

THE HUMAN JOURNEY
Quest for Self-Transformation

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The Theosophical Society in England

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The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric Philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.

H.P. Blavatsky
The Secret Doctrine

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To obtain life in human form is said by the Buddhist to be the greatest privilege. The same concept is expressed in the classic work on Vedanta, Sri Sankaracharya's **Viveka-chudamani**, usually translated as 'The Crest Jewel of Wisdom'. There it is said: 'Among sentient creatures birth as a man is difficult of attainment...' ¹ The challenge is to preserve such a condition by acting at all times in a human manner. Our humanity is threatened not only by forces external to our nature, but more significantly by factors within ourselves. Much has been said and written about the dehumanization of man by the technological devices he himself has created; many voices today are raised in protest against a view of man that would remove his essentially human identity by categorizing him as an animal, albeit a superior one, among other animals or as a machine, however skilful in operation, among other machines. The preservation of the human within us is no easy task; to undertake the task depends ultimately on how we define our humanity.

As Dr. Abraham J. Heschel has pointed out, 'Every generation has a definition of man it deserves.' ² Our generation may have moved from the Aristotelian perspective of the Scholastic philosophy which defined man as **homo rationalis**, an animal with the capacity for choice, but, as Dr. Heschel continues, 'It is characteristic of the inner situation of contemporary man that the plausible way to identify himself is to see himself in the image of a machine.' ³ Evidence of our contemporary dilemma lies in the fact that we usually frame our question of definition in terms of **what** rather than **who** is man. Our 'whatness' places us in the category of things, but being human is a process, in which we are continually engaged. It is a journey, on which our quest is for knowing more, for feeling more, and ultimately for that transformation that carries us beyond ourselves. It is a journey in which the very process of travelling is not distinct from the unfolding awareness of our own mystery, for even in the discovery of ourselves, we only plunge further into the mysterious depths of being. According to Laurens van der Post, Dr. C.G. Jung once said that 'The core of the individual is a mystery of life, which is snuffed

out when it is "grasped"... True understanding seems to me to be one which does not understand, yet lives and works...' ⁴ So our human journey does indeed demand that 'Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself.' ⁵

What then constitutes a human incarnation and how is it to be preserved? The Buddhist reformer of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Tsong-kha-pa, set forth the qualities and conditions required for man to be considered human, and it is evident that he foreshadowed contemporary developments in the field of psychology by his emphasis on man's uniqueness as arising, in the words of Dr. Herbert V. Guenther, out of 'a psychological order because it is defined by references to certain kinds of mental processes, attitudes and actions prompted by them.' ⁶ As Dr. Guenther translates certain passages in the works of Tsong-kha-pa, '...in order to find a human body it is necessary to store powerful, wholesome Karma, and this is very rare ... impeccable ethics and manners as the motivating power for winning enlightenment must be present as a solid foundation, liberality and other virtues as its companions, and proper resolutions as the connecting links ... If I were to think that, although this human life is difficult to win, it has been achieved and will last, I have to consider its transitoriness which involves three premises: the certainty of death, the uncertainty of the hour of death, and danger of death coming any moment without delay.' ⁷

Our humanity, then, is not a random happening, a chance accident in a universe of numerous accidents; it is the result of carefully nurtured attitudes, of actions founded on ethical and moral principles, and of continual efforts to live in a fully human manner. We are under obligation so to live and act at every moment as to preserve and advance our humanity. 'The greatest concern of man is to know what one has to be in order to be a man,' wrote Immanuel Kant. The truly human is expressed in the power of conscious choice. There is a Hebrew saying to the effect that 'Man was created for the sake of choice,' and the sense of a choice of ways is present in all mythologies. Not only must we face the consequences of our choices, we must also recognize that others cannot make our choices for us. Every Scripture echoes this fundamental truth of the **human** journey. 'The art of living is, in its essential meaning, a development and transformation of the power of inward choice', wrote Frances Wickes, a leading student of Carl Jung. ⁸ And if we fail to exercise this power, this faculty of choice which makes us human, 'we shorten the stature of our soul.' The central lesson of the **Bhagavad Gita** is not so much that Arjuna must act as that he must act out of his own choice, that he must

reach his own decision and understand the basis on which his action rests. For Arjuna, symbolic of every man, was a man with a problem; as with so many individuals with problems, he longed to have someone else solve his dilemma. This Sri Krishna could not do, as indeed no true teacher can ever solve the problem which may confront the student. The Immortal Charioteer in each of us, if we may contact him, can but give us the vision, the true perspective of comprehensive understanding, on which to base our choices intelligently and with dispassion. As the **Vivekachudamani** reminds us:

'The nature of the one reality must be known by one's own clear spiritual perception and not through a pandit...; the form of the moon must be known through one's own eye...

