

LETTER 15

Box 419, Wheaton, Ill.
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My dear Friends:

At this moment I am in New York which, to my mind, is the most interesting of all American cities. I am so thrilled with the silent majesty of the great Hudson River, and the wonderful bridges which cross it. There seems to me to be a wonderful life and expansion about New York which transcends anything like it elsewhere. So many people love California and the West Coast, but my heart is in the East with its lovely woods and damper climate.

I have been having some interesting experiences with Universities. At one place the professor of philosophy who had been giving his class a course on world faiths, gave me a quarter of an hour at the end of one session to tell the boys and girls what Theosophy was. You have no idea how interested they all looked. Another professor gave up his class to come to hear me. It reminded me of the words of the Buddha to His monks when He sent them out to preach. He told them that there were thousands of young men in the world whose minds were only lightly covered with the dust of worldliness. If someone would tell them where Truth lay they would at once begin the search. I remember Bishop Leadbeater saying something similar. He told us that there were thousands of boys and girls who could become the pupils of our Masters if only the way was pointed out to them. For however much the divine ego in everyone of us may desire to find and tread the path to Adeptship he must find it in a physical incarnation, not after death, and he must gain the co-operation of his brain-mind. How will that brain-mind understand unless he has heard or read?

This letter I would like to discuss a problem that I feel so many of our people do not rightly understand, the problem of oscillations and re-action. All things move under the rule of unceasing rhythm. There can be no 'action' without a corresponding 're-action.' The ceaseless rhythmic 'up and down' of life is everywhere apparent. This is very marked in the case of all those who strive to live a spiritual life. In the case of a great saint, the re-action is so terrible that it sometimes lasts for years, and St. John of the Cross, who is the great authority on this subject, calls it the "dark night of the soul." This darkest night always precedes the gaining of the great path of Union with God. It may be looked upon as a tremendous purgation whereby the last lingering remnants of self in the aspirant are finally taken away. As I said, in the case of great saints it sometimes lasts for years. It lasted five or six years with St. Catherine of Siena. St. Catherine had what are called 'interior locutions,' where the mystic seems to speak with God. When finally she came through she said to God: "Where were Thou, Lord, in the midst of all this foulness?" And God replied: "Daughter, I was in thy heart."

What are the signs of these re-actions? The saints tell us in very clear terms. That which before had attracted them in glowing colors of love and aspiration becomes dull and lifeless, even repulsive. St. Therese of Lisieux passed almost the whole of her short conventual life in such a dark night. She writes in her autobiography that there were times when she could neither pray nor meditate, that she read holy books but the words meant nothing to her. She was assailed by the most hideous doubts, almost as if some mocking voice were telling her that her faith and aspiration were selfish illusions on her part. She writes that if God wishes her to sit at the table of sinners she is more

than willing to do so and not even to wish to rise from it until He gives the sign. What strength and what selflessness belonged to the saints that they could endure this with such patience, and never ask or hope for 'consolation.' Therese said to a novice who told her that she had prayed for consolation: "Oh! that I would never do, ask for consolation. It is so sweet to serve the good God in the dark night of trial."

Now, in the Theosophical Society, as in all forms of aspiration, dark nights continually occur. They come to all of us again and again in lesser or greater degree. It generally takes the form in our work of becoming what school-boys call "fed up." Theosophical truth and books no longer attract us. Our ancient aspiration and realization seem to have completely disappeared. We may even think that our leaders are self-deceived or talking nonsense. This is part of the rhythmic ebb and flow of the universe. Most people do not understand it, and so we find that under a particularly violent attack they will leave the Society and its work, and try to ease the pain of re-action by condemning what they originally adored. What a vast pity! I remember once in Australia, Bishop Leadbeater talked to us about 'avitchi,' the very worst form of a dark night that exists in the universe. Avitchi means the 'waveless,' feeling oneself absolutely outside the scheme of evolution, entirely alone. Can we imagine anything more truly horrible? Yet C.W.L. told us that we must all experience that someday in order to know how to help a man who may be living in it. And on the way, said he, there are minor avitchis which come and go.

Mrs. Besant told us that when such an oscillation reaches anyone of us, we should just hold on, and remember that though the clouds may seem to have completely engulfed us behind them, the sun is always shining, and presently the clouds will break and the sunshine come back. If only we have the selflessness and strength to endure. She said one day to me when I had a minor attack in Adyar, "It sounds brutal, dear, but remember that it does not matter what we feel." Let us hold on to what Light on the Path calls "the dim star of our being." Let us remember in the night the vision we once saw, and when day dawns again let us remember the darkness of the night. Thus shall we achieve an equilibrium which cannot be disturbed. It requires strength. It requires faith. Perhaps the one is the outcome of the other. "Faith," says H.P.B., "is the soul's unlearned knowledge." If only we could listen to our diviner selves. Strength is the outcome of selflessness. "His strength is as the strength of ten, because his heart is pure." Sometimes it takes the form of over-scrupulosity, of being extremely dissatisfied with oneself. This is the reverse end of hidden conceit and pride. Why do we make up our minds about ourselves? Why not leave that to the wisdom and compassion of the Master? St. Therese said to her novices: "If you are willing to bear in peace the trial of not being pleased with yourself, you will be offering the Divine Master a home in your heart." There is a similar lovely saying in Hinduism: "They who never ask anything but simply love, Thou in their heart abidest forever, for this is Thy very home."

The accepted pupils of a Master are tried by the Dark Powers, as God allowed Job to be tried by Satan. They must win the fight by themselves. The Master will sympathize, but He will not fight the battle for them. Else how would they grow? These experiences are tremendous 'purgations.' "The shell must break before the bird can fly." And the Lord Shri Krishna says "When I have stripped a man of everything, then I give him Myself."

Your affectionate friend,

Clara Codd

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