

Festival of Leo
New York City, July 25, 2010

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Good afternoon and welcome to the Festival of Leo. The actual moment of the full moon will be at 9:38 this evening, so we're working well within the floodtide of spiritual energy available at this time each month. At the time of the full moon, it's as if a door stands open between the Hierarchy, symbolized by the Sun, and Humanity, represented by the Earth. When the Moon is full, it stands out of the way, so to speak. Nothing then can impede the alignment of the Sun and Earth, the Hierarchy and Humanity. These monthly group meditation meetings are called an Approach to the Hierarchy, and the Approach is in two directions. The Hierarchy directs its consciousness towards humanity in response to humanity's approach to the soul. When this approach is made by a group and as a group, then a channel is created in consciousness for the reception of divine Light and Love radiated by the Hierarchy and distributed throughout the world by the meditating group.

This group is far more than just those of us gathered in this room today, for it's composed of countless groups large and small who are meeting as we are throughout the world. It's a powerful opportunity for group service, so let us take a moment to align ourselves with this worldwide group; envision the Love and Light pouring into the group channel being created by the worldwide group; and see these powerful spiritual energies radiating throughout the world, touching every plane and level of existence with the beneficence of Deity. Then let us say together an ancient prayer which is a kind of hymn to the Sun – the Gayatri.

O Thou Who givest sustenance to the universe,
From Whom all things proceed,
To Whom all things return,
Unveil to us the face of the true Spiritual Sun
Hidden by a disc of golden Light
That we may know the Truth
And do our whole duty
As we journey to Thy sacred feet.

The Sun has always been recognised as a source of Life and Light, and therefore of Power, from time immemorial. The Sun is the astrological ruler of Leo, and today, in preparation for our meditation, we focus on the gifts and opportunities of Leo. Leo is described as “the battlefield of the Forces of Materialism and the Forces of Light” – of selfish materialistic desire and “inspired spiritual Sacrifice” – which makes its influence is especially meaningful at this time. The global economic crisis is forcing people, institutions and whole nations to face a desperate situation and try to trace the disastrous effects back to their originating cause. Materialism, greed and selfishness have been identified as the cause, but it seems we, humanity, are still in the stage of identifying the culprits and placing the responsibility as far away from ourselves as possible. Blaming the banks, Wall Street, the government, rich people, poor people trying to live above their means, oil companies, Humvee drivers, hedge fund managers, property owners, real estate speculators, Republicans, Democrats, Saudi Arabia, China – have I missed anybody? All are targets for blame, and all no doubt bear a portion of the responsibility for the state we're in. But fundamentally, the source of the problem lies in all of us, in the sense that a basic human characteristic is the belief that each human being is a separated self.

This belief is cultivated from a baby's first breath by its loving parents who believe their child is unique, one of a kind and irreplaceable. And each child is. But we are also, each one of us, atoms in the body of a Great Life. We esotericists speak of the one Life almost too readily, without taking the measure of what

we're saying. For, if there is really only one Life in Whom we all live and move and have our being, and therefore if we truly are one with all that lives and breathes, then that entails consequences of personal responsibility, unselfishness and self-sacrifice that would stop even the most dedicated ethicist in his tracks. Yet, belief in this one Life is an essential principle of the Ageless Wisdom, and Leo marks an essential stage in coming to terms with this recognition.

Leo is the "birthplace of the individual", Alice Bailey said; the coming into form of the individual self-conscious human being who emerges out of the mass experience in Cancer. The beginning of this recognition demonstrates as self-awareness and a sense of individual responsibility. Spiritually, this is an important stage in the life of the aspirant, Alice Bailey said, for he has to know himself through true self-awareness before he can know that divine spirit which is his true Self and know also his fellowmen. The Oracle at Delphi understood this need, for he said "Know thyself". "Know the Self" comes next, and when that is achieved, one knows not only oneself but all selves. And when one approaches the consciousness of the Adept, the demand is "Know the One."

This progressive knowledge of the self begins with awareness of the personality, a blend of mental energy, emotional energy, and vital force, and these three are masked, hidden or revealed by an outer shell of dense matter. The result of this union of three energies in an objective form is self-consciousness. Their fusion produces that sense of individuality for which we use the word "I". It's an awareness of identity in relation to other identities, and it declares its existence by affirming "I am".

In this description you will notice mention of mental energy as well as emotional and vital force. The separated, selfish personality cannot exist without a degree of mind to propel itself forward. That helps us understand why so many intelligent people can be so dedicated to their self-interest. The mind has awakened its lower faculties of analysis, discrimination and some logic, but the higher mind hasn't yet awakened. And this is part of the journey everyone must take from the herd mentality to the stage of individuality as a separated, independent being, before recognising the goal of mergence with the group and eventually with the Whole.

Again, to quote Alice Bailey, "The primitive step on the way to selfhood of necessity is selfishness. Equally, the prime hindrance to the advanced and highly evolved personality is selfhood, or the prolongation of a selfish attitude." The goal, she said, is the achieving of personality, and its sacrifice to group good, with a consequent merging of the self in the one Self and the fusion of the individual soul (consciously and willingly) in the Oversoul. This progression is summed up in the keynote of Leo, "I am That and That am I."