'Who but oneself (Atman) is capable of removing the bondage of **Avidya, Kama and Karma**... even in a thousand million Kalpas?

'Disease is never cured by (pronouncing) the name of medicine without taking it; liberation is not achieved by the (pronunciation of the) word Brahman without direct perception.'⁹

Our human journey, then, must properly begin with an understanding of who we are and what constitutes our human-ness. H.P. Blavatsky, in setting forth for this age the ageless tradition, defined man as a **saptaparna**, a seven-leaved plant. The seven principles are variously given in the theosophical literature, but recognizing the two highest principles as the universal Self or Atman and its spiritual soul or consciousness, Buddhi—these two in union constituting the Monad—we may narrow our definition to that which is essential for man to be truly man. As H.P.B. states the case: '... the two higher "principles" **can have no individuality on Earth**, cannot be **man**, unless there is (a) the Mind, the Manas-Ego, to cognize itself, and (b) the terrestrial **false** Personality, or the Body of egotistical desires and personal **Will**, to cement the whole, as if round a pivot... to the physical form of man.'¹⁰ Dr. Annie Besant summarized this magnificent statement in the succinct and extremely useful definition: ' "Man" is that being in the universe, in whatever part of the universe he may be, in whom highest Spirit and lowest Matter are joined together by intelligence...' ¹¹ Essentially, then, three factors are involved, with the focus on the middle principle or aspect, as it may be called; this is the mind, or, more properly, the entire psychological nature, as

will become evident as we proceed. Here at this central point, technically the **Kama-manasic** nature, is man; here is found both the agony and the glory of being human; here, where

'...the impossible union

Of spheres of existence is actual...' ¹²

lies the central task which is the supreme **opus** of the human journey, the 'consciousing' (to coin a word) of our godhood in the attainment of SELF-realization.

Therefore, in considering the human journey, it may be useful to adopt what is known as the Taraka Raja Yoga system in the classification of man's principles. Discussing the septenary classification, H.P.B. gives a valuable tabulation of systems adopted in various schools. ¹³ Commenting on the Taraka Raja Yoga system, she says that 'for all practical purposes', this is the 'best and simplest.' Explaining further, she states: 'Though there are seven principles in man, there are but three distinct Upadhis (Bases), in each of which his Atma may work independently of the rest.' And she goes on to emphasize that '...as every Adept in Cis-Himalayan or Trans-Himalayan India, of the Patanjali, the Aryasanga or the Mahayana schools, has to become a Raja Yogi, he must, therefore, accept the Taraka Raja classification in principle and theory, whatever classification he resorts to for practical and Occult purposes.' ¹⁴ In this connection, we may also take note of the statement by H.P.B. that 'The human principles elude enumeration, because each man differs from every other... Numbering is ... a question of spiritual progress and the natural predominance of one principle over another.' ¹⁵

The Taraka Raja Yoga system, as indicated above, states that Atma, or the universal consciousness, is localized through three **Upadhis** or bases. The word **upadhi**, from the verbal root **dhi**, which means to hold or to nourish, is generally translated as container or receptacle, but it also has the connotation of that which imposes limitation on and gives qualification to that which is held, nourished and contained within it. Therefore, the three **upadhis** through which the universal becomes particularized both limit and nourish the One Consciousness in its individualized expression. These three **upadhis** are given as:

1. **Karanopadhi**, or spiritual soul or Buddhi; the word **Karana** (combined with **upadhi**) is derived from the verbal root **Kr**, which is to act or cause action; **Karanopadhi**, then, is that base which provides, the principle of causality;
2. **Sukshmapadhi**, or the mind, including **Kama rupa**, consciousness, together with volitions and feelings; the word **sukshma** meaning fine, subtle, precise, intangible, carries

with it the connotation of the subtler principles relating to the psychological nature of man;

3. **Sthulopadhi**, or the dense physical with its etheric and pranic aspects; the word **sthula** means that which is tangible, gross, bulky and therefore the **sthulopadhi** has been called the perishable body, which has mass and weight, in which the spiritual soul, clad in its subtle bodies, is invested for incarnation.

