

Lesson 7

THE PATH

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

The “Path” is a term that refers to the time-tested pathway towards spiritual realization. In theosophical literature it includes the narrow sense of the path towards spiritual initiation under the guidance of Masters of the Wisdom. These two need to be distinguished from each other because the first one is a general path open to all, while the latter is a special case that endeavors to hasten the process by qualifying oneself for direct guidance by a genuine spiritual teacher. The first one is commonly referred to as the “mystical path,” which can be trodden by anyone who feels the inward call (the “divine discontent”). Its tenets are found in the mystical traditions of all major religions, and are included in what Aldous Huxley calls the “perennial philosophy.” The second one is what may be considered as the “esoteric path,” a more difficult one fitted to those who have adequately prepared themselves. While in many aspects, these two meanings of the Path overlap with one another, the present article shall outline their known features separately.

The Mystical Path. The path towards spirituality is well-known among all the religious traditions. It is known as mysticism. Thus there is mysticism among the Christians (Carmelite, Trappist, etc.), Muslims (Sufism), Jews (Kabbalah), Buddhists (Zen, Theravada, Mahayana), Hindu (Yoga, Vedanta, and others), etc. Examples of guidelines for such inward path would be the Sermon of the Mount of the Christian gospels, the Eightfold Path of Buddhism,

the Paramitas of Mahayana Buddhism, the eight stages of Raja Yoga, etc.

Entry to the Path is always preceded by an inward “call” and a discontent of worldly things. Such a call is followed by an earnest search for the truth accompanied by sincere doubt and

The path towards spirituality is well-known among all the religious traditions. It is known as mysticism.

skepticism of outer forms of worship and belief. In one’s search, one finds various portals to the Path, and the individual must decide which gateway seems most suitable to oneself. Eventually, one discovers that the elements of various mysticisms are essentially identical. In fact, the Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan, declares: “No one can be a mystic and call himself a Christian mystic, a Jewish mystic or a Mohammadan mystic. . . . Mysticism is something which erases from one’s mind all idea of separateness, and if a person claims to be this mystic or that mystic he is not a mystic; he is only playing with a name” (*The Inner Life*).

One of the most important elements of the mystic path is the *purification* of the self of its conditionings, desires, and attachments. This stage involves pain and suffering. It is what

Light on the Path

[One of the most significant guidebook for the spiritual life is *Light on the Path* dictated by an Adept to Mabel Collins. It starts with the following exhortations:]

Before the eyes can see, they must be incapable of tears. Before the ear can hear, it must have lost its sensitiveness. Before the voice can speak in the presence of the Masters it must have lost the power to wound. Before the soul can stand in the presence of the Masters its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart.

1. Kill out ambition.
2. Kill out desire of life.
3. Kill out desire of comfort.
4. Work as those work who are ambitious.

Respect life as those do who desire it. Be happy as those are who live for happiness.

John of the Cross calls the “dark night of the senses.” It necessitates what another mystical treatise calls a “cloud of forgetting” whereby the individual gradually becomes detached from the things of the outer world (*Cloud of Unknowing*).

But the true motivation for treading the Path is not the rejection of the worldly life, but the inward call which is now being felt in the heart of the aspirant. A spiritual discipline is then adopted, which normally includes meditation and certain modes of living. It is this which eventually leads one to *illumination* or *enlightenment*. This in itself has various levels or stages that are recognized in the different spiritual traditions of the world (*hal* or *awhal* of the Sufis, the *jhanas* of Buddhism, the mansions of the soul of Teresa of Avila, etc.). These stages have their own subtle impurities that must be further

cleansed, as in the Buddhist *jhanas* and the “dark night of the spirit” of John of the Cross.

This ultimately leads to union with the Divine, the Nirvana of the Buddhist, the *moksha* (liberation) of the Hindus, and the *fana* (annihilation) of the Muslim Sufis.

The Esoteric Path. Spiritual traditions in the East and the West also speak of the razor-edge path whereby the development of the aspirant is accelerated through certain stringent rules and disciplines, and done under the guidance of a qualified Teacher. This path is not recom-

Spiritual traditions in the East and the West also speak of the razor-edge path whereby the development of the aspirant is accelerated through certain stringent rules and disciplines, and done under the guidance of a qualified Teacher.

mended to every one as it requires certain qualities and preparedness not commonly attained by most aspirants. In the theosophical tradition it implies *chelaship* or discipleship to a Master of the Wisdom, which includes probation and trials.

The Greeks had openly distinguished between the exoteric and the esoteric path through the Lesser and Greater Mysteries that lasted for more than a thousand years. Christianity has such a tradition that began with Jesus himself when he said that he taught parables to the masses but gave the keys to mysteries only to the disciples. The Gnostics of the first few centuries of Christianity carried forward this tradition of a secret path. In the East it is known as Gupta Vidya (or secret knowledge). The *Sufis* have their *murshids* or

The Paramitas

“Yea, Lord; I see the PATH; its foot in mire, its summits lost in glorious light Nirvanic. And now I see the ever narrowing Portals on the hard and thorny way to *Jnana* [*Knowledge, Wisdom].”