Even when this realisation is accepted and the need for it is appreciated, it doesn't happen overnight or over a lifetime. It's an unfoldment of consciousness that is profound, life-altering, and fraught with pain. The Buddha understood this, for his own enlightenment was achieved only after great struggle and numerous bypaths. When he had achieved his liberation from the grip of the separated self, he preached his first sermon and said "Wherever there are the conditions of individuality, there are the conditions of sorrow." The great mystic Meister Eckhardt said, "The shell must be cracked apart if what is in it is to come out, for if you want to know the kernel you must break the shell." Huston Smith, the religious scholar, put it this way: "Everything I do for my private wellbeing adds another layer to my ego, and in thickening it insulates me more from God. Conversely, every act done without thought for myself diminishes my self-centredness until finally no barrier remains to separate me from the Divine."

Yet, in the Buddha's last sermon he insisted that we be a lamp unto ourselves and work out our own salvation with diligence. Was he contradicting what he had said in his first sermon some forty years earlier? I don't think so, because the Buddha knew that the "lamp" that exists within each human being

and which is capable of leading each person forward, step by step, out of darkness and into light, is the guarantee not only of our liberation but also of our origin. For we are all, in a sense, sparks of one flame.

Realisation of this is called the state of isolated unity. It's a very advanced state of consciousness in which all boundaries and limitations fall away. The mind continues to think, but not of things or objects. In the Upanishads' words, "It is filled with that which is 'separated from all qualities, neither this nor that, without form, without a name.' For most of us, this stage of isolated unity lies far ahead, but we can move towards it by stretching our minds to appreciate its promise. Alice Bailey described this goal in the following way: "Where true identity is achieved, there is no sense of this or that, no recognition of individual activity within the group, because the will of the merged soul is identical with that of the group and automatic in its working. Where true unity is present, the individual aspirant becomes only a channel for group will and activity, and this with no effort of his own – a spontaneous reaction."

Some of us might be wondering, if this is the goal, and if it's so difficult to achieve, then why did we incarnate in a physical body and develop a personal identity, a sense of independence and uniqueness that we call a personality, and which becomes our total identity for a very long time? Because something precious and of lasting value to the Logos is gained by this temporary creation of a personality. The path of initiation gains release from this sense of separated self, but the result of this achievement isn't the loss of identity; rather, its transformation. "Of one thing we can be sure, and that is that *identity ever remains*", the Tibetan said. "Each one of us, in due process of evolution, forms part of one of the Heavenly Men, Who Themselves form the seven centres in that greater Heavenly Man, the Logos. Yet, though we are merged with the whole, we do not lose our identity, but forever remain separated units of consciousness, though one with all that lives or is."

The purpose of the journey into form, leading to identification with the form, then with the herd or mass, followed by awakening to the sense of individuality – I, me and mine – is for the purpose of gaining discrimination between Spirit, Soul, and Matter. This discrimination is an essential function of manas, and it is man's obligation to demonstrate it, for man is literally one who thinks, the origin of "man" being the Sanskrit manas – to think, to discern and discriminate between. "The purpose of this solar system is the unfoldment of consciousness. The outstanding theme of Leo is the activity of the self-conscious unit in relation to its environment or the development of sensitive response to surrounding impacts by one who stands – as the Sun stands – at the centre of its little universe. The whole story of Leo can be summed up in the word 'sensitivity'", Alice Bailey said.

That that sensitivity is acquired through pain and loss is a fact of life, for we don't let go of the sense of separateness, apart-ness, easily. The naturalist Jane Goodall, in her book *Reason for Hope*, wrote of her despair after the death of her husband and of her deep grief at that time. Then one day in Gombe, her African home where she has studied the chimpanzees for years, she was spending an afternoon with them in the forest when a terrific rainstorm came up. She and a few of the chimps waited out the storm as it raged over them for over an hour. As the air gradually cleared and the sunlight returned in the late afternoon, it revealed the natural world of forest, lake, mountains, chimps and Jane in all its beauty. And then, she described what happened: "Lost in awe at the beauty around me, I must have slipped into a state of heightened awareness. It is hard—impossible, really—to put into words the moment of truth that suddenly came upon me then. Even the mystics are unable to describe their brief flashes of spiritual ecstasy. It seemed to me, as I struggled afterward to recall the experience, that *self* was utterly absent: I and the chimpanzees, the earth and trees and air, seemed to merge, to become one with the spirit power of life itself."

She went on to describe how every part of the natural world, from bugs to leaves to chimps, took on an intense vitality. All her years of study and analysis of the chimpanzees was good and necessary, but now she understood that there is another window through which humans can look out into the world around

us, a window that the mystics and Masters have used to understand the world. We don't know why the capacity to recognise the world in this way came only after a period of deep grief and despair, but perhaps that suffering broke down some barrier or separating wall in consciousness, for she wrote, "That afternoon, it had been as though an unseen hand had drawn back a curtain and, for the briefest moment, I had seen through such a window. In a flash of 'outsight' I had known timelessness and quiet ecstasy, sensed a truth of which mainstream science is merely a small fraction. And I knew that the revelation would be with me for the rest of my life, imperfectly remembered yet always within. A source of strength on which I could draw when life seemed harsh or cruel or desperate."

"I am That and That am I" – how do we gain this consciousness of belonging to a larger whole, as Jane Goodall so beautifully described? One practice we can cultivate is the definite and sustained effort to sense the Presence throughout the Universe in all forms and in all presentations of truth, the point of light behind all phenomenal appearances. Some forms are able to radiate the light, while others hide it from view, but what the poet Robert Browning called the "imprisoned splendour" lies behind all outer appearance awaiting recognition. There is always a greater light to be discovered. As Alice Bailey wrote, "As the light of the Moon is the guarantee that the light of the Sun exists, so the light of the Sun is the guarantee of a still greater light." Leo bestows the faith that can confidently declare, "I am That and That am I." Let us close with our meditation.