

The Path of Spiritual Evolution

by Niels Brønsted

The path of spiritual evolution may be described in many ways. Generally we can say that it consists of a gradual expansion of the ordinary human waking consciousness so that it will include the dimensions of the soul and the spirit.

Through study, meditation, and service the aspirant to the spiritual path invokes a new function of consciousness and tries to use it as a source of inspiration in his service work. This leads to tension in his mental nature between the new function and the sum total of his achieved development, for he has to make a supreme effort in order to handle the impressions. But as he learns to use the new function more deliberately, the tension is released and there is a fusion of old and new functions.

When this fusion is sufficiently stable, the aspirant in his new state starts to invoke a still more advanced function of consciousness, and once more there is tension between this function and the sum of qualities from which he works. In that way the process proceeds as an alternation between periods of constructive tension and fusion with new functions of consciousness.

So the aspirant should not focus on producing tension but on recognizing his immediate level of evolution and on that basis seek to approach the latent qualities of his soul and spiritual nature--then tension will follow automatically.

In order to depict the process more tangibly we may say that the aspirant takes the first step by focusing his consciousness on the mental plane through positive, that is creative, thinking. This activity may be seen as a vibration that invokes or releases an impulse from the soul, the thinker. The impulse causes a fusion or integration of the three aspects of

the personality--thought, emotion, and action--and again this leads to tension between, and later on fusion of, the personality and the soul.

Through its activity this new positive focal point--the soul infused personality--emits a vibration which invokes the higher self, the spiritual triad or atma-buddhi-manas as it is termed in theosophical nomenclature. The triad responds by evoking an impulse towards the soul, and so the soul-infused personality which was formerly a positive or radiating point of energy becomes a negatively polarized or receptive focal point for spiritual impression from the triad. This leads to tension between the two poles, and it is from that field of tension that the disciple works at the building of the rainbow bridge or antahkarana. We will enlarge on that later. But eventually the tension causes a fusion of the soul infused personality and the higher self. This fusion now constitutes a new positive focal point which, through its activity, emits a vibration that invokes the spiritual Hierarchy. The response from the Hierarchy makes the disciple "negative" or receptive to the hierarchical impulses we term the plan of evolution, and a new field of tension is produced in which he endeavors to realize some part of the plan in his three worlds--the mental, astral and physical planes. Let us summarize this information in three items:

1. The first fusion between the personality and the soul is produced by the positive activity of the lower mind, that is the constructive, creative and humanitarian group thinking which is the new egoic function of consciousness that the integrated personality invokes.

2. The second fusion between the soul-infused

personality and the higher self is produced by the interplay of higher abstract thinking--that is the new causal function of consciousness invoked by the activity of the soul infused personality--and the analytical intellect.

3. The third fusion between spiritual man and the Hierarchy is produced by pure, intuitive reason or love-wisdom that is the new function of consciousness the disciple's activity invokes from the buddhic world.

The Technical View

But a subject like the path of spiritual evolution can always be seen from different angles, and at this point we need to sketch the technical aspect. This I have dealt with in somewhat more detail in an earlier article termed *Soul Contact*,¹ but for the sake of continuity in this article, a brief summary and, at the same time, an extension of the previous material is inserted here.

The waking consciousness of the integrated personality consists of three functions: analytical intellect in the mental body, emotions in the astral body, and streams and centers of vital or etheric energy that govern the nervous systems of the physical body. The functions are linked by the consciousness thread which communicates thoughts from the mental body to the cerebrum and apparently also impulses from the astral body to the limbic system, which is a group of structures in the middle of the brain that play an important role in emotion and motivation.

The consciousness thread is the main thoroughfare for the ordinary waking consciousness. It simply tells the brain what is being thought in the mental body and sensed in the emotional body, and it is the withdrawal of this thread that makes the body fall asleep at night. In computer terminology we may say that the mental and emotional bodies are the computer while the brain is the display monitor and the consciousness thread the cable connecting them.

This is somewhat substantiated by the

medical fact that when the brain orders a simple action to be carried out, the action has already begun up to half a second before the brain's conscious decision. The medical problem consists in the question, "who is acting then?" But esoterically we are only pleased with that kind of information, for it is not difficult to state a plausible theory. We know that ordinary actions commence as an image in the mental body, and we merely have to imagine that impulses flow into the brain initiating the action through the motor nerves and at the same time "telling" the brain that such an action is being performed. And perhaps the latter process is a bit more complicated and needs more time.

