

# **The Yoga of the Serpent Fire**

EDWARD GALL

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## OCCULTISM AND THE SERPENT FIRE

One of the results of the greatly increased interest now taken by Western peoples in the religious systems of India has been the translation into English and other European languages of numerous works hitherto only available in Sanscrit or some kindred tongue; and as Indian religion, in its many forms, has numerous points of contact with those systems which are somewhat loosely called 'occult', this means that there is now available to Western students a certain amount of information hitherto almost entirely unknown to the populace as a whole, and usually only fully imparted under pledge of secrecy to specially selected individuals after they had undergone a preliminary course of testing, preparation and training.

A case in point is the teaching relating to that mysterious force known in Sanscrit as Kundalini, a term usually translated in English as the Serpent Fire. Veiled and cryptic allusions to it are found in various Hindu writings, which might well appear entirely incomprehensible to the uninitiated; but in modern occultism, at least a corner of the veil has been lifted, thanks largely, in the first instance, to The Theosophical Society.

It is not necessary to deal here at length with what present-day occultism usually has to say on this subject, as this can now be studied in numerous modern works, most of them easily accessible; and a brief and general summary of this aspect of the teaching is all that need be attempted here.

In the Etheric Body, according to this teaching, there are a number of force-centres, or chakras as they are called in Sanscrit, which are normally in an inactive state, and Kundalini, the Serpent

Fire, lies 'coiled up', to use the symbolic expression usually adopted, in the chakra which is situated in the Etheric Double opposite the base of the spine. In the course of occult training and development, this Serpent Fire is aroused, and the pupil, when under the direction of a properly qualified teacher or Guru (under whom alone the work can be safely undertaken) is taught to guide Kundalini gradually upwards to the higher chakras, and finally to those in the head. When these etheric chakras are aroused into activity, they eventually vivify two organs in the physical head, the pituitary body and the pineal gland, as a result of which the pupil becomes possessed of various powers of a psychic nature. For example, he becomes clairvoyant or clairaudient, or both. That is, he becomes fully aware in waking consciousness of what is known in modern Theosophical literature as the Astral Plane, and even in some cases of the Lower Mental Plane. He also acquires various other powers of a psychic character, but somewhat beyond the range of the ordinary type of medium or clairvoyant, whose psychic faculties are not usually of so high an order, and in some cases, are awakened by other and less reputable methods.

The awakening of the Kundalini-power, as all occult schools are agreed, is fraught with the gravest danger in the hands of the ignorant. On the one hand, if its awakening is brought about prematurely or by the use of wrong methods, it may result in the damaging or even the shattering of the Physical Body, so great is the power thus aroused. On the other hand, if brought about in individuals whose lower nature is not yet sufficiently disciplined, it may travel downwards to the lower force-centres of the body, resulting in a coarsening and demoralizing of the whole personality—a psychological disaster even greater than the physical one, since it adversely affects the inner or subtler human 'principles'.

Regarding the real nature of this Serpent Fire, much confusion and uncertainty still prevails as a rule. H. P. Blavatsky relates it to that mysterious cosmic power which she calls Fohat, and would

seem to suggest that its real nature, though not identical with electricity, is in some way analogous to it—or rather to that cosmic force which manifests as electricity on the physical plane; and it is through the awakening in himself of this power that the individual gains the various supernormal powers or Siddhis, as they are called in Eastern occultism.

All this, of course, is perfectly familiar to students of the subject, and, for this reason it is unnecessary to deal further with it here. We may therefore turn at once to consider the Serpent Fire from an entirely different standpoint.

That there should be a different approach to the subject will probably come as a surprise to many people; yet it should not really do so, for all the mystery teachings have more than one key, and can be interpreted from different angles and on different levels. H.P.B. has said, indeed, that each one of such teachings has at least seven different keys by means of which one or other of its mysteries may be unlocked; and our concern here is to interpret the teachings regarding the Serpent Fire from the mystical rather than the purely occult standpoint.

#### OCCULTISM AND MYSTICISM

Both the aim and the method of mysticism are different from those of occultism, and, in some important respects at least, of a higher order, even though the two are, in another respect, complementary.

In its widest and most general aspect, mysticism might be defined as everything that concerns the awakening, the unfolding and the eventual full flowering of the spiritual or Buddhist consciousness in man, bringing with it, as its culmination, the sense of complete self-identification with the One Divine Life of the cosmos.

Unlike the occultist, whose temperament, as such, is definitely that of the extravert, and whose method, though directed to the



superphysical levels, is, like that of Science in general, one of exact, objective and impersonal investigation, the mystic is, fundamentally an introvert, even though many of the great mystics have shown a surprisingly firm grip of practical affairs when occasion called for this.

Nevertheless, the gaze of the mystic is characteristically turned inwards, and he seeks to pass beyond both the external physical world and the intermediate world of the psyche with its element of glamour and illusion. He aims, in fact, directly at the purely spiritual or 'formless' levels of being, on the heights of which his own inmost and essential Selfhood finds itself united with the one universal Self. Mysticism, thus regarded, is identical with Yoga, using that much misunderstood word in its highest and truest sense, the only sense in which it should ever be used. It is itself the true Raja or Royal Yoga, which subordinates everything to the achievement of the one great goal of Yoga itself, in the sense of union, the union of the part with the whole, the particular with the universal, the human with the divine.