The unique value of this system in the consideration of the specifically **human** journey becomes evident when we consider further that the esoteric philosophy explicitly states '... that there exists in Nature a triple evolutionary scheme for the formation of the three **periodical** Upadhis; or rather three separate schemes of evolution, which in our system are inextricably interwoven and interblended at every point. These are the Monadic (or Spiritual), the Intellectual, and the Physical Evolution.' ¹⁶ Elucidating this doctrine, Dr. G. de Purucker points out that these three lines 'are coincident, contemporaneous, and fully connected in all ways: an evolution of the spiritual nature of the developing creature taking place on spiritual planes; an evolution of the intermediate nature of the creature (in man the psychomental part of his constitution); and a vital-astral-physical evolution, resulting in a body or vehicle increasingly fit for the expression of the powers appearing or unfolding in the intermediate and spiritual parts of the developing entity.' ¹⁷

To complete the picture, H.P.B. adds that 'Each of these three systems has its own laws, and is ruled and guided by different sets of the highest Dhyanis or Logoi. Each is represented in the constitution of Man, the Microcosm of the great Macrocosm, and it is the union of these three streams in him, which makes him the complex being he now is.' ¹⁸ Actually, it is man alone who unites in himself these three streams of evolution, and he does so through that specific factor in his constitution which marks him as human: the presence of Manas, or the principle which makes self-consciousness possible. It is to this principle that he must give the utmost attention, for to betray its promise is to forfeit his humanity. To refuse to think is to deny our human condition; the battleground, the **kurukshetra**, is the field of choice. We dare not retreat from the field, lest we lose our human state, even though our choices may prove in some wider perspective of knowledge to have missed the mark at which we aimed. Perhaps the most fundamental human right after all is the right to be wrong!

A decade or so ago, a biologist is reported to have announced, 'I have discovered the missing link between the anthropoid apes and

civilized men. It's us!' The theosophical student may well paraphrase such a statement by pointing to the occult view of man, in which the 'link' between the animal state of existence, in terms of a physical body, and the Immortal Spirit or Atman is the psychological nature where we are most focused today. Indeed, in man are met all the opposites, and in man alone can come the resolution of the opposites. This is the human journey to which H.P.B. directed our attention in emphasizing, in connection with the fundamental propositions on which the occult doctrine is based, that:

'The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric Philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.'¹⁹

Relating this essential doctrine to the threefold evolutionary stream in the production and development of the periodical bases or Upadhis through which the one Ultimate Reality, localized as Atma, manifests itself, we may suggest that three primary processes are involved. These may be termed: first, reincarnation, by which the developing consciousness sheaths itself in successive **Sthulopadhis** or physical vehicles appropriate to the awakening life within; second, metempsychosis, by which self-transformation, dependent on 'personal effort and merit', shapes the psychomental constituents of man's constitution into the likeness of the archetypal or 'Heavenly' man;²⁰ and, third, the process of Enlightenment by which the spiritual nature stands revealed in its full and awesome splendour. These processes are indeed 'coincident, contemporaneous, and fully connected in all ways,' because they relate to three kinds of time. Reincarnation takes place in linear time; it is therefore possible to speak of past and future lives or existences and to say of the current transitory and constantly changing complex that we call ourselves, 'This is my present incarnation.' Metempsychosis occurs in mythic time; here transpires the hero journey of the soul, with a beginning possible at any moment of linear time, for one does not need to wait on a new 'incarnation' to undertake the quest for self-transformation. The process of Enlightenment, as the Buddha's experience clearly evidenced, takes place outside of time altogether; it is the 'now' which is always, and which can enter the world of time at any point, as it were. The very word 'process' can scarcely be applied to Enlightenment, and one is forced to resort to the well-known paradoxical phrase of India, 'Neti, neti' — not this, not that.

It has become axiomatic to say that today man stands at the crossroads and that upon his present decisions will rest not only his own survival but the very survival of the earth itself. There are those who cry out that we have already chosen the fatal fork in the road and are well along the way to self-destruction and world-annihilation. If that is so, then we must have the courage to retrace our steps, to return to the treacherous junction by facing the consequences of our old choices (Karma) and start off anew on the genuine road that leads to our goal. An African proverb reminds us that 'The road doesn't say a word to anyone', by which is simply meant that each one must walk the path for himself. Myth and fairy tale are replete with examples of those who took the wrong turnings, found themselves, as did Christian in Bunyan's **Pilgrim's Progress**, in the 'slough of despond', and so had to retrace their steps, living out the results of unhappy choices until with renewed strength they could once more set out on the great journey. All about us may be the signs that we are embarked on the wrong road; sometimes we act very much like passengers on a bus, chattering away about our own petty concerns and the trivialities of existence, never looking out of the window to see where we are going, what is the terrain over which we are travelling, fully content to leave the driving to someone else. Occasionally, we may hear a cry from someone in a forward seat who urges the driver to stop, to turn around, to take another direction, but we only laugh and shout, 'Go on! It doesn't matter where we end up; this is fun and we are enjoying ourselves!' But when we do finally wake up to the direction we have been taking, when we become aware that the bus can be stopped and we ourselves can take a hand in determining our destination, then as all the great myths relate we begin in earnest on the hero journey of the soul and, like Ulysses, we set out

'To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars.....