However, the waking consciousness is also modified and colored by various energies flowing into the body system through the seven primary centers and activating the endocrine or hormone producing glands.

The instinct of self-preservation and the sexual drive are transmitted from the astral body to the physical system through the base of spine and sacral centers respectively. In the emotional field the solar plexus center transfers ordinary human states like jealousy, envy, or vanity from the astral body to the sympathetic nervous system, while the heart center communicates more gentle emotions like love, devotion, or aspiration to the parasympathetic system. In the mental field the throat center transfers creativity and the brow center abstract ideas to the central nervous system while the head center conveys the function of will to the thought nature. The spiritual development mentioned in the introduction results in a definite connection from the physical waking consciousness to the soul in the egoic lotus and the spirit in the higher self.

But the connection to the soul is not conscious in the same way as the processes of the mental body are perceived consciously in the brain. It consists of a connection between the centers in the three bodies of the personality and the petals of the egoic lotus. This communication link is allocated to the

three aspects so that there are three pairs of centers each belonging to one of the aspects. The sacral and throat centers belong to the third aspect and are linked with the knowledge petals, the solar plexus and heart centers belong to the second aspect and are linked with the love petals, while the base and head centers belong to the first aspect and are linked with the sacrifice petals of the egoic lotus. Together these connections represent what we may call "unconscious" soul contact.

The brain does not obtain conscious contact with the spiritual nature until the disciple builds the rainbow bridge, or antahkarana, from the mental unit, the nucleus of the mental body, to the mental or manasic permanent atom, the nucleus of the causal body. So this connection actually passes by the soul (viewed as the egoic lotus) and links the lower analytical mind with the higher self directly. The result is that manasic, buddhic and atmic processes are perceived consciously in the brain, and that is why we may term this link "conscious" soul contact, although, strictly speaking, the link is not with the soul but the higher self--see Figure 1² at the end of as

Occult Meditation

After these introductory remarks we may now focus on the method or technique that the aspirant to the mysteries has to use in order to realize the prospects that knowledge of the spiritual path holds out. This method constitutes a central part of the raja yoga of our time and is termed "occult meditation." The word "occult" is used to differentiate this type of meditation from the many others we are presented with in modern society, and at the same time signifies that it is a meditation that draws out hidden or latent qualities in the aspirant.

In other words, and in accordance with the above introduction, occult meditation--practiced in the right way, for a sufficient period of time and in a sufficient number of incarnations--will unfailingly and scientifically produce the two types of soul contact: "unconscious" and later

also "conscious." This is the primary goal of evolution in the human kingdom, for not until personal man is truly overshadowed by the soul and the spirit will he be able to cooperate consciously with the Hierarchy in its effort to create a better world for all to live in. At first the work of occult meditation proceeds in three phases that we will consider one by one:

1. Intention.
2. Visualization.
3. Projection.

INTENTION. Normally, this word means some sort of mental decision or determination, and it is in fact during this phase that we decide to build the antahkarana with all that it entails. Without this decision nothing happens, and so it is essential to the whole process.

But the word also has another connotation that is clearly illustrated if we consider the Latin word "intendere" which means "stretch" or "strain." For, as pointed out in the introduction, the building of the antahkarana starts with the accumulation of a field of mental energy-substance in a state of extreme tension around the mental unit which, seen from the point of physical space, seems to be located within the head. This field is like a bow bent to the utmost of its capacity and ready to shoot an "arrow" in the direction of the manasic permanent atom which, together with the buddhic and atmic permanent atoms, may constitute what is termed the jewel in the egoic lotus.

This is the field that is alluded to when instructions in occult meditation use terms like "raising the consciousness to the head and holding it steady in the light." It implies that the meditating person is oriented towards the soul and the triad, has a clear mental conception of the task to be carried out, and is concentrated to such a degree that he is able to preserve the tension without stressing the brain cells beyond their capacity. When this has been accomplished, the signal to the soul is so invocative that it turns its attention in the direction of the personality and starts to participate consciously in the process.

If this is not accomplished, the formulated intention is nothing more than a thought form and the ability to realize its content merely the demand of the elemental essence to have the thought repeated in order to keep the form intact as a vehicle of vibration. So it is essential that high frequency soul energy flows into the thought form and empowers the mental intention and emotional aspiration with spiritual will.

However, the field of mental tension is not only the result of a meditation technique, but also of the way in which the disciple lives. He has to develop a sense of proportion and discrimination in his family life and service work so that he does not waste energy on nonessentials. For the projection of the antahkarana in the mental dimension is paralleled by the building of a physical-etheric light bridge between the ajna and crown center--the etheric correspondences to the pituitary and pineal glands respectively--and that is one of the reasons why the disciple has to integrate his personality forces in the ajna or brow center for the meditation process to take effect.

