes himself in hand when his awareness is clear enough for him to see the contradictions in his life and that body consciousness is pulling him in every direction but the one in which he wants to go. This is the beginning of self-understanding.

Even before entering the Path, there must be a certain understanding of life. If there is no discernment about what is worth while and what is not, and if one is running after things which are useless, engaged in pursuits which are 'for one life only' as *At the Feet of the Master* says, one is not ready for the Path.

The word 'Path', however, gives a wrong picture, as if one were going somewhere outside oneself; but it is meant to indicate an inner change and nothing else. Before that change can take place consciously, there must have been not only some discrimination but also a little detachment, a certain self-restraint, implied in the six points of conduct spoken about in Vedānta, parallels for which exist in other traditions. Further, there must be the urge to change—the feeling that there must be a right-about turn in life. The most difficult stage of one's life is this turning point. Previously, while one moved outwards to gain experience and obtain stimulation, there was no problem. The man who wants worldly things goes after them. After entering the Path proper, there is no problem either. One who has definitely 'entered the stream' knows in what direction he is going. The time between, where perhaps most seekers are, when they are neither quite worldly nor definitely unfolding their spiritual nature, is a stage of doubt and struggle. People claim to want enlightenment, yet cling to the pleasures and attachments of the world. *Light on the Path* states that 'though the ordinary man asks perpetually, his voice is not heard'. It also says 'Those that ask shall have.' The difficulty is that 'the voice of the mind is only heard on that plane on which the mind acts.' Those who want the enlightenment of liberation must not ask only with the mind—that is, conceptually—they must learn to ask at a deeper level, without wanting wisdom together with the pleasures and objects of the world. There must be a radical change of direction. When the direction becomes absolutely clear, the Path proper begins.

The first of the initiations is called in Buddhism *srotāpatti* or 'entering the stream', and this describes clearly what it is. When passing things cease to have meaning except as a kind of a 'sport' (*līlā*) of the Infinite Reality, when a sense of the immortal truth has dawned and there is a definite sense of direction, that is *srotāpatti*. Dr Besant says the term *parivrājaka*, 'one who wanders', refers to the same stage. As the concept degenerated, people put on the Sannyāsī dress and wandered about with a begging bowl. A *parivrājaka* is *aniketa*, which means he has no home in the worldly sense. The worldly home is a place of shelter from the rest of the world, from where each one fights his battles against the world with allies in the form of husband, wife,

children. So the home represents an exclusive, egocentric way of life. But to be a homeless one—a wanderer—means that fixations and attachments come to an end. The word Sannyāsī has also been misunderstood and what, in fact, represents a wonderful inner change has been made trivial by tradition. The Sannyāsī severs his sacred thread, gives up ceremonies and his very name because he is no more attached. The world is his family; the earth itself is his home. So, *srotāpatti* means that worldly attitudes to *my* house, *my* family and religion, *my* country and nationality, all come to an end. We identify ourselves as Hindus or Buddhists, by class, nationality, mental characteristics and so on. To dis-identify at a deep level means a widening and deepening of our sympathy. When we see a brother or a friend suffering, we feel that suffering ourselves; but when a neighbour or someone less well known suffers, do we feel it? Generally not, because we are more closely identified with brother and friends. When we see somebody poverty-stricken, do we really care? If one is a *srotāpatti*, a *parivrājaka*, an *aniketa*, he does. Attachments decrease, and false concepts based on the body are shed. Most of our attachments are body attachments. An Indian is suspicious of another man because, due to karmic forces, his body happens to be Pakistani in his present incarnation. That is the sole reason.

Before the first 'initiation' takes place, various fetters have to fall away. The personality must become harmonized, and become a voluntary servant, no longer struggling against the inner nature.

Both doubt and certainty are fetters. As mentioned earlier, while turning round from the 'outward path' towards 'home' much of the time there is doubt. People who say they want to tread the spiritual path wish, at the same time, to act as others want. The man who is free from doubt does what he knows to be right and not because others want it; this does not mean, of course, that one should not be considerate to others. Doubt ceases when the direction is clear. One who has come to that stage always chooses that which leads to the eternal and not that which is of the passing moment.

When Mr Krishnamurti speaks of choicelessness, it puzzles many people. But it is very simple to understand that for a person who

has turned towards the spiritual heights, there is only one direction; not many, and therefore no choice.

The word 'initiation' is another much misunderstood and, indeed, degraded word. A Guru puts his finger on someone's forehead and this is said to be initiation. It is, in fact, superstition. Initiation is not an outer event at all. The factors lie within; when preparation has taken place, there is an inward transformation. The consciousness undergoes a dimensional change, and this cannot be brought about by someone else any more than someone else can see on behalf of a blind man. Without the required six points of conduct and detachment, and the shedding of at least some of the attachments of the personality, initiation cannot take place. The Sanskrit word for disciple—*shishya*—denotes one 'who is capable and worthy of being taught'. One of the Masters of the Wisdom wrote that most of their secrets are incommunicable. If this were not so, wisdom could be passed on by publishing a textbook and distributing it to the world. A great deal of what needs to be said about the spiritual life has already been said many times over, but, since words do not achieve anything, people have not thereby become more spiritual. Somebody else's thought does not bring change; one can make use of it, but the real work must be done by oneself.

