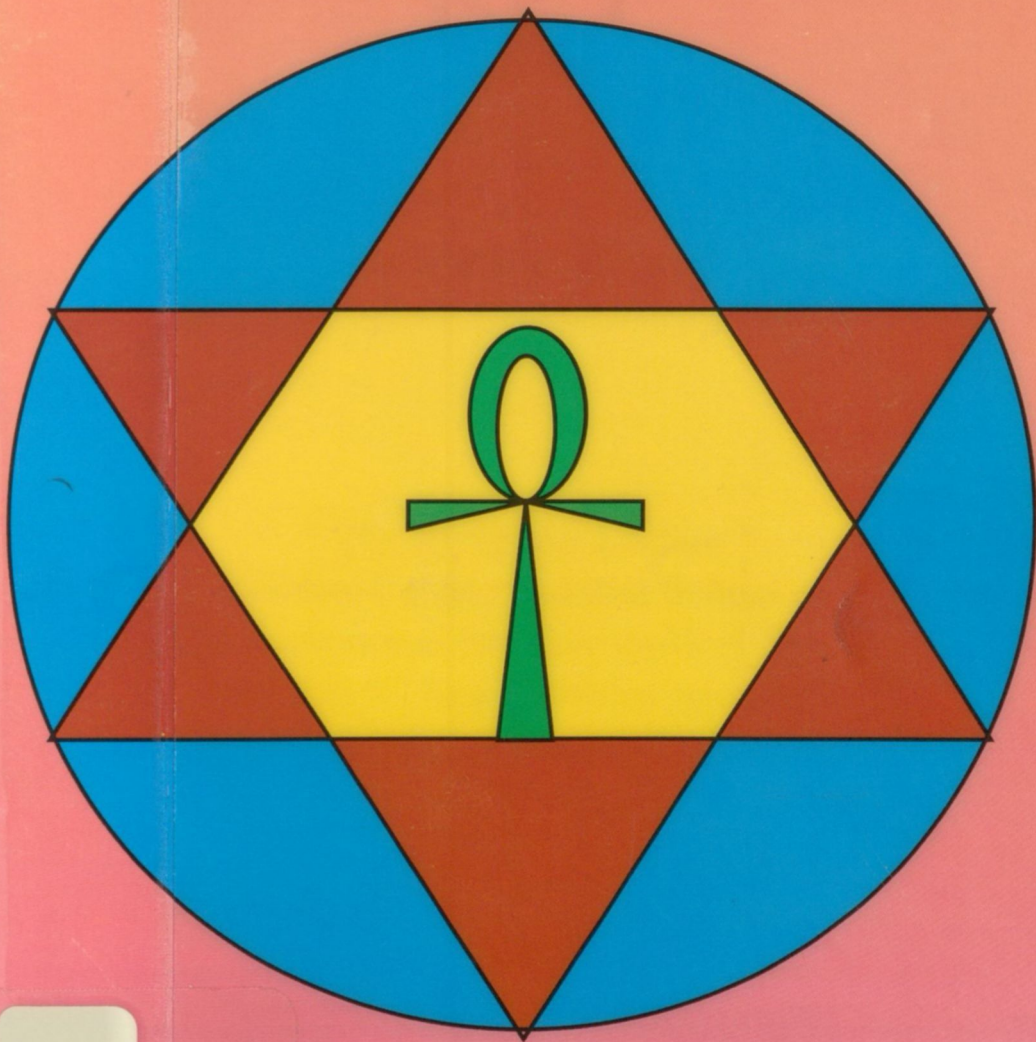


# THE VIRTUOUS KEY



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***Blavatsky Lecture 2006***  
***by BETTY BLAND***



# THE VIRTUOUS KEY

by **Betty Bland**

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# The Virtuous Keys: Seven in One

**D**o you remember the story of *The Secret Garden*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett? In this classic children's story, Mary, the young heroine, has found a gate that provides entrance to an intriguing garden, but alas it is locked tight. Yet she feels that there is something special behind that tall brick wall. Then one day a friendly robin unearths an interesting looking key, which turns out to be none other than the key to the desired gate. In turn, the garden ends up being the key to unlock some human hearts. The key, the gate, and the garden beyond are all inextricably linked in their function of providing healing and growth.