The term Raja Yoga is to be understood here, of course, in a wide sense and as including the well-known Three Paths, those of Intuition Wisdom or Spiritual Insight (Jnana Yoga), Religious Devotion (Bhakti Yoga), and Disinterested Service for the Welfare of the World (Karma Yoga).

It is then, from the standpoint of pure mysticism, identical with that of the true Raja Yoga, that we approach our study of the Serpent Fire; but this does not mean that the occult teaching on this subject, as already summarized, is baseless or illusory. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence that in that teaching there is a real science of the occult, and a basis of fact, as far as it goes; but the public and unrestricted imparting of that teaching to all and sundry is, as already indicated, attended by the gravest dangers.

For the mystic, however, all this teaching has another aspect, higher and much more important, and one, moreover, \*which

carries with it none of the dangers inherent in the other, but is one which, on the contrary, can be safely commended and freely communicated to all who are ready for it.

#### THE ANALYSIS OF MAN

The most appropriate starting-point is perhaps a consideration of the nature of the Serpent Fire itself. This, as we have already seen, is a point on which relatively little unambiguous information is to be had; but from our present standpoint we may take, as our point of departure, a statement made by H.P.B. in her book *The Voice of the Silence*; and in having recourse to this particular book, in reference to a mystical interpretation, we have H.P.B.'s own warrant, since she dedicated this book 'To the Few', a phrase which she elucidated as meaning 'to the few real mystics in The Theosophical Society'.

In one of her notes to this book, H.P.B. describes the Serpent Fire as 'Buddhi, considered as an active instead of a passive principle—which [latter] it is generally when regarded only as the vehicle or casket of the supreme Spirit, Atma'.

That H.P.B. is adhering faithfully to the teaching of the Masters, may be seen when we compare this passage with one in number LIX of the *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, where the Master says: 'The supreme energy resides in the Buddhi, latent when wedded to Atma alone, active and irresistible when galvanised by the *essence* of Manas, and when none of the dross of the latter [in the Lower Manas] commingles with that pure essence, to weigh it down by its finite nature.'

This brings us to the subject of the various aspects or functions of consciousness in man—the principles, as they are usually called in modern Theosophical literature; and, in discussing these to the extent necessary for our present purpose, it is essential that we go back behind the later Theosophical teaching on this point, and adhere in general to H.P.B.'s classification.

Reversing, for our present purpose, the true occult method we work from below upward, these terms having, needless to say, a psychological and ethical significance rather than a literal and spatial one.

The first three principles, in this order, are: firstly, the gross Physical Body; secondly, its etheric counterpart, which H.P.B. herself called the Astral Body, but was called later the Etheric Body, and which has recently come to be called the Vital Body; and, thirdly, the Cosmic Vital Force, pouring out in the first instance, from the Sun, and appropriated in due measure by each individual Etheric or Vital Body for the purpose of maintaining the vitality and health of the dense physical partner.

It is debatable, however, how far this classification is really satisfactory, and H.P.B. herself was apparently not altogether pleased with it. In the first place, most occult schools are in agreement that the dense Physical Body is not, strictly speaking, a principle at all; and some schools (though not all) would even extend this to include the Etheric or Vital Body, since the latter is, when regarded from one point of view, the vehicle or distributor to the dense Physical Body of the third member of this Trinity, the vital Solar or Pranic Force. Even this last, however, is not in itself an individual human principle, but, rather, universal and cosmic; and, if we are to regard Prana as a human principle at all, we must be careful to realize that it is so only in so far as it is appropriated by the individual Etheric or Vital Body, as already explained.

The second group of human principles is sometimes spoken of collectively by H.P.B. as Kama-Manas, and so consists firstly of the passional-feeling nature (Kama) whether, as in the earlier evolutionary stages, almost entirely animal in nature and bound up with the physical body, or, as in later stages, more or less closely linked to the thinking principle (Manas), the mind in all its normal operations and functions, examining data, reasoning, drawing

deductions, and generally exercising its logical functions, usually called, in modern Theosophical literature, the Lower or Concrete Mind. To this add the purely personal Will which, like the Manas itself, is more or less bound up with, and involved in, the Kamic principle, and we have as our second group of human principles the normal waking self of everyday experience, the Empirical Self, as it is often called in modern days, corresponding broadly to the psyche of present-day psychology, and usually spoken of by Theosophists as the Personality, though we must note that this latter term is used by contemporary psychology and philosophy in a different sense.

Beyond this second group of principles, we come to the highest group, itself threefold. Firstly, we have the higher aspect of Manas itself, the abstract or spiritual Manas, beyond the limitations and illusions of the concrete logical mind; and secondly, the principle which H.P.B. calls Buddhi (not used by her, however, in exactly the sense in which it is used in the Vedanta). As this is a principle with which we shall be much concerned in the course of our study, we shall say nothing further about it for the moment, except to regard it, in close association with the Higher Manas, as, for us, the most important aspect of the Immortal Spiritual Self of man, that state of Selfhood, beyond the separateness of personality-selfhood, in which man dwells ultimately in full and permanent consciousness of his fundamental and essential identity with the third and final principle of this third and highest group, the principle which H.P.B. calls Atma. In her scheme, Atma is the ultimate principle, but, as she points out, it ought not, strictly, to be regarded as a human principle or included as such, being rather, in itself, universal and undifferentiated. Only in association with a particular Buddhi can it be regarded as a human principle, even in the exalted sense in which we must employ the word 'human' in this connection. In itself, it is one and identical with the Transcendental Cosmic Life, from whom and in whom are all things.