One way of describing the process is using a simile from the world of electronics. Let us assume that soul energy enters the head center with a positive voltage of, say, +10 volts. However, this is not enough for a "spark" to be drawn between the head and ajna centres within the head, and therefore we have to establish a negative electrical pole of, say, -10 volts. This is the personality field in the ajna center, and now the total voltage between the two poles is 20 volts, which makes it possible to draw the "spark"--the physical counterpart of the antahkarana.

So the process actually requires power which may only be obtained if energy is saved and preserved in daily life. The brow chakra has 2 x 48 petals, and 48 is the sum of the petals of the five "body" chakras: base 4 + sacral 6 + solar plexus 10 + heart 12 + throat 16 = 48. That is why the brow chakra is termed the center of the integrated personality, for it is able to sum up and integrate the frequencies

of the five lower chakras within its own pattern.

Here the word "frequency" can be understood quite literally, because a chakra consists of a wavy rotation where the distance between wave crests may be considered the "wavelength" and the number of wavelengths the "frequency" (see the illustration on the previous page.)

This means that each of the five chakras can contribute to the personality force field in the brow chakra in the following way:

The base center transmits the instinct of self preservation into physical consciousness. Here energy may be saved by limiting the tendency to hypochondria which, due to over stimulation, is so common among disciples. **The sacral center** transfers the sexual drive from the emotional body. Here energy may be saved by limiting sexual activity to what is necessary for our well being--and to have children.

The solar plexus center is the gate to the emotional life. Here energy may be saved by limiting the critical and irritable atmosphere which easily arises between disciples in a group--again due to the over stimulation that is practically unavoidable on the path of spiritual evolution.

The heart center transmits the more gentle emotions into the autonomous nervous system. Here energy may be saved if we do not attempt to act more loving than we really are. It is impossible to force love from "below" and "upwards." It flows naturally from "above," and all we can do is to remove hindrances through detachment and indifference--that is, not allowing our personal emotions and idiosyncrasies to block communication with others. Most disciples are loving and considerate people who do not need to simulate.

The throat centre is the channel of the creative thought and word. Here energy may be saved by limiting speech to what is necessary. Arguing is always a waste of time and energy. If we agree there is nothing to say.

If we don't agree, nobody is going to convince us, and there is still nothing to say.

VISUALISATION. After the accumulation of a mental field of tension, which is a relatively passive phase, a very active phase ensues where the student makes a blueprint or builds a thought form of the course, or "track," which the antahkarana is going to take--for energy follows thought.

This is based on the creative imagination which is really an astral quality originally evolved by the desire function. We create images of the things we want to acquire or avoid, the things we are attracted to or fear. These images are projected on the silver screen of the mind whenever we need them, or when we get bored, and it is on the basis of those that we choose what we want to do. For instance, the sexual drive of many people is so intimately linked with the pictures of the imagination that it is difficult to say whether the urge is due to the instinct itself or the demand of the thought forms to have themselves repeated.

Therefore, the imagination has to be raised to the highest level of the astral plane and made to function quite independently of ordinary emotional processes before it can be used as the basis of the visualization process. When this is accomplished, it becomes responsive to buddhic impression and a current of force is set up between the astral and buddhic bodies. This current passes through the field of mental energy substance and starts to shape and organize it.

This means that the imagination works in two ways. It builds images or thought forms out of the ordinary content of the mind, and it acts as a sensitive receiver of buddhic impressions. Seen from the angle of the analytical intellect, buddhic impulses are "arupa" or formless and may not be utilized creatively until they are shaped by the imagination and assimilated by the mental nature.

But visualization is more than creative imagination. It is in fact a combination of the

mind's ability to direct energy and the picture producing faculty of the imagination. The production of images focuses the awareness of the disciple somewhere between the pituitary and pineal glands. This is where we paint pictures and imagine the things we would like to have and plan to work for, but as the visualization proceeds this process becomes secondary to the direction of energy that is more focused and goes on in the area directly around the pineal gland.

PROJECTION. At this time many students face a critical point in their meditation work. They have accumulated a field of mental energy-substance, they have learned through their intention to keep it in a state of extreme tension, and they have organized the field by means of the form-building faculty of the astral-buddhic energy. But now they have to use the will in order to project the consciousness thread or antahkarana.

