

*Discipleship and the Path of Ascent*

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Welcome friends to this full moon Festival. This afternoon, we prepare to work in the fiery sign of Sagittarius – a sign associated with intuition, vision, aspiration and one-pointed direction towards a goal. Under the influence of Sagittarius, a period of both rest and realignment with a new goal occurs, replacing the disorientation that can be experienced in Scorpio through the severe testing of the desire nature. The lighted energy of the new vision now pours fully into the heart, expanding consciousness with the promise of further enlightenment in Capricorn. This search and struggle for light on the path is described well in the Old Commentary as follows:

"He turns from right to left, and then again from left to right. He revolves in giddy fashion upon an axis of desire. He knows not where to go or what to do. The sky turns black."

This description of the probationary path well describes humanity. At this point, the sign Gemini, the polar opposite sign to Sagittarius, begins potently to play its part in the life of those who are consciously treading the Path, with Sagittarius gradually "piercing the heart with his arrows, and then upon the flight of the arrow, the man reaches Capricorn" with its Crisis of Renunciation.

The arrow is a well-known symbol of Sagittarius, the arrows of aspiration and directed thought being fired towards the mountaintop of initiation in Capricorn. We are constantly firing these arrows and then pausing to collect them on the way before re-launching them to ever-higher altitudes. As mentioned, the pause in Sagittarius reveals it as a sign of interlude or rest following the testing experience in Scorpio – not that there is any such thing as rest in a universe that is constantly in motion. "Rest" is a relative term as Max Born points out in "The Restless Universe" saying:

"It is odd to think that there is a word for something which, strictly speaking, does not exist, namely, 'rest' for rest or interlude still encompasses some sort of activity for even that which is still to the senses, is still moving at tremendous speed in space."

Emerson further enriches this thought with the comment "the soul in man may not sleep, but must live incessant. Not in his goals but in his transitions, Man is great; and the truest state of mind rested in, becomes false. There is no abiding principle in man, only change". So what may seem like achievement and rest is only so from the perspective of the furious battle in Scorpio, and in fact what is occurring in this sign is realignment, a moving of

the magnetic pole of being in response to the keynote of Sagittarius “*I see the goal, I reach that goal and then I see another*”.

Goals aspired to, goals reached and new goals envisioned – this succession of goals is the process of human evolution towards group consciousness. Governed by Sagittarius, it has been taking place since humanity individualised from the stage of animal man, 21 million years ago when the sun was in Sagittarius. Sagittarius was governing when the Hierarchy first made its approach. It is significant that the Earth is the esoteric or soul ruler of this sign, governing the disciple who works upon the “plains of the earth” for it is on these radiant plains that we must serve, transform, and bring into being the kingdom of God through the light of creative intelligence, infused with Love and Purpose.

It has taken a long time for the human race to attain the point where another crisis, that of initiation, or group consciousness, can be inaugurated. However, that time is now with us and there is much work to do for the spiritually minded people of the world as another eventful and somewhat dark year in world affairs has reminded us. The successful transition from individual to group consciousness will see the planet becoming a sacred planet. For our encouragement, once the heart awakens and a renewal of consciousness occurs, the evolutionary process speeds up towards a recognisable spiritual goal. In meditation, the arrows of thought that we project towards the higher realms evoke response and set up the pattern of invocation/evocation that underlies conscious evolution. And when a group of trained meditators is doing this on behalf of humanity, the power to effect change in the world is great even though it may not be outwardly apparent. The Tibetan made clear the importance of the continuity of this group consciousness, saying:

“Disciples in my Ashram have a dual responsibility to stand steady in a *preservation of realisation*—if I may use such a phrase. This steadiness must not be relaxed in any way as old age draws near, and it must not be permitted to disappear through the transition of death itself. It is through the unbroken conscious thinking of a welded group of disciples that the Master of an Ashram works. *Discipleship in the New Age Vol II*

These words were intended to encourage members of his ashram and affiliated groups to “preserve” their state of mind, no matter what, even during the process of death and entry upon the other side of the veil. As some of you will know, here in the U.K. the legislature has passed an assisted-dying bill for terminally ill adults to be allowed the choice to die following a signing off approval by two doctors, and a judge. It was a close run contest which saw cross party voting, and the debate included stories of personal involvement with close family members in this situation, movingly relayed by so many who gave persuasive arguments for both sides of the issue.