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,

...that which we are, we are;

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but stong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.' ²¹

Our work has been clearly set out before us: to take up the human journey, the quest for self-transformation. The forces that are arrayed against us are no longer those that would enslave the body but those that hold in bondage the mind and heart, forces we ourselves have set in motion through all the past of our

unconscious wanderings in the desert of ignorance. We must win through to our immortality; a lonely journey it may be, yet we are never alone, and if we will but look, the signposts are clearly marked by generations of Adept Teachers. We travel from the self to the Self, and then on to the One SELF. 'Saith the Great Law:— "In order to become the KNOWER of ALL SELF thou hast first of SELF to be the knower"...thy self is lost in SELF, thyself unto THYSELF, merged in that SELF from which thou first didst radiate.' ²²

The process or method by which the journey is accomplished is that of metempsychosis, a doctrine grossly misunderstood and sadly misinterpreted, until it is viewed in the light of the occult philosophy. H.P.B.'s reference to it as an essential element in man's achievement of his human-hood, and ultimately his superhuman state, is clear evidence that it refers to the necessary psychological transformation that must take place if we are to win our immortality. Reincarnation alone is insufficient to achieve the goal set before us; the mere accumulation of existences, experiencing a certain number of lives, can no more make of man a god than continuing to eat forever the leaves of some special plant can transform the caterpillar into a butterfly. The process of metamorphosis in certain organisms that undergo a complete internal change is analogous to the task which must be undertaken in full conscious awareness by each individual for himself. Hence it is that H.P.B. speaks of a 'long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.' As already stated, the latter is linear in time; metempsychosis participates in another dimension of time, what has been called by many writers mythic time.

Usually translated as changing soul after soul, metempsychosis has been termed 'a symbol of the passing of the ego during successive incarnations into human bodies, astral and physical, full of animal propensities denoted by names of animals of various kinds.' ²³ Dr. de Purucker points out that the term 'contains the specific meaning that the soul of an entity, human or other, moves not merely from condition to condition, migrates not merely from state to state or from body to body; but also that it is an indivisible entity in its inmost essence, which is pursuing a course along its own particular evolutionary path as an individual monad, taking upon itself "soul" after "soul"...' and metempsychosis, therefore, refers to 'the adventures which befall the soul...' ²⁴ The doctrine is fundamentally Platonic, and therefore may best be understood in the light of Plato's concept of the soul. It may be recalled that H.P.B. spoke of the Platonic philosophy as 'the most elaborate compendium of the abstruse systems of old India,' and of Plato as

'the greatest philosopher of the pre-Christian era [who] mirrored faithfully in his works the spiritualism of the Vedic philosophers who lived thousands of years before himself, and its metaphysical expression.'²⁵

Therefore, while metempsychosis has usually been used either as synonymous with reincarnation or as simply another term for transmigration, it should be recognized that each term has its own specific meaning in the esoteric philosophy. As Dr. de Purucker further points out: 'It is of course evident that these words have strict relations with each other, as, for instance, every soul in its metempsychosis also transmigrates in its own particular sense; and inversely every transmigrating entity also has its metempsychosis or soul-changings in its own particular sense. But these connections or interminglings of meanings must not be confused with the specific significance attached to each one of these words.'

²⁶ An examination of the Platonic doctrine will amply justify the thesis that metempsychosis is an essential process, relating to psychological evolution, in the total journey of man toward his ultimate goal. It should neither be confused with the process of reincarnation nor dismissed as an alternative term for transmigration (which also, incidentally, has a deeper and more significant meaning than has been assigned to it in exoteric works; see, for example, the elucidation of its genuine esoteric significance in H.P.B.'s article on 'Transmigration of Life Atoms').²⁷

Throughout all the dialogues of Plato, the responsibility of the individual soul is emphasized. In the **Phaedo**, Socrates tells his listeners, '...if the soul is really immortal, what care should be taken of her, not only in respect of the portion of time which is called life, but of eternity! And the danger of neglecting her from this point of view does indeed appear to be awful.'²⁸ Plato again and again stresses that the soul through her own action brings judgment upon herself, both when through ignorance or passion she transgresses the Divine Law and when by her own efforts she turns from the depths of misery to ascend the heights of spiritual realization. The Platonic myths in the **Timaeus**, the **Phaedo**, the **Phaedrus** and the **Symposium** deal beautifully with the nature of the soul, the choices before her on her journey in the realms of birth and death, and her final restoration and return to her true home. A complete analysis of these myths, revealing the mystical aspects of a deeper truth preserved through the esoteric tradition, would constitute a study quite independent of our present theme. An excellent brief survey, however, may be found in the small work, **The Human Soul in the Myths of Plato** by the Editors of the Shrine of Wisdom.²⁹