Initiation means entering a new world and beginning to live at a different level. There are various grades of consciousness. A dog, watching a philosopher working on a book, sees the physical actions of its master—the hand moving, the man going to a bookshelf or turning pages. But the dog does not know what is going on within its master's consciousness because its own consciousness is not at the same level. The final change of dimension for the human being is that of liberation—the freedom that is the utter abolition of ego. On the way to that stage, self-centredness and self-importance have to diminish. There are so-called spiritual experiences which make a person deceive himself into thinking that he has become enlightened; if he talks about it, there is something wrong, for no enlightened man claims to be so. A true inner change is self-evident in the sense that there is less of the feeling of selfhood, a widening sense of unity and a deepening harmony. The one thing that any seeker must watch

for, whatever experience he may have had, whatever progress he may have made, is this I-sense; it is dangerous, and will cause him to fall.

It is very difficult to describe the change of dimension brought about by a new quality of consciousness. A hologram demonstrates that a part represents the whole. That is true of life also. In every part of life, the whole exists in all its fullness, and it is a little bit of this that some people have experienced as a new level of awareness, an 'expansion of consciousness'. Expansions of consciousness vary in degree and duration. Trouble arises when, after experiencing a little, people begin to feel that they are very special and spiritual. Such 'ego trips' destroy the possibility of further progress.

After the stage which in Buddhism is called *srotāpatti*, there is that of the *sakridāgāmin* or *kutīchaka* who has come near to the end of compulsory incarnations. At this stage, there is said to be a wider vision of the meaning, beauty, and truth of existence. Much of manifestation is incomprehensible to us. We see suffering and cannot understand it. But a person undergoing the second initiation begins to realize the beauty of its meaning. The third stage is that of the *anāgāmin* or *hamsa* whose karma has been wiped away and who is not, therefore, under compulsion to return into a physical body. The compulsion of karma is the compulsion of one's own thirst for experience. At this stage the last shred of desire dies. *Light on the Path* describes how ambition can take new and subtle forms and ambition for worldly things may turn into ambition for the spiritual. In the same way, yearning for liberation can be a form of ambition. But when the sense of unity is fully established, what is there to be ambitious about? Ambition and desire die, even desire for the spiritual.

It is said that there is a difference between the Buddhist consciousness and the Nirvāṇic. The Buddhist consciousness is a wonderful feeling of unity with everything—with the grass, sand, animals, human beings, even with what before seemed disgusting or painful. There is oneness with the suffering of those who suffer and with the joy of those who are happy. But in the Nirvāṇic consciousness there is no trace of the feeling that 'I am one with the other.' There is undivided unity, deep and steady.

The fourth initiation is that of the *Arhat* or *Paramahansa*. Even at this stage, there are said to be some 'fetters' but they are of necessity very subtle. At this stage, the person has learned all that manifestation has to teach of the nature of Reality. Here manifestation is no longer an arena of pain; it has become a great song. The seed of the banyan tree is tiny and, looking at it, one cannot know fully what lies within it until one sees the great tree itself. Manifestation is like that. In its original simplicity, the Beingness cannot be known in all its glory except through manifestation. Manifestation has something glorious and indescribable to reveal. It is this that the Arhat is said to experience.

The Arhat is the embodiment and essence of compassion. When we see suffering, we either suffer with the sufferer or we are indifferent. But to understand the meaning of suffering, to feel compassion and yet not be agitated, is different. Thus, the Buddhas and Arhats, while they are immeasurably compassionate, have that perfect 'peace that passeth all understanding'.

These are said to be the stages in which qualitative changes of consciousness take place. Every change is a growth into further universality, a deeper sense of unity, a greater abnegation of the self. Ramana Maharshi taught that there is no such thing as self-realization because, when the truth is realized, there is no longer a 'self' to realize it. The idea of progress on the Path and of initiation as a form of self-survival is utterly mistaken. As *The Voice of the Silence* says, one has to give up being to non-being, self to non-self.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY OR DISCUSSION

1. What is an Adept or Master from a theosophical point of view?
2. What can create an affinity between an Adept and an aspirant?
3. The word 'Guru' means "one who dispels darkness"? How do you understand such a meaning?
4. Why do some people become dependent on 'Gurus'?
5. Why does the TS have no spiritual authority?
6. How do you understand the statement "the Path is oneself"?
7. Why was the Path mentioned as a turning point in one's life?
8. What is the theosophical view on initiation as presented by the author?
9. What is the essential direction of the Path?

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