This process consists in a combined use of the will, further visualization and the word of power of the ray. Up to this phase the method has been the same for all the rays types, but now there is a change of situation because the organized energy substance can only be projected and shaped into a thread by means of sound--as in all other processes of creation--and the character of this creative sound depends on the soul and personality rays.

Response From the Higher Self

These three phases of the work of occult meditation lead to the state we have termed "conscious" soul contact. But at the same time we see how important the "unconscious" soul contact is to the process as a whole, for it conveys three types of creative energies to the personal consciousness corresponding to the three aspects:

Third aspect contributes creative energy from the knowledge petals of the egoic lotus via the throat center, and this is necessary for the process of visualization.

Second aspect contributes love-wisdom or

group consciousness from the love petals via the heart center, and this is necessary for the magnetic attraction of mental energy-substance and for the development of discrimination in order to reduce the waste of energy.

First aspect contributes spiritual will from the sacrifice petals via the head center, and this is necessary for maintaining the point of tension and for the projection of the thread by means of the word of power.

However, three phases remain before the antahkarana is completed and man is finally liberated. But whereas the first three phases represent the work of occult meditation the student performs on his own initiative, the last three phases express the response of the higher spiritual dimensions to the effort.

The first of these final phases is termed *invocation* and *evocation*. This means that intention, visualization and projection together invoke the higher self, which in turn evokes or emits a line of energy to meet the projected consciousness thread or antahkarana.

So now the first tenuous strand has been cast across the gap between personal and impersonal man, but this line of communication has to be expanded through active use, and that is why this phase is termed stabilisation.

When this is accomplished the disciple is able to ascend in full consciousness into the higher self--the sphere of the monadic life. He "is resurrected from the dark cave of the personality life into the blazing light of divinity."³ So resurrection is the term for this phase, and the disciple "is no longer only a part of humanity and a member also of the Hierarchy, but he belongs to the great company of Those Whose will is consciously divine and Who are the Custodians of the Plan."⁴

Spiritual Consciousness

As we have seen, the result of the building of the antahkarana is that atmic, buddhic, and

higher manasic impressions are registered and interpreted not only by the mental and emotional aspects but also by the physical brain consciousness.

And so we ask ourselves: "What does that imply? Is it possible for us to imagine what kind of consciousness this engenders?" The question is very difficult to answer because these three aspects of conscious awareness are beyond the grasp of the rational mind that normally constitutes our highest means of recognition. All we can do is to present a few ideas which, by means of the creative imagination, may vaguely suggest the effect that these higher impressions will have on our physical consciousness.

Manas is a Sanskrit word for the mental aspect as a whole, but in this context, it is used as a "technical" term for the higher abstract thinking which, originally, is a function of the causal body, but which today many people are able to assimilate and interpret by means of their lower mind. Abstract thought is the highest level ordinary human consciousness may attain, but it is still a response to the plan of evolution on the buddhic plane, for the mental, astral and physical planes are below the threshold of planetary group consciousness.

Seen from the angle of the Planetary Logos, these three planes do not constitute a principle, in the same way as the dense physical body is not considered a principle by the human personality--and by principle we mean an evolutionary factor. The physical evolution of man goes on in the vital or etheric body and is only reflected in the cell structures of the dense body, and that is also true in relation to the Planetary Logos. His cosmic physical evolution takes place in the cosmic ethers--that is the buddhic, atmic, monadic and logoc planes--and it is merely reflected in the three cosmic dense planes, our mental, astral and physical worlds.

This means that the flow of abstract causal impressions into the mind and the brain will result in an awareness of the highest ideas and perceptions humanity has been able to produce

as a response to the buddhic plan of evolution from the Hierarchy. These impulses convey the ability to see the ideal behind the concrete, to see what things have in common instead of what separates them. This makes us capable of cooperating in spite of all barriers and, in a detached way, see through the illusions which result from our identification with ideas we only perceive fragmentarily.

Buddhi is the medium of pure intuitive reason--an insight that leads to what is termed spiritual love-wisdom. But why are intuition and love so intimately linked? Imagine that we are able to perceive a poor and desolate person to such a degree that we sense all aspects of him--not only the individual suffering (which is very often self-induced) but also the underlying soul nature struggling to be noticed by the personality. If this intuitive perception is sufficiently profound and all-embracing, our help to that person will be in the nature of a conditioned reflex, and the close-fistedness of the personality will not be allowed to rationalize away the need for help by the excuse that he will probably drown his sorrows in wine.