As the Editors of the Shrine of Wisdom point out, '...when Plato speaks of the souls of men changing into the souls of animals, this must not be taken to mean that the human soul can become literally the soul of an animal, but rather that it lives in a purely natural manner, content only with the things of the body, and without energizing its more divine faculties.'³⁰ Thomas Taylor, the great Platonist so frequently quoted by H.P.B., states in his Introduction to the **Timaeus**, 'Again, when our souls are represented after falling to the present body as suffering a transmutation into brutes, this, as Proclus beautifully observes, must not be understood as if our souls ever became the animating principles of brutal bodies, but that by a certain sympathy they are bound to the souls of brutes, and are, as it were, carried in them...' ³¹ More explicitly, Plato in the **Phaedo** records Socrates as saying that 'such as are addicted to gluttony, arrogant injuries, and drinking, and this without any fear of consequences, shall enter into the tribes of asses and brutes...' while 'such as hold in the highest estimation injustice, tyranny, and rapine, shall enter into the tribes of wolves, hawks and kites.'³² So, according to the Platonic doctrine, the outer form reveals the characteristics which the manner of a man's life dictates. For Plato, only those who were devoted to philosophy could maintain the human state. One may easily note the nearly unconscious continuation of such a view in terms of the language used to describe individuals by animal traits; we may say, for example, that a woman addicted to gossip is 'catty,' or that a man who pursues women is a 'wolf'. Language itself often reflects mythological truths, though the basis for certain expressions may long since have been forgotten. In the present context, however, it is relatively easy to recognize that we tend to maintain in our speech the essential significance of the doctrine of metempsychosis even when we may intellectually reject its usual exoteric connotation.

The ease with which the human state can be lost is nowhere better illustrated than in the dramatic account of metempsychosis written in the second century. A.D. by the brilliant adherent of the Neoplatonic school, Lucius Apuleius. There seems ample justification for suggesting that Apuleius was not the original author of the book known as **The Golden Ass**, but that he derived it from a Greek work which has since been lost. Be that as it may, evidence of the continuation of a number of mystery cults—Mithraic, Dionysian, Egyptian, etc. — at the time when Apuleius lived would lend credibility to statements that he himself had been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries and probably sought to obtain admission into several other mystery schools as

well. In her psychological interpretation of **The Golden Ass**, Dr. Marie-Louise von Franz points out that this work by Apuleius was preserved probably because its rather pornographic contents, especially when read without understanding its occult or even psychological signification, made the novel popular reading (albeit providing forbidden information) among the monks and novices in monasteries throughout the Middle Ages.³³ Whatever the reason for the survival of the work, its significance or its present relevance for us lies not merely in what it may tell us, in veiled form, about certain mystery schools of the past—schools in which the occult tradition was maintained through initiatory rites and disciplines—but more importantly in depicting quite graphically the human journey, with its transformations or metempsychoses, which must be undertaken by every individual even at the risk of losing his human condition.

The story that Apuleius related is much intermixed with extraneous elements which certainly form 'blinds' to the essential meaningfulness of the tale, as genuine occultism has always been veiled in allegory and symbol since its ultimate secrets are communicable not in words but through an awakened spiritual perception. In **The Golden Ass**, we have the story of a young man, Lucius, whose name itself means 'light', who sets out on a journey to his mother's home, a very apt symbol of the abode of Sophia, the eternal wisdom. En route, Lucius encounters numerous adventures, meets with people of all stations in life, and the novel is interspersed with countless tales that sometimes amuse and sometimes instruct. In the course of his journey, Lucius meets a young, attractive girl, Fotis, whose name also means 'light', but it is through her that he is transformed into an ass, able to say only 'hee-haw' although his inner consciousness is left untouched by the outer appearance. Just so the tragedy of the loss of our essential humanness is compounded when we realize the extent to which we may have made fools (asses, we may even say) of ourselves when we have identified ourselves with our emotional or instinctual nature. We may note that it seems to be light that leads light astray, so it is necessary to examine a little more closely the situation in which Lucius found himself. The contemporaneity of the story is evident if we compare the circumstances with those in the world today, when there is such widespread interest in the phenomenalistic aspects of occultism. For Lucius was diverted from his central purpose by the lure to study witchcraft, and it was in the house of a couple who could afford him an opportunity to pursue such a study that he met Fotis. Now the light that Fotis represents is the illusory, reflected light of the astral or kamic

nature. As **The Voice of the Silence** reminds the aspirant:

‘Beware, Lanoo, lest dazzled by illusive radiance thy
Soul should linger and be caught in its deceptive light.