The same is true in Madame Blavatsky's use of imagery to represent the seven ultimate virtues, which are called *paramitas* in Hindu terminology. In the third fragment of *The Voice of the Silence*, a small but beautiful, and profound poetic portal onto the pathway for the spiritual pilgrim, Madame Blavatsky (HPB) compares each of the seven *paramitas* to a key and the gateway it unlocks.

In trying to sort out how to live the Theosophical life, many of us try to discover the keys to unlock our better qualities – to unlock the gates within our own beings. The pattern of virtues recommended by HPB guide the pilgrim to the final heights of glorious enlightenment. But because growth moves in spirals, repeating challenges at ever-new octaves, their instruction is valuable to each of us, however far away from the ultimate goal.

In *The Voice of the Silence* HPB lists seven portals, each of which requires a special key to be able to reveal its secrets and travel through to the next territory. As we human beings always prefer direct answers and easy steps, we are drawn into the journey with the portals and their keys. Yet we quickly find that we are confronted with not a straightforward pathway but a maze of repeating virtues and dangers. The lack of direct information confounds our logical brains and we are left with what might be considered a huge and complex koan. Although the text explains aspects of the portals and keys in different ways and in a meandering fashion, as a whole it has an interesting pattern and logic.

Let us explore these keys and portals in order to glean some of their meaning. We will try to distill a pattern that will bring them into clearer focus that we might use these bits of wisdom in our own path walking.

# 1. DANA

We start the journey with *Dana*, which means charity. This is the key to the first portal, the very beginning of the journey. We begin by thinking first of others.

Charity does not just mean giving alms to the poor or tending a soup kitchen, although it can entail both. It is the outer expression of an inner attitude, in which we recognize our unity with all and respond with loving service and a caring attitude.

Charity is not only in the physical realm but also in our attitudes and thoughts. We must give not only of what we have, but also of who we are. We have to overcome prejudices, resentments, and bitterness. This kind of generosity of spirit also can be called love. The term is used this way in the biblical verses from the 13th chapter of *First Corinthians*:

Love [or charity] is patient and kind. Love envies no one, is never boastful, never conceited, never rude; love is never selfish, never quick to take offense. Love keeps no score of wrongs, takes no pleasure in the sins of others, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance.

*Dana* is the key to living productively and well in the physical world. If we use this key it will open the portal to a life well lived on the physical plane. With this key, we find our entrance onto the path; however, for each of the portals HPB mentions the monsters or difficulties to be found either guarding the portal or lurking somewhere on the other side:

216. Thou hast to fight thy way through portals seven, seven strongholds held by cruel crafty Powers – passions incarnate.

217. Before thou canst approach the foremost gate thou hast to learn to part thy body from thy mind, to dissipate the shadow, and to live in the eternal. For this, thou hast to live and breathe in all, as all that thou perceivest breathes in thee; to feel thyself abiding in all things, all things in SELF.

220. So shalt thou be in full accord with all that lives; bear love to men as though they were thy brother-pupils, disciples of one Teacher, the sons of one sweet mother.

223. Thou hast to be prepared to answer Dharma, the stern law, whose voice will ask thee at thy first, at thy initial step.

224. Hast thou complied with all the rules, O thou of lofty hopes?

225. Hast thou attuned thy heart and mind to the great mind and heart of all mankind? For as the sacred River's roaring voice whereby all Nature-sounds are echoed back, so must the heart of him 'who in the stream would enter,' thrill in response to every sigh and thought of all that lives and breathes.

Charity is not a simple thing. Charity is an attitude that chips away at and finally annihilates our natural and long developed self-centeredness. It is the key that brings us to the first portal, the entrance into the path of spiritual unfoldment.

In the case of the first portal HPB seems to give us a break from the dread monsters. She provides a view of green pastures ahead, with the monsters behind us. In this case it is the monsters of the physical life that soften us and teach us so that we finally decide to take ourselves in hand. The woes of selfish living have created all the monsters we need to push us forward to seek a better way.

230. Armed with the key of Charity, of love and tender mercy, thou art secure before the gate of Dana, the gate that standeth at the entrance of the PATH.