H.P.B. here goes back direct to the fundamental teaching of the Vedanta, the identity of Atma (or Atman) and Brahman. Atman is Brahman. Thou art That. The Ultimate Absolute Selfhood of each man is one with the Universal Self. This is the fundamental affirmation of the loftiest mysticism, the Royal or Raja Yoga, always and everywhere. It is that to which the profoundest intuition and experience of the mystic gives its unfaltering assent, and, as such, it finds its rightful place here, in our present study.

#### BUDDHI AS THE SERPENT FIRE

The capital importance of the principle of Buddhi can now be appreciated. It is itself, in the highest sense, the link between the human and the Divine, the particular and the Universal. H.P.B. gives a clue to this when she points out that, while Manas without Buddhi would not be the *Spiritual Ego* (but only the personality ego), Atma without Buddhi would not be the *Spiritual Ego* (but rather the unparticularized Universal Spirit in its pure transcendence).

With all this in mind, we can now return to H.P.B.'s definition of the Serpent Fire in *The Voice of the Silence*.

If we thus consider the various principles as described by H.P.B., we shall realize that, in the developed human being, every principle or aspect of the Self, except the highest and the lowest, is both active and passive, active as regards the principle below it, and passive as regards the principle above it.

These two terms, 'active' and 'passive' are not altogether adequate to express what is really meant: but as it is doubtful if any better can be found, and as H.P.B. herself employed them, we shall retain them here.

The highest principle is active only, for there is nothing above it to which it can be passive; the lowest is passive only, for there is nothing below it to which it can be active. Thus, to take a concrete example, Kama-Manas, the soul or psyche as a thinking-



feeling entity, once its sensuous and self-centred activities are largely controlled and purified, will be active in relation to the physical body, but passive (or better perhaps, receptive) in relation to the Spirit, of which Buddhi is one of the characteristic aspects; while Buddhi, though active in relation to the Kama-Manas, is itself passive in relation to Atma.

Buddhi, however, must not be thought of as a purely microcosmic and individual principle, power or activity; for, from another angle, it is also much more, inasmuch as it has its macrocosmic aspect, so that, in this sense, we can speak of a Cosmic Buddhi, of which the particularized Buddhi is the individual appropriation; and in its active aspect, whether as macrocosmic or microcosmic, it is a thing of tremendous and well-nigh overwhelming power.

Many aspirants ardently desire to contact the Spiritual Self or Inner God; but this is one of the prayers which often, as Shakespeare says, 'the Wise Powers deny us for our good', since if the full force of the Buddhist levels of consciousness, or even a substantial proportion of it, were poured down into the limits of an unprepared or average personality, then that personality—not merely its outer body, but also its inner or psychological powers—would assuredly be seriously damaged, if not actually destroyed. This, perhaps, is why H.P.B. refers to the Serpent Fire, or Buddhi in its active aspect, as 'an electro-spiritual force, a creative power which, when aroused into action, can as easily kill as it can create'.

In its macrocosmic aspect, and as thus active, it works in the closest co-operation with the Third Logioic Aspect, that of the Holy Spirit in the sense in which some mystics, especially some of the greatest Christian mystics, have used this term. The great Flemish mystic Ruysbroeck, for example, describes the Holy Spirit, in one of his writings, as playing like lightning between God and the human soul. This vividly recalls to mind H.P.B.'s descrip-

tion of one aspect at least of Fohat, and her definition of the Serpent Fire as a power substantially Fohatic in character.

There is little trace here of that conventional piety which is sometimes confused with mysticism, or of that sentimental quietism (falsely so called) of which even some of the true mystics were unjustly accused. It is indeed the testimony of the truest and greatest of the mystics that this Power, as experienced within the personal self or psyche, is at times such that they feel as if any further intensification of it would be more than they could possibly bear. Yet it is not pain but an intense joy, though a joy of which the worldling knows nothing. 'I must joy', says the same great mystic already quoted, 'though the whole world shudder at my joy'. And though all this be, as one writer has said, either a warning to the timid not to trespass, or an invitation to the spiritually courageous and adventurous to dare, yet, to the duly prepared man of purified and disciplined psyche—but only to him—there is no real danger, for, in his case, the power is exquisitely and perfectly adapted to the capacity of the receiving psyche, which is utilized and tested to the utmost degree, it may be, but never beyond it. 'In this is no dread'; and it is perhaps in this sense that we are to understand the saying in *Light on the Path* that 'it is left to the individual . . . to refuse to be terrified by his greater nature'.

Even in the Hatha-Yoga or Tantric schools, which treat of Kundalini in the occult sense, the best teachers insist on the necessity of the preliminary disciplines before they will allow their pupils even to think of attempting to awaken the Kundalini power.