Our help will be a completely detached, but at the same time, deeply loving act, accompanied not by any ordinary emotion, but the general state of bliss which the emotional nature is only able to reflect when it is as smooth as a millpond in early summer's morning. Bliss is not a personal state of emotion like the astral love that is directed towards a particular human being. It is a universal and intense empathy in relation to all humans no matter who they are and whether we like them or not on the personal level.

So through buddhic impression we may experience our unity with all human beings--the universal brotherhood that is a fact in the buddhic world and not merely a beautiful dream. This experience of unity results in a brotherly love for all people in the same way as we, in the ordinary world of astral emotion (and on a lower turn of the spiral), may love a close friend because he is so familiar that he is

almost a part of our own nature.

But what we experience is a unity with the consciousness of all people, and as consciousness is the result of the meeting of life and form, and forms necessarily are separated from each other, the experience will still contain an element of duality--a duality between the one who experiences and that which is the object of his experience.

Atma is the medium of pure life energy--at least in relation to the five planes that constitute the field of monadic evolution. Through atmic impulses we may identify with the one life that flows through all creation and therefore also through our fellow human beings. This is an experience of undifferentiated synthesis; an experience that holds no duality because life is a unity in itself and does not depend on other factors.

Maybe we can illustrate the difference between atma, buddhi and manas by using a somewhat prosaic or vulgar simile. Imagine that we place ten potatoes on the table in front of us and count them--that is manas. If we put them in a bag they constitute a unity (a bag of potatoes) while at the same time preserving their individuality--that is buddhi. But if we turn them into mashed potatoes they change into a synthesis where the individual potato is lost in the whole--that is atma.

But identification with the one life is also an identification with Self. If we sit down for a moment, close our eyes, take a couple of deep breaths and let all processes of consciousness quiet down, we eventually reach a point where nothing is left but "being" or "self." The self is taking up all of the silver screen of the mind, and the thought occurs that when nothing but the self seems to exist, it can't possibly be our personal self in contradistinction to the self of others. It must be the same universal, all-embracing self in all people, and any notion of being separated from them is an illusion.

When we normally see ourselves as separated from other "selves" it is due to the fact that we experience our being as a point within the brain looking out of the eyes. But the esoteric teaching tells us that as the

personality approaches the soul and the spirit, this point is gradually expanding into a sphere--"with its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere" as H.P. Blavatsky would say. This all-encompassing sphere has the world within itself, and this means that there is neither time nor space, because there is no separation or distance between (my) self and any point in space or time. But the question is, why are "life" and "self" so intimately connected? The answer lies in the link between them--the will. Life energy carries the evolutionary impulse itself, and this we may term the will to develop. But will and self are two sides of the same coin, for there is no self without the ability to choose, and no will without a self to will. If we could not choose and make decisions we would be a cork on the ocean of desire, an entity without a center, and not deserve the term "self." And, on the other hand, there would be no will without a being to convert the energy into action. It is like the old philosophical question about the sounds in nature: if there is no human ear to hear the trees creak in the wind, do they creak?

This means that the atmic state of synthesis--what mystics call "nirvana"--may hardly be termed an "experience." We should rather call it "pure being," and the effect is that the dynamic power of life itself permeates all vehicles including the brain, manifesting itself as the will to obey the process of evolution with all the sacrifices that are involved.

So life, will and sacrifice are related concepts, but we should be aware of the fact that it is only the personality that experiences a sacrifice. Spirit does not sacrifice, it merely liberates itself from hindrances. These are the personality reactions we value so highly and

are so identified with. They are the currents which give us the feeling of being living, warm-blooded and enthusiastic entities. They let us become absorbed by the flow of events, but they also disturb the timeless tranquility that the meditative discipleship requires.

In other words, these currents make waves in the personality vehicles, and just as waves of water prevent the surface from reflecting our true image, so do the personality waves prevent the mental body from reflecting manas, the emotional body from reflecting buddhi and the personality from reflecting atma.

Literature

Alice A. Bailey: *The Rays and the Initiations*, pp. 482-497 and 539-542.

Alice A. Bailey: *Discipleship in the New Age*, Volume T, pp. 89-91.

Notations

1. *The Journal of Esoteric Psychology*, Vol. IX, No. 2, Fall 1995.

2. Adapted from Alice A. Bailey: *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 817.

3. Alice A. Bailey: *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 495.

4. *Ibid*, p. 495.

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Niels Brønsted, teacher / translator, lives in Denmark and is a life-long student of the Ageless Wisdom. He is a founding member of the Theosophical Union in Denmark. He translated A Treatise on Cosmic Fire into Danish.