‘This light shines from the jewel of the Great Ensnerer
(Mara). The senses it bewitches, blinds the mind, and
leaves the unwary an abandoned wreck.’³⁴

The number of people today, young and old, who are blinded by the dazzling light of the pseudo-occult, by promises of quickly gained psychic abilities, or by their own search for self-gratification, is legion, and like Lucius they may figuratively, if not literally, wear asses’ heads as a result of their bewitchment. Indeed, Lucius is but one figure in an ancient line of personified principles representative of the Anthropos, the man who in all ages represents every individual human in his quest for wholeness. The Gnostic tradition is replete with references to the ‘Light-Man’, or the personified principle of light who undertakes a journey into the Stygian darkness of matter, there to await redemption or by his own efforts to liberate, through inner transformation, the original being within himself and to return in full Self-consciousness to the kingdom of light. From the **Rig-veda** description of the primordial Purusha, or original person, through all the myths of countless cultures, to the Gnostic, Hermetic and alchemical traditions, the image of Lucius has lived on into our own time, whether consciously recognized or unconsciously experienced. Today, the astrological image of the Aquarian period provides a graphic symbol of the Anthropos, reminding us that the task of man in this age is to become conscious of the larger, inner presence which is the central point of our divinity and which must be carefully preserved lest we lose our humanness. Like Lucius, we must ourselves remove the ass’s head by eating of the rose, symbol of self-sacrifice, and standing naked, that is, without any false coverings that hide the true, immortal Self. The process is ever the same, an inner transformation, a true metempsychosis, by which the human soul is awakened to its true state when it can be initiated, as was Lucius, into the mysteries of Isis and Osiris, the mysteries of nature and an understanding of life and death.

The question inevitably arises as to the means by which metempsychosis is effected, how the transformations occur that lead to liberation, and the ultimate goal of the process. This is essentially one question, for goal and process cannot be separated, or, as pointed out earlier: ‘Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself.’³⁵ This fact has always been recognized in the true mysteries; in the story of Lucius, it was beautifully portrayed in his awakening to the effort required to

achieve his own liberation. It is always 'through personal effort and merit' that we proceed on the human journey that leads to the final transcendence of the human condition. To revert once more to the tale of Apuleius, Lucius had to break through the crowd of people pressing about him, symbol of the need for every individual to extricate himself from the collective unconscious, from the standards of the masses and a crowd morality; only then could he snatch at the garland of roses and eat them 'with loving relish.' So it is that each one must for himself stand free from the crowd, pursue his own lonely inner experience, unprotected yet also undisturbed, and eat to the full of the rose, symbol of sacrifice and love. As Jung has clearly indicated, the act of sacrifice, which always implies a certain suffering, is part of 'the divine process of change', which 'manifests itself to our human understanding and... man experiences it—as punishment, torment, death, and transfiguration.'³⁶

The symbolism of the human journey recorded in the work of Apuleius could be pursued much further, but we may note here only that following the eating of the roses, which concluded the period of his punishment and torment, he underwent the symbolic death and transfiguration which are essential features of all genuine initiatory rites. Lucius' own words describe the experience:

'I approached the very gates of death and set one foot on Proserpine's threshold...At midnight I saw the sun shining as if it were noon...The curtains were pulled aside and I was suddenly exposed...as when a statue is unveiled, dressed like the sun.'³⁷

Indeed the culmination of Lucius' transformative process is reminiscent of the description of transfiguration given in **The Voice of the Silence**:

'He standeth now like a white pillar to the west, upon whose face the rising Sun of thought eternal poureth forth its first most glorious waves. His mind, like a becalmed and boundless ocean, spreadeth out in shoreless space. He holdeth life and death in his strong hand.'³⁸

The method by which the process of metempsychosis, of inner soul transformation, is accomplished has been variously defined. In **The Key to Theosophy**, H.P.B. refers to the process of '**Theurgy**, or "divine work", or **producing a work of gods**; from **theoi**, "gods", and **ergein**, "to work". The term is very old, but, as it belongs to the vocabulary of the MYSTERIES, was not in popular use. It was a mystic belief — practically proven by initiated adepts and

priests—that, by making oneself as pure as the incorporeal beings— i.e., by returning to one's pristine purity of nature—man could move the gods to impart to him Divine mysteries...'.³⁹ Whether known as yoga in the east or alchemy in the western tradition, the theurgical task is still before us if we would win our immortality. In today's psychological terminology, it may be called self-actualization or individuation. Whatever the name assigned to the human **opus**, we are dealing directly with the psychomental transformations which constitute the hero journey of the soul. The language of medieval alchemy provides a rich vocabulary for understanding the process itself, for as Jung has pointed out in regard to myth, symbolical language 'is the primordial language natural to these psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imagery.'⁴⁰ What is required of us is a genuine metempsychosis, a second **inner** birth, the authentic regeneration which is the production of the **lapis philosophorum**, the diamond body of eastern alchemy, the spiritual gold or 'noble Tincture' of the western alchemist. As H.P.B. informs us at the very outset of **The Secret Doctrine**, the word **Dzyan** which is the title of the Stanzas on which her entire exposition rests derives from a term which in older texts is given as **Janna** and 'is defined as "reforming one's self by meditation and knowledge."⁴¹