The caduceus of Mercury, taken as symbolically depicting the progression of the Kundalini, shows twin serpents ascending the rod and twining themselves round it in spiral formation; and a clue to this may perhaps be found in two statements by H.P.B. In the first of these she says that 'This force [the Kundalini Shakti] included the two great forces of attraction and repulsion': and in the second she explains that Kundalini 'is called the serpentine

or annular power on account of its spiral-like working in the body of the ascetic developing the power in himself'.

This latter statement is specially significant in view of the Theosophical teaching of the course of evolution in relation to the greater cycles such as those of Root-Races, Rounds, Globes, Chains, Schemes and even Solar Systems. If we study these carefully and in their broadest sweep, we shall discover that the force of evolution proceeds essentially, neither in a horizontal line nor in a circle, but spiral-wise: while, turning to individual spiritual evolution, we shall find that, although this has often been symbolized as progress along a path or ascent up a mountain-side, here too the course, especially when considered in the light of reincarnation, is one of cyclic-spiral progression.

This important point cannot be elaborated here, but it may at least be said that if all this had been realized, the Eastern, and especially the Indian, doctrine of Cycles, macrocosmic and microcosmic, would not have been so widely and persistently misunderstood and criticized, particularly by Western scholars and philosophers, as purposeless and pessimistic.

#### THE SERPENT AND THE FIRE

Coming back now to H.P.B.'s definition of the Serpent Fire as active or positive Buddhi, we can perhaps understand how, when envisaged from our present standpoint, it is fundamentally a spiritual and not a psychic power, and one which originates in, and operates from, the purely spiritual, arupa or 'formless' levels of consciousness. This fact, it seems obvious, is indicated by the name given to it, for the serpent, as is now generally known, is a world-wide symbol, on the one hand, for the purely spiritual realm of the Eternal, for Eternity itself, in fact, and, on the other, for that supra-intellectual Wisdom which is born of the world of the Eternal.

The Serpent symbol has, of course, its lower or darker aspect,

but with that we are not here concerned, since Wisdom, here regarded as an aspect of Buddhi, and associated with the Nagas or 'Wise Serpents', the spiritual initiates of India, and with the conception in the mind of Jesus when he exhorted his disciples to be 'wise as serpents', is essentially a spiritual quality, not to be confused with knowledge, which is intellectual; and it is well to remember that when St. Paul wishes to convey the same conception, he uses one or other of two Greek words, Gnosis or Sophia, neither of which, strictly speaking, carries a merely intellectual or logical connotation; while Fire, again, is recognized as the symbol and correspondence of the spiritual level of being, as Air of the intellectual, Water of the psychic or Kamic-emotional, and Earth of the physical.

It is true, of course, that Air is sometimes used as a symbol for the spiritual, and Fire for the mental levels of consciousness, but Fire is unquestionably the more appropriate symbol for the Spiritual states of consciousness, and it is the one which H.P.B. herself employed—on occasions at least—and which we find used in various world scriptures. As regards the Cosmic Spirit, the Logos Himself, we read in the Bible that 'Our God is a consuming Fire', or in the words of the prophet Malachi, 'like a refiner's fire'; while in the book of *Exodus* we have the memorable passage:

The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up into the mountain and be with Me there.' And, when Moses was gone up, a cloud covered the mount; and the Glory of the Lord [that is, the Shekinah] dwelt upon Sinai, covering it with a cloud six days. And the seventh day, he [the Lord] called him out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the Glory of the Lord was like a burning fire upon the top of the mountain.

Again, in Ezekiel's vision of some of the beings of the Celestial Hierarchies, functioning on these lofty levels of the pure Spirit, the prophet describes those beings thus:

Their appearance was like that of burning coals of fire. This

was the vision running 'to and fro in the midst of the living creatures—a bright fire, and lightning going forth from the fire'.

It is this same Fiery Power which, seen in especial relation to man, as active Buddhi, is the purifying agent in the personality-life of the individual as he slowly ascends towards the celestial heights, stage by stage. It is likewise along this line that we are to understand the New Testament declaration that the Fire would test every man's work, and its reference to a testing 'so as by fire', as well as Krishna's words in the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*;

As the burning fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so doth the Fire of Wisdom reduce all Karma to ashes.

In this connection it is worth noting that, in the original, the word here translated as 'Wisdom' is Jnana, here to be regarded as an aspect or function of Buddhi, and corresponding to the Greek Gnosis or Sophia already mentioned, in which the subjective knower and the object of his knowledge completely and perfectly apprehend each other in a direct and instantaneous act of mutual interpenetration and self-identification.

From the occult point of view, Fire, Air, Water and Earth are connected with the four so-called 'elements' (using that term, of course, in its occult and not its chemical sense), and with the four classes of Nature-Elementals and Devic Lives, each class being related to its appropriate 'element'. We are not, of course, concerned with this here, except as establishing, by analogy, the position here taken up; but it is worth noting that further confirmation is forthcoming from Milton, whose occult knowledge is coming to be more and more acknowledged, and who in *Il Penseroso* refers to

. . . those demons [Devic Lives] that are found  
In fire, air, flood or underground,  
Whose power hath a true consent  
With planet or with element,



where due attention should be paid to the order in which the 'elements' are given.

