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THE STEPS OF THE SOUL

The human individual is a very complex being: he is composed of innumerable elements, each one of which is an independent entity and has almost a personality. Not only so, the most contradictory elements are housed together. If there is a particular quality or capacity present, the very opposite of it, annulling it, as it were, will also be found along with it and embracing it. I have seen a man brave, courageous, heroic to the extreme, flinching from no danger, facing unperturbed the utmost peril, truly the bravest of the brave; and yet I have seen the same man cowering in abject terror, like the last of poltroons, in the presence of certain circumstances. I have seen a most generous man giving things away largely, freely, not counting any expenditure or sacrifice, without the least care or reservation; the same person I have also found to be the vilest of misers with respect to certain other considerations. Again, I have seen the most intelligent person, with a clear mind, full of light and understanding, easily comprehending the logic and implication of a topic; and yet I have seen him betraying the utmost stupidity of which even an ordinary man without education or intelligence would be incapable. These are not theoretical examples: I have come across such persons actually in life.

The complexity arises not only in extension but also in depth. Man does not live on a single plane but on many planes at the same time. There is a scale of gradation in human consciousness: the higher one rises in the scale the greater the number of elements or personalities that one possesses. Whether one lives mostly or mainly on the physical or vital or mental plane or on any particular section of these planes or on the planes above and beyond them, there will be, accordingly, differences

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in the constitution or psycho-physical make-up of the individual personality. The higher one stands, the richer the personality, because it lives not only on its own normal level but also on all the levels that are below it and which it has transcended. The complete or integral man, some occultists say, possesses three hundred and sixty-five personalities; indeed it may be much more. The Vedas speak of the three and thirty-three and thirty-three hundred and thirty-three thousand gods that may be housed in the human vehicle — the basic three being evidently the triple status or world of Body, Life and Mind.

What is the meaning of this self-contradiction, this division in man? To understand that, we must know and remember that each person represents a certain quality or capacity, a particular achievement to be embodied. How best can it be done? What is the way by which one can acquire a quality at its purest, highest and most perfect? It is by setting an opposition to it. That is how a power is increased and strengthened — by fighting against and overcoming all that weakens and contradicts it. The deficiencies with respect to a particular quality show you where you have to mend and reinforce it and in what way to improve it in order to make it perfectly perfect. It is the hammer that beats the weak and soft iron to transform it into hard steel. The preliminary discord is useful and needs to be utilised for a higher harmony. This is the secret of self-conflict in man. You are weakest precisely in that element which is destined to be your greatest asset.

Each man has then a mission to fulfil, a role to play in the universe, a part he has been given to learn and take up in the cosmic Purpose, a part which he alone is capable of executing and none other. This he has to learn and acquire through life-experiences, that is to say, not in one life but in life after life. In fact, that is the meaning of the chain of lives that the individual has to pass through, namely, to acquire experiences and to gather from them the thread — the skein of qualities and attributes, powers and capacities — for the pattern of life he has

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to weave. Now, the inmost being, the true personality, the central consciousness of the evolving individual is his psychic being. It is, as it were, a very tiny spark of light lying in normal people far behind the life-experiences. In grown-up souls this psychic consciousness has an increased light — increased in intensity, volume and richness. Thus there are old souls and new souls. Old and ancient are those that have reached or are about to reach the fullness of perfection; they have passed through a long history of innumerable lives and developed the most complex and yet the most integrated personality. New souls are those that have just emerged or are now emerging out of the mere physico-vital existence; they are like simple organisms, made of fewer constituents related mostly to the bodily life, with just a modicum of the mental. It is the soul, however, that grows with experiences and it is the soul that builds and enriches the personality. Whatever portion of the outer life, whatever element in the mind or vital or body succeeds in coming into contact with the psychic consciousness — that is to say, is able to come under its influence — is taken up and lodged there: it remains in the psychic being as its living memory and permanent possession. It is such elements that form the basis, the groundwork upon which the structure of the integral and true personality is raised.

The first thing to do then is to find out what it is that you are meant to realise, what is the role you have to play, your particular mission, and the capacity or quality you have to express. You have to discover that and also the thing or things that oppose and do not allow it to flower or come to full manifestation. In other words, you have to know yourself, recognise your soul or psychic being.

For that you must be absolutely sincere and impartial. You must observe yourself as if you were observing and criticising a third person. You must not start with an idea that this is your life's mission, this is your particular capacity, this you are to do or that you are to do, in this lies your talent or genius, etc. That will carry you away from the right track. It is not the liking or

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disliking of your external being, your mental or vital or physical choice that determines the true line of your growth. Nor should you take up the opposite attitude and say, "I am good for nothing in this matter, I am useless in that one; it is not for me." Neither vanity and arrogance nor self-depreciation and false modesty should move you. As I said, you must be absolutely impartial and unconcerned. You should be like a mirror that reflects the truth and does not judge.

If you are able to keep such an attitude, if you have this repose and quiet trust in your being and wait for what may be revealed to you, then something like this happens: you are, as it were, in a wood, dark and noiseless; you see in front of you merely a sheet of water, dark and still, hardly visible—a bit of a pond imbedded in the obscurity; and slowly upon it a moonbeam is cast and in the cool dim light emerges the calm liquid surface. That is how your secret truth of being will appear and present itself to you at your first contact with it: there you will see gradually reflected the true qualities of your being, the traits of your divine personality, what you really are and what you are meant to be.

One who has thus known himself and possessed himself, conquering all opposition within himself, has by that very fact extended himself and his conquest, making it easier for others to make the same or a similar conquest. These are the pioneers or the elite who by a victorious campaign within themselves help others towards their victory.