We must see the process, however, as dynamic; it is a **work**. In today's world where guru-production has become almost an industry and the concept of meditation has become cheapened by the marketability of gadgets offering consciousness-alteration mechanisms which demand of their users no personal effort whatsoever, we may overlook the age-old truth that he who would win through to liberation cannot escape the labour required to effect the transformative process. In our scientifically sophisticated age, we may dismiss as superstition and fanciful imaginings the recipes and formulae of the medieval alchemists. Fortunately, as a result of researches carried on by Dr. Carl Jung and his successors, it is becoming increasingly recognized today that the seemingly meaningless directions veiled the psychological and spiritual labours which constitute the human journey. As A.P. Sinnett wrote in regard to this royal art of spiritual regeneration:

'The transmutation of the normal physical consciousness of man into the divine consciousness was the **magnum opus** on which the true alchemists were engaged, and much that is grotesque imbecility in the directions and recipes they have left behind, if we read it simply as nineteenth century chemists, becomes

beautiful spiritual philosophy in strictest harmony with the laws governing human spiritual evolution, when we put a symbolical construction on the quaintly expressed formulae relating to coctions and distillations and the mercury of the wise and fiery waters and ferments.’⁴²

It may not be without significance that many frontier thinkers in the field of psychology have been and are today pointing out the **psychological** implications of the **magnum opus** confronting man, using alchemical terminology as the symbolical language of essentially psychic and spiritual processes. For H.P.B., who clearly restated for our time the principles of the mystery-tradition which included alchemy, stated explicitly that the next developmental stage in man’s evolution ‘has more to do...with psychology than with physics.’⁴³ As stated earlier, the focus of our task today is at the psychological level, the second of the three schemes of evolution dealing with the intellectual or **kama-manasic** field of operation in man, where the process is metempsychosis. This is the critical area of the psychomental complex where the battle for the preservation of our humanness is waged.

In all alchemical texts certain basic motifs appear according to which the **lapis philosophorum**, or the philosopher’s stone, the perfect and incorrupt substance or latent goldness, is produced. Generally the stages in transmutation are given as threefold, symbolized by the colours black, white and red or gold. In some texts four stages are distinguished: blackening, whitening, yellowing and reddening. Into the alchemical vessel, which is man himself, are put sulphur and salt, the sulphur symbolizing the desire nature with its appetites and passions seasoned, as it were, with ‘intellectual salt,’ salt representing at this stage the reasoning faculty of the lower mind. The mystic agent which is also present in the vessel of our nature is known as Mercury, which Evelyn Underhill describes as ‘Spirit in its most mystic sense, the Synteresis or holy Dweller in the Innermost, the immanent spark or Divine Principle... Only the “wise” the mystically awakened, can know this Mercury, the agent of man’s transmutation; and until it has been brought out of the hiddenness, nothing can be done.’⁴⁴ As Underhill continues: ‘The Three Principles being enclosed in the vessel... which is man himself, and subjected to a gentle fire—the Incendium Amoris—the process of the Great Work, the mystic transmutation of natural into spiritual man, can begin...’ She then compares the three stages of the work, when the **prima materia** or initial matter assumes the three successive colours (black, white and red), to the three traditional stages of the mystic way: purgation, illumination and union. These may be seen also as

analogous to the Three Halls of Ignorance, Learning and Wisdom described in **The Voice of the Silence** as the three states of consciousness which lead the aspirant into the fourth or fully transformed state of the Enlightened One. The yogic literature of eastern alchemy similarly delineates a threefold process leading to the transformative awareness and in many systems heat plays an important part in the production of the 'new man'.