No one can read these passages, and many more that might be cited, without realizing that Fire, while it symbolizes, from one point of view, a protean and all-pervading Cosmic Power, one in essence but varying according to the different levels on which it manifests, as in the system of Heraclitus, is also particularly and peculiarly associated with the purely spiritual, 'formless' and super-psychic states of consciousness.

When it is said in occult literature that, under instruction, the Kundalini is directed upwards and burns a way into the higher force-centres or chakras, culminating in those in the head, this, for the mystic has clear reference to the essential preliminary process of purification and self-discipline, whereby the lower powers of the personality are transmuted 'so as by Fire', from sensuous, materialistic and purely downward-turned, self-interested activities, and turned upwards in the direction of the Spirit. It is, moreover, true to spiritual experience—and it is only with such that we are here concerned—that, just as, for the occultist, the Kundalini Power lies latent in the etheric chakra opposite the base of the spine until aroused to activity, so, for the mystic, the true yogi, the Fohatic power of Buddhi lies latent at first in the depths of his own being.

Man's awakening to the presence of the Buddhistic Serpent Fire in himself is sometimes symbolically described as the descent of a ray of light or a fiery flame from the heights above. In reality, it might equally well be depicted as a stream of Divine Life and Power gushing upwards from the hidden depths of his own being. This same truth is expressed by Goethe in the second part of *Faust*, in the scene where Mephistopheles is directing Faust on his journey to the realm of the Mothers (as Goethe calls it) the world of the divine Archetypes, Plato's world of the Eternal Ideas, the purely transcendent realm of the Spiritual Consciousness, the arupa or 'formless' level of Theosophical literature. 'Descend',

says Mephistopheles to Faust, 'or', he adds significantly, 'I might equally well say "Ascend". It is the same thing.'

*"Versinke, denn! Ich könnt auch sagen, steige!*

*'s ist einerlei"*.

This is true; for on those levels space has lost all its earthly characteristics, and the reaching of the realms of Spiritual Reality is not a question of movement in space at all, either upward or downward geographically speaking, but simply a change in the focus of consciousness.

#### THE INNER CHAMBER OF THE HEART

*The Voice of the Silence* speaks of allowing the fiery power to retire into 'the inmost chamber of the heart', which, from the mystical standpoint, can be regarded as the personality-manas, illuminated from the spiritual realms above, and thus becoming the Manas-Taijasi, the highest state of the personality-life as such, and can quite legitimately be called the abode of the World's Mother, the latter being, as H.P.B. explains, Kundalini, here to be regarded as the Buddhi-Fohat, so far as the personality consciousness can contact it, though not as it exists in itself, on its own exalted and 'formless levels of being.'

The 'heart', then, in this sense of the 'inner heart', may be thought of as centred in the spiritually irradiated psyche; and it is the essence of this which, as the Manas-Taijasi, is eventually assimilated and absorbed into the Spiritual Triad, thus becoming one with it, in the depths of the Buddhic consciousness.

In mystical literature the term 'heart' is frequently used in this sense of the 'inner heart' or Manas-Taijasi. 'Like a mirror, I reflect thine image in the heart', sings the Sufi mystic; and the Upanishadic references to the 'heart' can, in many cases, be interpreted in the same sense; while, in this connection, it is significant that in the Hebrew Psalms, the term 'heart' is to be understood not primarily in reference to the purely emotional

nature but rather to the spiritually illuminated mind.

‘Then’, continues *The Voice of the Silence*, ‘from the heart, that power shall rise into the sixth, the middle region, the place between thine eyes, when it becomes the breath of the One Soul, the voice which filleth all, thy Master’s voice.’

Here again, we must not be content to take merely the literal, superficial and obvious interpretation. Occultly, of course, the reference is to the chakra between the eyebrows, the vivification of which is said, in some occult schools, to bestow vision of the spiritual worlds; but this is surely a reversal of the true facts of the situation. No stimulation of any etheric force-centre will ever, of itself, bring consciousness of the spiritual or ‘formless’ worlds, though it may awaken some supernormal powers of a psychic or semi-occult character, the Siddhis being, in many cases, of this order. These, however, are not in themselves spiritual at all; in fact, if developed before the achievement of liberation from the bonds of the personality-self, they may themselves become obstacles to that liberation.

The truth is that the awakening of the Serpent Fire or Kundalini, occultly understood, is, from the point of view of the true, spiritual yoga, a matter of small moment; nor is it to be supposed that, because Kundalini has been thus occultly awakened, one has thereby become a true yogi or reached the supreme goal of yoga.

On the other hand, a direct inward awakening to the spiritual and ‘formless’ states may have some repercussions, *via* the psyche, on the brow-chakra, of the character mentioned. Even so, however, it is essential to recognize that such a chakra-vivification need not necessarily result at all from a genuine spiritual awakening; and it is quite possible for an individual to be truly awakened on the spiritual levels and even be quite considerably advanced on the Path, or Mystic Way, without having any clairvoyance, clair-audience or similar powers, and sometimes even without being himself aware in his surface or normal consciousness of his true

spiritual stature or status. Even the great yogis and mystics who possess the Siddhis say little or nothing about them, make no parade of them, and never encourage their pupils or disciples to seek after them.

