

FESTIVAL OF SAGITTARIUS New York, December 20, 2010

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Good evening, friends, and welcome to the Festival of Sagittarius. The actual moment of the full moon occurs at 3:15 am tomorrow morning. The winter solstice also occurs tomorrow evening. This moment in the annual cycle when the sun reaches its lowest point in the Northern Hemisphere and seems to stand still has significance going back to prehistoric times, as can be seen in the ancient ruins of Stonehenge. Why did the winter solstice hold such significance for early man? As in all things, perhaps there was a mixture of expedience and spirituality. The beginning of winter and the minimum of sunlight meant starvation, but it also marked the start of increasing light, bringing the renewal of life to Earth.

The longing for spiritual light is also deeply anchored in human consciousness. One of the most ancient prayers we have comes from the Brihadaranyaki Upanishad of ancient India. It expresses the aspiration for light, for life, and for the real. Let us take a moment to silently link up with our fellowmen, with the new group of world servers who consciously seek to aid in bringing more light into the world, and with our fellow meditators meeting, as we are, throughout the world. Then let us say together this ancient appeal.

"Lead us, O Lord,
From darkness to light;
From the unreal to the real;
From death to immortality."

The need for light seems obvious to the neophyte who wants to know and understand; yet the meaning of light takes on increasing depth and complexity for the disciple in training. To the neophyte light is good, and darkness is bad. Light brings wisdom and understanding, darkness is ignorance and evil. Yet one of the Rules for Disciples and Initiates which is understood only at an advanced stage of consciousness says that "darkness is pure spirit". This recognition, realisation, (call it what you will) is so overwhelming and all-embracing that distinctions and differences disappear. The disciple realises that they are only the result of the activity of substance in its form-making capacity and are consequently illusion and non-existent, from the angle of the spirit at rest in its own centre. The only realisation left is that of pure Being Itself."

To understand the significance of the light of Sagittarius, we have to try to understand why direction is such a key theme in Sagittarius—such an important navigational tool. The symbol of Sagittarius is the Archer with his bow drawn taut and the arrow aimed in the direction of its target. The light of Sagittarius is like the arrow, "a beam of directed, focused light. In this the point of light becomes the beam, revealing a greater light ahead and illumining the way to the centre of light". This helps us understand why Sagittarius is one of two points of balance in the zodiac, Libra being the other, and why the experience in Sagittarius has to take place on the plains of Earth. Sagittarius marks an interlude between Scorpio, sign of testing and challenge, and Capricorn, sign of the climb to the mountaintop of initiation. This interlude occurs on the plains of earth, where the path between the pairs of opposites runs straight and level, leaving the depths of personality experience and the heights of soul experience on either side. On this level way, the archer needs a sure sense of direction, a clear vision of the goal, to navigate his way towards greater light.

The Tibetan makes an interesting observation when he writes of the need for the disciple to develop "the capacity to take the light". This suggests that the incoming light has to be managed, somehow, and this thought lies behind the keynote for Sagittarius - *I see the goal. I reach that goal, and then I see another.*

Spiritual evolution unfolds step by step, and no phase of the way may be evaded. As the Tibetan puts it, “revelation comes step by step, moving from one great point of focus to another until naught more remains to be revealed.” The disciple moves forward as he learns to use the mind as a searchlight to penetrate into new fields of awareness and recognition. This requires right interpretation and right relation to that which is seen and contacted, a process of assimilation and alignment that cannot be rushed.

Light takes on special significance at the winter solstice, the moment of greatest darkness in the annual cycle. Just as the stars are most visible at the time of the dark of the moon, so light needs darkness to reveal itself. “In the light the stars shine not, but in the darkness light diffused is not, but only focused points of radiance.” There would be no darkness without the light, and no light without the dark. Yet, this contrast is only part of a great mystery, for we’re told there is no light or dark to the soul but only existence and love. The soul knows only *being*, and light and dark are—to the soul—the same thing. Why this is so seems to have to do with the soul being the relation between spirit and matter, the energy which unites two aspects of what is essentially One. Darkness is pure spirit, but Divinity demonstrates Its presence in matter through light. The old Commentary put it this way: “From darkness issued light, from the subjective emanated the objective.” In the Tibetan’s words, “Out of the relation of light and dark, that which is invisible emerges into visibility, and we can see and know. Christ, as the light of the world, revealed that reality.”

This helps us to understand something of the spiritual purpose of blindness. Blindness is said to be a prelude to initiation, imposed by the soul upon the hastening aspirant, so that the lessons of conscious experience, of discipleship, and later of initiation may be correctly assimilated and expressed. In this way, the rushing seeker is protected from making too rapid and superficial progress. “It is depth and a profound ‘rootedness’ for which the inner Teacher, and later the Master, looks”, we’re told. To achieve this, blindness is induced by the soul in order to “black out” the glory and the promised attainment and reward. The disciple is thrown back upon himself. All he can see is his little field of experience, and it is this stage that the prophet Isaiah referred to when he spoke of the “treasures of darkness”. “The beauty of the immediate, the glory of the present opportunity and the need to focus upon the task at hand are the rewards of moving forward into what seems to be impenetrable darkness”, we’re told. And as the disciple does so, he sees the goal; he reaches that goal, and then he sees another. Step by step, he develops the capacity to take the light – to use its revelatory power in service.