Thou seest well, Lanoo. These Portals lead the aspirant across the waters on “to the other shore”⁷. Each Portal hath a golden key that openeth its gate; and these keys are: —

1. DANA, the key of charity and love immortal.
2. SHILA, the key of Harmony in word and act, the key that counterbalances the cause and the effect, and leaves no further room for Karmic action.
3. KSHANTI, patience sweet, that nought can ruffle.

4. VIRAGA, indifference to pleasure and to pain, illusion conquered, truth alone perceived.

5. VIRYA, the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal TRUTH, out of the mire of lies terrestrial.

6. DHYANA, whose golden gate once opened leads the Narjol [a saint, an adept.] toward the realm of Sat eternal and its ceaseless contemplation.

7. PRAJNA, the key to which makes of a man a god, creating him a Bodhisattva, son of the Dhyanis.

Such to the Portals are the golden keys.

VOICE OF THE SILENCE

teacher imparting the secret wisdom to the *mureed* (student).

In the theosophical tradition, the same distinction is made between the open mystical path and the esoteric path. There are people who are good and spiritual. They can pursue liberation at their own pace and without any special disciplines imposed upon them. But to those who feel the need to enter the steeper path, then there is a way.

During the lifetime of H.P. Blavatsky, the path of discipleship was directly available and many people formally applied for such chelaship. Many of them failed. Among those who were accepted (apart from Blavatsky), only one was known to have been accepted to join the Mahatmas in their ashram: Damodar Mavalankar.

The rules for such a path were laid down in many books, such as *Light on the Path*, *Voice of the Silence*, *Instructions to the Esoteric School*,

and many articles and letters, particularly the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. In all of them, one point is repeatedly stressed:

One only inflexible rule has been ever binding upon the neophyte, as it is binding now — the *complete* subjugation of the lower nature by the higher. From the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* to the recently published *Light on the Path*, search as we may through the bibles of every race and cult, we find but one only way, — hard, painful, troublesome, by which man can gain the true spiritual insight. And how can it be otherwise since all religions and all philosophies are but the variants of the first teachings of the One Wisdom . . .? (CW 6:31)

The following are some excerpts on qualifications needed for treading the Path:

. . . the first conditions required to reach it are an absolute disinterestedness, a

One only inflexible rule has been
 ever binding upon the
 neophyte, as it is binding now
 — the complete subjugation of the
 lower nature by the higher.

boundless devotion to the welfare of others, and a complete indifference to the world and its opinions. In order to make the first step on that ideal path, the motive must be absolutely pure; not an unworthy thought must attract the eyes from the end in view, not a doubt or hesitation shackle the feet. (CW 11:135)

. . . the qualifications expected in a “regular *chela*” are “(1.) Perfect physical health. (2.) Absolute mental and physical purity. (3.) Unselfishness of purpose; universal charity; pity for all animate beings. (4.) Truthfulness and unswerving faith in the laws of Karma. (5.) A courage undaunted in the support of truth, even in the face of peril to life. (6.) An intuitive perception of one’s being the vehicle of the manifested divine *Atman* (spirit). (7.) Calm indifference for, but a just appreciation of, everything that constitutes the objective

and transitory world. (8.) Blessings of both parents and *their permission to become an Upasana* (chela); and (9.) Celibacy, and freedom from any obligatory duty. (CW 8: 294)

In H.P. Blavatsky’s *Voice of the Silence* she also wrote of the open path and the secret path. The open path, she says, is the “way to selfish bliss.” It earns liberation for oneself. The “secret path” is one of renunciation and compassion: “to forego eternal bliss for Self, to help on man’s salvation. To reach Nirvana’s bliss, but to renounce it, is the supreme, the final step — the highest on Renunciation’s Path. Know, O Disciple, this is the *Secret PATH*” (VS, 145). It is the “Doctrine of the Heart” as opposed to the “Doctrine of the Eye.”

An aspirant who applies for discipleship will be accepted on probation. Afterwards they may be admitted to the four initiations that leads to Arhatship. These are: *Srotapatti* (“one who has entered the stream”), *Sakridagamin* (“one who will return but once”), *Anagamin* (“one who will no longer return”), and the *Arhat*, one who has attained Nirvana.

Copyright 2005 by the author. Philippine Theosophical Institute, 1 Iba Street, Quezon City, Philippines.

Questions for Review:

1. What is the so-called Path?
2. What is the true motivation for treading the Path?
3. What is the difference between the open mystical path and the esoteric path?
4. What is the most important rule in order to be successful in treading the Path? Why do you think this is so?
5. What is the “secret path” or the Doctrine of the Heart?
6. What are your own reflections about the existence of the Path and your own present life and circumstances?