The ideal is to concentrate on the purification of the psyche, to practise the disciplines, and to aim directly for the Buddhic consciousness; and when that has at length been achieved, then the various chakras can be safely awakened and the Siddhis acquired. Nay; they will then even unfold naturally and spontaneously, if and when they are needed, through being stimulated from above by the Spiritual Self, instead of being prematurely and unnaturally forced from the personality levels, usually with undesirable and even disastrous results.

Even a brief reading of the passage which has just been quoted, is sufficient to show that H.P.B. cannot be referring merely to the etheric brow-chakra, and that it is in the mystical sense and in relation to the 'formless' regions of consciousness that her words must be understood, as relating to that experience as a result of which the individual awakes to the Buddhic consciousness, 'the sixth' as H.P.B. calls it, the sixth principle, which of course is Buddhi, and is here described as 'the breath of the One Soul' in complete accordance with her classification of the principles.

A significantly close (though not exact) parallel can be found in certain Yoga teachings, such as that given by the great Ramakrishna, wherein the seven stages of spiritual development are figuratively related to the seven principal chakras and their awakening.

The first three—all located below the diaphragm—symbolize the three earliest stages, in which the individual, though definitely beyond the animal kingdom, is still very largely dominated, both as regards his emotions and his mind, by those animal instincts and desires which demand their expression and satisfaction through the physical senses.

At the next stage, the fourth, which is symbolically associated

with the heart-centre, the man's psyche or personality-self first becomes subject to the influences of life and light and power penetrating through into it from the spiritual or 'formless' levels. At first, needless to say, these influences are limited and intermittent, nor does the individual as yet understand anything of their true nature and origin. In the next stage, however, the fifth, which is mystically associated with the throat centre (not treated separately by H.P.B.) and which represents a partial transmutation of the emotions, man begins to be conscious of the true nature and origin of these spiritual 'intimations' and gradually becomes more and more aware of them; but even at this stage they are still realized only in so far as they can manifest within the personality-self.

The next stage, however, which is the one referred to in the passage we are at present considering, is the sixth, and is symbolically associated with the centre between the eyebrows. Here, when, as *The Voice of the Silence* expresses it, 'the power shall rise into the sixth', the yogi-mystic passes beyond the personality-consciousness altogether and is established in the Higher Mental and eventually the Buddhic states. Here he directly beholds the Buddhic light and life, experiences this no longer merely as reflected in the personality, but on its own lofty levels and in his own purely spiritual selfhood.

Nevertheless, he is not yet absolutely one with it; for this is not the ultimate but only the penultimate stage. There is still a sense of duality, though the last, faintest and subtlest. He is like a man standing at a great window in a room and looking out through the window at a vast expanse of country flooded with the rays of the risen sun. He can see it all; he can even feel the full warmth of the sunlight as it falls upon him through the glass. And this last subtlest sense of duality remains until at length, with the ascent into the seventh and final stage, symbolically identified with the great head-centre, all sense of duality, of subjective and objective,



of self and not-self, vanishes. The window, as it were, opens wide, or, shall we say, the window and the room alike dissolve, and he passes into the limitless, sun-suffused land to unite himself with it and become one with it.

#### THE TRUE GURU

It is necessary, however, to understand the agency through which this awakening to the life and power of the Buddhic consciousness is brought about, and light may be gained in this matter by a consideration of the two senses in which H.P.B. uses the word 'Master'.

The first and more frequent usage refers to the Teacher and Master (Guru) whose presence and instruction are essential to the pupil (Chela) in the occult procedure of awakening the fire of Kundalini and guiding it upwards through the various chakras. Occultly, of course, a Master fulfils other functions in relation to his chela, as well, but this is the only one which we need consider here.

On the other side too, the mystic, the true and pure yogi, is usually heavily indebted, in his upward progress towards the height of the Buddhi, to some external agency. The reading of a book, the listening to a performance of some great piece of music, the contemplation of a beautiful scene—any of these may be, in its own way and to its own degree, the means, or at least the medium, the occasion though not the cause, by which the birth into the Buddhi is brought about.

More usually, however, the mystic is indebted in this respect, rather to some particular individual, more advanced in most respects than himself in the matters of the Mystic Way, whether connected or not with some specific religious body, or other kind of organization; and in this sense we can speak of the mystic likewise as possessing, at the earlier stages at least, his Master. The great Indian poet-mystic Kabir—to take only one example—had

his Master in this sense of the word, as he was, in his earlier days, a pupil or chela of the sage Ramananda, while Ramananda himself was in turn originally a disciple of the great South Indian Master, Ramanuja.

But the true function of the Spiritual Master is not to dominate his pupil, so that the latter becomes a mere replica, a reproduction in miniature, a mere echo of the Master; not to give him, on the ordinary mental levels, vast quantities of information regarding occult or even spiritual matters, but rather, and above all, to inspire him. Not for him to exact blind and unquestioning obedience, and issue detailed instructions, but to suggest in general terms, and leave the detailed working out to the pupil himself; and always, at the critical moment of decision, to stand aside, to throw back the onus of responsibility, initiative and full freedom of choice on to the shoulders of the disciple himself, who thus learns more and more to walk in the growing light shed by his own Buddhic consciousness which is ultimately and essentially the true and only Master and Mystic Guide.