231. Behold, O happy Pilgrim! The portal that faceth thee is high and wide, seems easy of access. The road that leads therethrough is straight and smooth and green. 'Tis like a sunny glade in the dark forest depths, a spot on earth mirrored from Amitabha's paradise. There, nightingales of hope and birds of radiant plumage sing perched in green bowers, chanting success to fearless Pilgrims.

There is a story of a newcomer being shown the afterlife. First the newcomer and guide come upon a banquet table. The hands of the people seated there are chained to the tables of plenty. They have forks – but the forks are too long for them to be able to bring the food to their mouths. So they are all starving, moaning, cursing, and crying out, jostling each other in attempts to reach the food. The newcomer concludes that this is not the place to be – that it must be Hell. The guide then brings him to the next region. The scene is exactly the same – a large banquet table with people who cannot reach the table of plenty before them. However, each one is feeding the person across the table. They are joyful, filled, sharing, and smiling at each other. Their charity and loving kindness transform the same circumstance into a Heaven.

Charity brings sense and joy to our earthly existence. We cannot feed ourselves except by feeding others. We cannot be complete in ourselves except by looking beyond self. *At the Feet of the Master*, a companion guidebook also recognizes the essential nature of this quality. Love is given as the fourth qualification required for the spiritual life. It is the essential footwear without which one would be foolish to begin the journey.

We can use the key of charity. As aspirants to this path every one of us has behaved charitably at some time; it is important to be aware, however, that there is one important condition associated with the key of charity. The act of charity must be performed without the desire for praise; otherwise it is an indulgence for the lesser self, the very monster in the outer realm that we have to slay.

To test yourself, think about the times you have done something really nice for someone – and consider whether you had to figure out a way to let someone else know about it. Remember that little imp inside that keeps whispering, “They really ought to know what I did for them so they can appreciate what a good fellow I am.” Or, “It isn’t really an act of pride to tell my friends what a good thing I have done so that they can fully appreciate my good qualities.” This is not to say that we can’t share and talk and be friendly, but just watch your inner workings to see if you can catch some wisp of selfishness at work.

Recall a time when you used this key – when you particularly went out of your way to help someone else, when you got nothing out of it, and when no one knew about it. Or maybe there was a time you were able to conquer a prejudice or bitterness and were able to feel more charitable. Immerse yourself in recollection when you were tuned in to charity and let the key open your heart, so that the verdant meadows come into view and the lark of joy sings in your heart. You have the first key. Whenever you have used it successfully, you have entered the portal of *Dana* to conquer life on the physical plane.

## 2. SHILA

Although we might like to kid ourselves about our advanced state of enlightenment, most of us still have to work on our ability to wield the key of charity. The good news, however, is that we can work on all of the keys at once. We do not have to remain solely focused on the first until it is perfected. Although charity is the foundation for all that follows, our path incorporates many repetitions of each of the portals and keys at different levels.

The second key, *Shila*, is translated in our text as harmony – harmony in action. This is the sense of harmony that comes from co-operating with the laws of nature, the laws of interconnectedness and responsible action. If we live in accord with all the precepts of right action, we will find a sense of harmony or balance in our lives.

This idea relates in some ways to *dharma* – finding our niche in the world where we are contributing to the whole. Where we are, the attributes that we bring, and the karmic predicament in which we find ourselves all work together to instruct us how to live in the world. Being ‘in the flow’ is the foundation for the dawning realization of our personal purpose in this world.

In Patanjali’s comments on the *Yoga Sutras* concerning the quieting of the modifications of the mind, we find that the life we lead has to support that effort twenty-four hours a day or the mind will never be still. We have to act in accord with the natural law in order to stop the disruptive dissonance created by our actions. We are a part of the universe and it is a simple fact that when we do not act in harmony with it, we create great waves of reverberation in the ethers that will return to us. We can lie to ourselves and to our friends, but not to the inexorable laws of the universe.

In *At the Feet of the Master*, the comparable qualification for harmony is called Right Conduct. In that booklet Six Points of Conduct are expounded upon:

1. Self-control as to the mind
2. Self-control in action
3. Tolerance
4. Cheerfulness
5. One-pointedness
6. Confidence

These points appear deceptively simple but they are extremely hard to follow. Yet to follow them is essential. We can change life for the better only by better conduct. There are no magic formulae. It is not our beliefs or rituals, but our living practice.