The first state, called in alchemy **nigredo** or blackness, represents the present state of human nature, full of imperfections and undergoing a certain purification through darkness and misery, conflict and suffering. The lower nature is gradually being dissolved; illusions about oneself and the world fall apart and one confronts directly what has been called in psychological terms the shadow or in alchemical terms 'the black beast.' Jung quotes an old alchemist as praying: 'Purge the horrible darkness of our mind, light a light for our senses!' ⁴⁵ This stage is also felt as a 'melancholia', when even one's most cherished ideals and convictions seem hollow and the entire work seems almost too difficult to attempt. Yet one must confront even the darkest elements within oneself, domesticate the 'black beast' of passion by taming the animal instincts and desires of the personal nature. For until we do confront every bit of darkness within, realizing that if the world without seems dark and forbidding it is only because we ourselves are opaque, we cannot proceed to that transmutation of our condition which marks the necessary metempsychosis out of which will be born the new man. If we do persevere, we may be certain that even in the blackest hour, at the deepest point of suffering, the content of the next stage will appear when the personality is emptied of all dross. So this stage is known as **albedo** or whiteness, but it has also been called the state of **Luna**, or silver, when the personality inwardly translucent shines with the reflected light of the true Self. The dangers of mistaking this stage as the culmination of the **magnum opus** are clearly set forth in **The Voice of the Silence**, where the Hall of Learning (the second of the three Halls through which every aspirant must pass) is spoken of as 'dangerous in its perfidious beauty... Beware, Lanoo, lest dazzled by illusive radiance thy Soul should linger and be caught in its deceptive light.' ⁴⁶

So we must press onward to the final stage, the **rubedo**, which has often been called the 'Marriage of Luna and Sol', the fusion of the human and divine, the union of the personality (Luna) with the essential Self (Sol). Now the retort can be opened to reveal the philosopher's stone, the pure gold of Wisdom, the diamond body, the Gnostic Anthropos, the Heavenly Man, **Salvator, filius**

macrocosmi; by whatever name it has been called, there now stands forth the divine original man, long buried and forgotten in the very centre of our being. Jung quotes the 17th century alchemist, Gerhard Dorn: 'Transform yourselves from dead stones into living philosophical stones!' ⁴⁷ The philosopher's stone, the **lapis philosophorum**, is frequently spoken of as hermaphrodite, containing within itself all opposites, binding together all the elements in the world. It is said to radiate a cosmically healing effect, and indeed he who has found the way to his own inner transformation, healing all divisions within himself, becomes the healer of the world. What began as a lonely way to one's self is found to be, in the end, a glorious path trod in the company of the gods. As Michael Maier, another 17th century alchemist quoted by Jung, has expressed himself: 'There is in our chemistry a certain noble substance over whose beginning affliction rules with vinegar, but over whose end joy rules with mirth. Therefore I have supposed that the same will happen to me, namely that I shall suffer difficulty, grief, and weariness at first, but in the end shall come to glimpse pleasanter and easier things.' ⁴⁸ If, as Jung has pointed out, 'The terrors of death on the cross are an indispensable condition for the transformation,' ⁴⁹ we may also be equally certain that out of the long series of reincarnations and metempsychoses there will come that experience of the Self which, as Dr. von Franz has so beautifully stated, 'brings a feeling of standing on solid ground inside oneself, on a patch of inner eternity which even physical death cannot touch.' ⁵⁰

The divine alchemy of individual transformation brings about, as a logical consequence, the transformation of the world. Is there, then, any other way than to undertake the human journey? How else shall we change the world? For if we are in darkness, the world can not know peace. 'Learn to suffer and you shall understand how not to suffer,' is the admonition given in the apocryphal Acts of John. Within ourselves are met all the possibilities both for world destruction and for world redemption; when we know how to bear the pain and burden of the world's sorrow, we shall know how to transmute that sorrow into supreme joy. 'Thou art enlightened — Choose thy way.' ⁵¹ Nowhere has the human journey been more aptly summarized or more surely delineated than in the Upanishadic verse:

From the unreal lead me to the Real,
From darkness lead me to Light,
From death lead me to Immortality.

Here is the age-old way, in accordance with the 'pivotal doctrine of the esoteric philosophy,' the way that 'admits no privileges or

special gifts in man...' except those he has earned out of his own experience. It is a way, however, in which we must realize that there is no one to lead us and nowhere to be led, for even here, even now, Reality, Light and Immortality are all about us and within us. We have but to open our eyes to see. The passage that is the human journey is won by our own efforts through numberless external existences and countless internal transformations. And when we have won through, we shall see the Real embedded in the unreal; we shall behold the Light in all that is dark; we shall know our Immortality even in the transient moment of time.

One day, in that mythic time of ever-nowness, will come the climax of our journey:

'Behold, the mellow light that floods the Eastern sky. In signs of praise both heaven and earth unite. And from the four-fold manifested Powers a chant of love ariseth, both from the flaming Fire and flowing Water, and from sweet-smelling Earth and rushing Wind. 'Hark!... from the deep unfathomable vortex of that golden light in which the Victor bathes, ALL NATURE'S wordless voice in thousand tones ariseth to proclaim:

JOY UNTO YE, O MEN OF MYALBA.

A PILGRIM HATH RETURNED BACK FROM THE
OTHER SHORE.

A NEW ARHAN IS BORN...

*Peace to all beings.'*⁵²

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