In *Esoteric Healing* the effort to legalise euthanasia and the concern about placing the power of life and death in the hands of the physician is discussed, reminding us that the problem which the proposed practice of euthanasia involves “will not exist when continuity of consciousness (which negates death) is achieved. That means that the time will come, in the racial development, when the soul will know that its term of physical life is over and will prepare itself to withdraw, in full consciousness, from the form” ... So it comes down to our attitude to death and its processes which involve pain and suffering. A prediction is made that “Modes of abstraction will be studied and applied when death is near, and the process will be regarded as soul withdrawal, as a process of liberation and release. That time, he said, is not so far away as you might think” adding:

“The will-to-die of the patient is not based at this time on knowledge and on mental polarisation, or upon an achieved continuity of consciousness, but on emotional reactions and a shrinking from pain and from fear”. So while agreeing that when there is terrible suffering and absolutely no hope of real help or of recovery, and where the patient is willing (or if too ill, the family is willing), then, under proper safeguards, something should be done. Another point is made that this arranging of the time to go will not be based on emotion and upon compassion, but on the spiritual sciences and upon a right understanding of the spiritual possibilities of death. *Esoteric Healing* p319-320

All of this highlights too the high importance attached to a group of disciples who have achieved mental polarisation and whose mind can be trained to hold an unbroken conscious line of thinking so that an enlightened adept can add his power to it in order to affect changes in human consciousness. As we know, it takes tremendous effort and strength of will to achieve this in these restless and chaotic times. The mind is all too easily pulled outwards through the senses in response to the physical and emotional environment instead of towards the inner “Call” of those who are seeking to impress human consciousness. Those who have travelled the Path for some time and know its tests and struggles naturally begin to feel a little “battle-worn” after a while. And it is at this stage, that we can benefit from the fires of aspiration available to us in Sagittarius to renew the vision, not just of the future, but of who we essentially are.

We know that a profound and sound optimism is entirely possible even in the midst of discouraging conditions. Given our divine constitution it cannot be so, even though it is not yet revealed to many of us. Despite everything there is a steady progress which has been from ignorance to knowledge and from darkness to light. Let us pause to take a few moments in the silence of the Sagittarian influence to align and strengthen our group commitment and then sound the most ancient prayer in the world:

Lead us from darkness to Light  
From the Unreal to the Real  
From death to immortality.

The first great clause of the prayer, "Lead us from darkness to Light", indicates a Light which will lead to the illumination of the mind by the light of the intuition. This has seen fulfilment to a large degree. We've been assured too that we are on the verge of seeing the answer to the second clause: "Lead us from the unreal to the Real".

The fiery sign of Sagittarius and the Earth's third ray influence have facilitated this progress through the energy of love, which evokes "the service of creation". This fire of love must be demonstrated by esoteric groups if they are to help bring about the Radiant Glory of the Earth, knowing that in the silent tension of Sagittarius, "the will to fire" can be summoned to burn away the glammers and illusions of thought that currently hold humanity back.

In order to see the goal ahead in Sagittarius, we have to deliberately create a sanctuary of inner peace and silence. This involves clearing ourselves of illusory thoughts, and glammers - one of the most difficult challenges because in many ways we have built our sense of identity through them. Having consolidated themselves in our aura over a period of time, these mental thought patterns condition our sense of reality and, consequently, are not easy to break through. Rather than battling with them or attempting to bring about peace and inner quiet through suppression of the old patterns, we can offset them through meditation. The seed thoughts used hold the vision of a new identity, and directing our thought in this way fires our aspiration and diverts our attention more and more until it does so throughout the entirety of each day.

As this occurs, the older forms of thought begin to fade and the new patterns of thinking steadily strengthen and become gateways through which a new goal arises in our mind's eye. This reality of the new goal to which we are aspiring is both seen and "felt" - feeling the seed thought through the highest aspect of the astral body. Over time a point of tension builds in consciousness - this is the "little gate" through which we can pass to contact realms of truth. Sagittarius itself is known as "the little gate" entered before the gate of initiation which awaits in Capricorn. It is an entrance difficult to find amidst the crowded thought forms constantly swirling around the aura for our minds are programmed through habit to produce thoughts related to the senses. In meditation, the mind is directed towards the potential future rather than the past. A thought form of the goal ahead is held in mind alongside a sense of spiritual expectancy. As the vision is held steady in the mind's eye, we can become aware of the higher feelings or qualities from abstract realms.