This indicates sufficiently the true place in the life of the disciple of external helps, whether individual or organizational. In the earlier stages of the spiritual life, much may be said for them, and such aid as they can offer ought gratefully to be accepted; but beyond a certain point their influence becomes restrictive rather than expansive, and they best fulfil their function when they lead the disciple as quickly as possible to the point where he no longer needs them—a fact well realized by the English poet Coventry Patmore when he said, ‘The work of the Church ends where the work of God begins.’

This brings us to the second and higher sense in which the word Master is used by H.P.B., which has reference to the Spiritual Self in man, the Higher Triad as it is sometimes called, the Atma-Buddhi-Manas, or—more specifically and in the final analysis—Atma itself, which, again using the word in H.P.B.’s sense, is in a

profound and intellectually inexplicable way, at once both individual (in the very highest sense of the word) as united with Buddhi, and universal in itself as a Divine Principle, *the* Divine Principle, as H.P.B. taught.

Kabir, to whom reference has already been made, also uses the word Master in this higher sense, and we interpret in this way his lines 'When you meet the true Guru, He will awaken your heart', where due notice should be taken of the term 'heart'; while H.P.B., in a note in *The Voice of the Silence* says, 'The Great Master is the term used by chelas to indicate the Higher Self. It is the equivalent of . . . Atma and Christos'.

#### THE TRANSMUTING FIRE

In the teachings of some occult schools, we are told how Kundalini in its upward progress through the body, not merely forces open the chakras and reverses them from their original downward-turned position, but also burns up all that obstructs its path; and in this the mystic sees primarily an indication of how the Buddhic-Fohatic power, growing ever stronger within him, forces its way upward through the different levels of his consciousness, acting upon his different personality-bodies and principles, purifying 'so as by Fire' all that can be eventually transmuted and utilized for its own divine purposes, burning away in the fires of self-discipline and self-dedication all that is unworthy, all that constitutes an obstacle in the Spiritual Ascent. First, the lower and grosser desires are thus submitted to the Ordeal by Fire; next the subtler but still self-centred interests—intellectual and aesthetic as well as devotional—are dealt with in similar fashion. Then just as it has been said in occult teaching that the ascending Kundalini, having reached the top of the spine, leaps across and upward to vivify the higher chakras—those in the head—so the yogi-mystic recognizes this as having reference, by analogy, to the spiritual experience in which, the work of purification of the whole per-

sonality-self, even at its highest, being completed, there comes the leap from the Lower Manas across (or up, which means the same thing) into the Higher Manas, from the personal into the super-personal regions, and so into what *The Voice of the Silence*, as we have already seen, calls the Sixth Region, that of the Sixth Principle, Buddhi, in which the Life of the 'formless' levels is realized in its all-embracing nature; for it is at this stage that the transformed and transfigured individual first truly experiences something of his essential oneness with all other individuals, with all other forms of life, and finally with the One Cosmic Life in Itself—this being, incidentally, one of the reasons why the Buddhic has been called the first of the 'universal' planes.

In this work of the purification of the whole personality-self, the Divine Agent, as we already know, has Fire as its characteristic symbol. It operates in the human psyche from lower to higher and ever higher levels, as we have just seen, in the great work of the mystic transmutation, transmuting, in the fiery crucible, all the baser metal of the soul, until, reaching at last the frontiers of personality, it consumes that very personality itself in a final holocaust, out of which the man emerges, in new and wondrous guise, on the super-personal levels of being, to know himself as the imperishable and authentic man of the Spirit, the Archetypal Self, the Divine Image, the Augoeides or Resplendent Self of the Mysteries, even as the Phoenix, consumed in the Fire, rises in renewed and transfigured form, and mounts towards the heavens.

It is those who have undergone this who are depicted for us in the *Apocalypse* as the citizens of the Celestial City, with their white robes and the divine mark upon their foreheads, their golden crowns and their palms of victory, and are there referred to as 'they who have come out of the Great Tribulation', or the Great Testing, and elsewhere as 'They who have passed through the Wall of Fire', or 'They who have passed through the Burning Ground'.

'Tis only then', continues *The Voice of the Silence*, referring to

the attainment of the 'formless' or super-personal levels of being, 'that thou canst become a "walker of the sky", who treads the winds above the waves, whose step touches not the waters', a symbol which clearly indicates the transcending of the kama-emotional states, here symbolized, of course, by the 'Waters'. But it also implies the transcending of the purely rational or logical intellect, the Lower Manas, in the expression regarding the treading of the winds and the walking on the sky, for the wind and sky signify here the 'element' of Air, and relate in our interpretation, as we have already seen, to the Concrete Mind, and the Yogi-mystic has now risen beyond this likewise, and the ascending Fiery Power has now carried him into the 'formless' levels of the spirit on which he finds himself free of all the limitations of the personality-levels of consciousness, and even free of the sense of personality itself, for, to tread or walk upon something, one must be above it, or, from another aspect, master of it.