Think what would happen if we could see the full trajectory of the evolutionary path we’re treading. If we knew what lies ahead of us, would we live our lives any more wisely? Or would we simply be overwhelmed by the vastness of the cosmic Whole in which we are a tiny atom? Man, whose name means “one who thinks”, is charged with bringing light to the lower kingdoms, and that can only be done as man learns to wield and direct the light within him. The Ageless Wisdom says that every atom, no matter how small, is endowed with light, with the principle of Intelligence. But stimulating this light, awakening it, takes time—time for responsiveness to develop, time for sentience to awaken. “All that is, is ever present”, we’re told, but we cannot see it. The irony is that from earliest times, man has demanded light, yet hasn’t realised that the light is already within him. This was the Buddha’s lesson, for he taught that it’s futile to search for this light outside ourselves – in a doctrine or a teacher. Instead, we need to awaken to the light that exists within us, to create the conditions that will cause it to rise up.

Perhaps this is why the great Teachers have always worked with the method of hints. Rather than spelling out the complete doctrine point by point, the giving of hints allows the disciple to take a kernel of Truth and go away and ponder on it, apply it to his life, experience the consequences of the hint, and learn to take it deeply into his consciousness before returning for further instruction. Pondering on the need for this process may explain why spiritual compromise is a fine art that the disciple must learn.

We've heard a lot about compromise in the political discussions of recent weeks. Often it's been viewed as a sign of caving in—of sacrificing one's values and principles—yet the most successful politicians seem to be those who understand the need for it and know when the time requires it. Behind their recognition lies an important spiritual truth. It's the duty and the responsibility of the disciple, working under the inspiration of the Ashram, to "modify, qualify and adapt" the plan. The Tibetan said "There is an 'art of spiritual compromise' which must be learnt and which it is difficult to master, because it negates fanaticism, requires a trained and intelligent understanding of applied measures and truth, and also negates evasion of responsibility; it involves also a comprehension of the time equation, of differing points in evolution, plus experience in the process of discarding the outgrown and unnecessary—no matter how good it may appear to be."

As the disciple does this, he discovers that each stage (when it is a factual experience) enables him to see the Plan from the angle of the Ashram and of the Master with increasing clarity. Eventually, we're told, there comes the time when the disciple arrives at the very heart of things and is so close to the heart of the Master that the hierarchical planning becomes something in which he shares and to which he contributes.

There are two kinds of compromise, the Tibetan said. There is compromise for the sake of expediency, and this is usually on the side of the least desirable, the most material and the easiest. There is also the compromise which swings decision gradually towards the spiritual values, and which leads to the greatest good for the greatest number. "It is this art of compromise which the disciple has to learn, for little is gained by the imposition of the spiritual values", he said. "The compromise to be established by the disciple lies between the recognition of the stage reached by average humanity and the immediate aspects of the Plan which the Masters feel should be presented to, and recognised by, everybody."

It takes unwavering commitment to the goal to be able to compromise without losing sight of the goal. Perhaps this is why it's said that the best leaders never get out too far ahead of the people. They can recognise the degree of change needed in their society and calibrate the right timing for bringing about the needed change without throwing the society into panic or unleashing negative forces in counter-response.

Disciples must apply this same assessment to the path. The problem for disciples is that they must work through the mechanism of a brain and therefore with the sense of time and space. "Disciples make more mistakes as regards time than any other", the Tibetan said. "Time is only a word for daily, *eventual* living", he said, and a hint is intended to give a sense of direction, to ignite the power to move forward. It's said the initiate knows because he works; not the other way around. This may be why Christ told his disciples that if they wanted to know the doctrine, they must carry out God's will. In other words, act upon what you do know before asking for more guidance.

It's never easy to gain a sense of direction when facing a situation, a step forward, for which one has no prior experience. Added to this difficulty is the complication of today's world, in which there can seem to be a multitude of choices, an overload of information to deal with, and, added to that, the powerful impact of the Shamballa force, the energy of synthesis which is so new to humanity. Perhaps an insight comes in the achievement of the ancient Polynesians who settled the Pacific islands eons ago. Have you ever wondered how they did that, setting out in small boats and crossing incredible distances on the ocean before coming to previously uninhabited islands? They used the stars, the constellations, as their guide. They had an extensive knowledge of astronomy and they had unwavering focus. This is the gift of Sagittarius: focus, a sense of direction, and a willingness to set out on a journey without any certainty of the final goal—only a compelling need to move forward, in consciousness, into greater light.

In just this way, evolution progresses as an inherent urge towards the light, a light innate in all forms. "This is true of a plant pushing its way out of the darkness of the earth into the light of the sun, a child extricating itself from the womb of its mother, the human being pushing himself into realms of greater

knowledge and of the disciple penetrating into the realm of soul light and life. This evolutionary pushing forward along the Lighted Way, out of darkness into light, from the unreal to the real, and from death to immortality, is an inherent urge in all forms. It's a great mystery which drives the tiniest atom on up to the most exalted Being within our solar system. Within every form lies light.

Our meditation each month is for the purpose of "Letting in the Light" by creating a channel in consciousness for the spiritual energies of Light and Love to pour into the world, giving direction and purpose to life on earth. This is the task of Humanity, the mediating kingdom and the bridge. Let us work now in meditation with our keynote: *I see the goal. I reach that goal and then I see another.*