It is worth pausing here for a moment to consider what the abstract mind and abstract thought really is. To many, the term 'abstract' connotes that which is divorced from concrete reality - a flight of fancy by means of which

we temporarily escape from the harsh and dreary world of physical plane living wherein the five senses rule supreme.

It is difficult to convey the reality of the abstract levels through words for our minds are programmed through habit to produce thought forms that relate to the five senses – predominantly sight. Perhaps some idea can be gleaned by considering how when the memory throws images up from the past, they are accompanied by sensations – the sum total of feelings that accompanied the event we are remembering. In meditation, a similar thing happens but geared towards the future rather than the past. A thought form of the goal ahead is held in the mind accompanied by a sense of spiritual anticipation. As we hold this vision steady in the mind's eye, we will become aware that certain qualities or “higher feelings” are conditioning the consciousness from the abstract realm. These are higher correspondences of the five lower senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, and they steadily draw us inwards. The abstract world is then no longer abstract, but simply another dimension where different, but related, senses prevail.

The fleeting qualities we touch in meditation are in fact states of being which we aspire to inhabit and relate to the concrete, outer world. As meditation moves into the stage of contemplation, higher correspondences to human emotions are experienced which, due to a lack of a better word, we call intuitional or buddhic. In order to activate these higher senses in this chaotic, noisy world of ours, perhaps the most urgent need is to cultivate occult silence. This involves the silencing of personality emanations – uncontrolled thought, the roar of desire, unnecessary speech. Doing this allows the circulation of energy to build in the etheric body which, in turn, lifts us into the life of spiritual creativity.

So perhaps we can say that, rather than a lack of activity, *occult silence is an intensification of the Will in preparation to create with sound*. The attention is a directed arrow – directed away from lower distractions and towards the soul – the goal being to carry a spiritual charge deep into the heart of manifestation, implementing some aspect of the Plan. The silence created for this is cultivated in all three bodies and is one where the tongue is silent and the ears are open while the desire nature is quiet and the mind still. In such a state, one is constantly living in a field of potential energy – energy that can then be used in general service, but also more specifically, to alleviate suffering in others by awakening and lifting them to a glimmer of heart consciousness where the solutions to their problems lie. It may involve vibration through the spoken word or through silent communication from heart to heart. The point is that the whole life is dedicated to the right use of creativity through sound, and silence is a preparation for working with this creative power.

This, then, is the goal and opportunity before us, the conversion of noise into "the silence that sounds", but how to reach this stage of composure is a problem for those of us living diffuse and busy lives. Perhaps we can understand the silent watcher more clearly if we think of silence as being allied to the practice of harmlessness. As we know, harmlessness, was the great lesson of the Buddha whose Noble Middle Way demonstrated its practice and which still illustrates the path through consciousness constructed by a redirection of energy away from form life towards the soul.

For the disciple there is a constant need to expand consciousness on the one hand, while on the other to follow this ever-narrowing path to the mountaintop. The narrowness of the path, reminiscent of a single arrow of fiery aspiration and one pointed intention, provides the impetus. We may fall off every now and then unless the focus is sure and steadfast. But if we persevere along the path of truth and right, at a certain point of the journey, Sagittarius brings us directly to the gate of initiation and the lighted entrance to the fifth kingdom of nature – the spiritual Hierarchy.

The interlude that this sign presents provides an inner space to retreat and recollect ourselves, to gather in our forces in spiritual tension ready to move ever onwards and closer to this goal. Maintaining these meditations at the time of the full moon amidst all the diversions and distractions of our times increases the spiritual energy available to meet today's challenges. It constructs a "Tower of Silence" for the lower self, as well as a place of entrance into "The Secret Place of the Most High". Most importantly though, it forms part of the spiritual sanctuary that the worldwide discipleship group is building to embrace humanity with love and bring light into the darkness where isolation and despair might otherwise prevail.