#### THE UNSTRUCK MUSIC

The transition from the levels of personality-selfhood, even at their highest into those of the Higher Mental and Buddhic can also be seen in what *The Voice of the Silence* has to say regarding what is called the Anahata-Shabda. When the yogi-mystic has reached the apex of personality-consciousness, as represented by the Manas-Taijasi, then he is said to hear, echoing out to him, from the formless spaces beyond, this mysterious sound, the Anahata-Shabda.

It is said in the tradition of some Indian occult schools, that when Kundalini, in the course of its upward progression, reaches the fourth chakra, the Anahata, then the individual hears the relative sound, the Anahata-Shabda, hitherto inaudible. This statement might quite easily be misunderstood, and its deeper implications missed, if taken too literally.

The Anahata occultly is the fourth of the chakras and esoterically

relates to the Kama-Manas; and Shabda means in a general sense, Sound, in all its gradations or modulations from the highest to the lowest. The lowest of these is sound on the physical plane, with special reference to speech; and the next, in ascending order, is the Anahata (literally, that sound which is produced without beating instruments together) which, being related, as we have just seen, to the Kama-Manas, belongs to the psychic levels of awareness, and, though of a higher type than physical sound, is nevertheless sound that is audible, though psychically instead of physically, and is still in the strictest sense, objective. From one point of view, the faculty thus awakened is a form of clairaudience, though sometimes of a higher type than that usually associated with the word.

Even when actually awakened by the ascending Power, however, it is still psychic, not spiritual, and, as such, the mystic or true yogi is not concerned with it. In his case, the ascending Power may, and usually does, pass on directly to the still higher stages, and eventually takes the leap into the 'formless' levels of the Higher Manas and the Buddhi, that realm which is both its starting-point and its goal. Then, all sense of objectivity fades away, and the yogi hears, or rather becomes, the One Sound, which is no sound at all, the Soundless Sound, the Voiceless Voice of the Silence.

#### THE JEWEL IN THE LOTUS

Occultly, the progression of Kundalini up the spine culminates in the awakening and unfolding of the great head-chakra which is poetically called the Thousand-Petalled Lotus. This, again, is a matter regarding which it is quite possible to miss the deeper implications. From the mystical approach, it is vain to seek for this Lotus Flower in the physical head, even on etheric levels, or indeed, on any of the personality levels at all, for, essentially, it represents the unfolded spiritual Selfhood in man, his attainment, at its highest, of full and permanent Self-consciousness of the Buddhic regions of being; and the Guru—or in another symbolism, the

Jewel—in the heart of this Lotus-Flower, stands for the inmost Selfhood of the Spiritual Man, the Atma, the ultimate core of his being, one with the Universal Being.

H.P.B. herself make this quite clear when she tells us that 'While for the Orientalists and the profane masses the sentence *Om Mani Padme Hum* means simply 'O, the Jewel in the Lotus', esoterically it signifies 'O, my God within me'; and thus, in the hymn in praise of the Fivefold Footstool, we find the verse 'I meditate on the Guru in the Lotus of a thousand petals', and elsewhere the injunction 'Meditate on your Guru in the Lotus of a thousand petals. His cool beauty is like that of the full moon, and His Lotus hands make the gestures to grant boons and dispel fear.'

These last phrases, like all else in this connection, are of course to be understood not as literal statements but as poetic imagery, and the term Guru, or Master, to be taken in the higher of the two senses already indicated.

It is perhaps needless to labour the point that, in dealing with all works which have an intuitional element in them, we may interpret what is told us in a manner which H.P.B. is said once to have described as 'abominably literal'; but it may not be unprofitable to remind ourselves that, although we find in expositions of mystical truth various schemes, diagrams, classifications and divisions of the stages of unfoldment of the spiritual consciousness, all such representations are, from the life point of view, artificial and illusory, in the final analysis. From the standpoint of intellectual exposition, and even to some extent from the practical or experimental standpoint, they have their place and purpose—at least in the earlier stages; but, once this has been realized and utilized, the best thing to do is to forget all about them; and for the disciple to allow himself to be tied, beyond a certain stage, to any intellectual scheme more or less rigid and mechanical in its operations, would be to lose the Life in bondage to the form, to



cling to crutches after he was able to dispense with them, to be content to walk when he could run, or perhaps even fly.

#### THE DIVINE MONAD

We are now in a position to understand—so far at least as understanding is possible for us—something of the fruition or consummation of the long ascent of the Spiral Way of the Spirit, the culmination of the work of the Buddhic Serpent Fire in man, the completion of that cyclic-spiral process whereby the Divine Monad, coming forth from the Central Fire, passes, when looked at *sub specie temporis*, into the darkness and eclipse of purely material conditions, only to re-emerge and commence the return journey, eventually to unite once more with the full Divine Transcendence, bringing its sheaves with it. On the other hand in its own essential Being, *sub specie aeternitatis*, beyond the lower worlds of time, space and becoming, it is, by a profound paradox, that same Divine Monad which is itself eternally one with and in the Universal Self. It is the Immortal Flower, that Flower which is also a Flame. It is the Fuel of God, the Bush burning unconsumed in the Furnace of Everlasting Love.

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