The one who lives the life shall know the doctrine. HPB confirmed this precept in a quotation of the Master, *Secret Doctrine*, vol I, p. 167): "Lead the life necessary for the acquisition of such knowledge and powers, and Wisdom will come to you naturally." Interestingly, right action on the physical plane is the key to unlock our functioning on the emotional plane. Using the second key, *Shila*, we move ahead into still promising vistas, but the path becomes steeper.

233. And to the second gate the way is verdant too. But it is steep and winds up hill; yea, to its rocky top. Grey mists will over-hang its rough and stony height, and all be dark beyond. As on he goes, the song of hope soundeth more feeble in the pilgrim's heart. The thrill of doubt is now upon him; his step less steady grows.

The instructive magic of karma works out on the emotional or astral plane. If a difficulty happens, and we are not emotionally attached to it, the problem washes over us without bruising or crushing us. But if we have strong emotional attachments to the way things must be, we will suffer a great deal through our emotional turmoil.

Doubt in the ultimate good, and the ever-present shadow of self-interest are the monsters that cause us difficulties here. Indulging in self-interest will surely block our clear thinking and right action; doubt arises in a troubled mind. If we do not pay heed, we are faced with many karmic setbacks in our walk through this second portal.

235. If lacking in the Shila virtue, – the pilgrim trips, and Karmic pebbles bruise his feet along the rocky path.

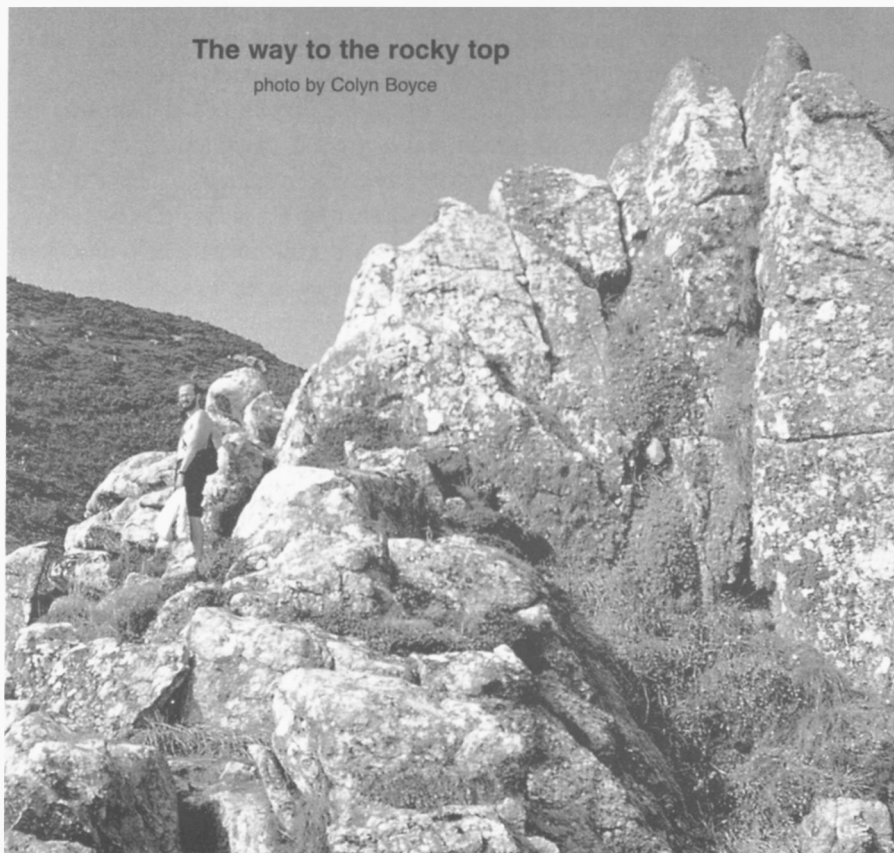
Everyone who enters the path, who sets out to travel the path of unfoldment, will experience this phenomenon of heightened karmic occurrences. These calamities and struggles are partly testing, partly instructive, and partly the balancing out and harmonizing of one's total karmic load, which must be lightened, in order to climb to the craggy heights.

*Shila* is the key for balancing karma, which has been forged in the emotional arena of desires and attachments. By acting in harmony with nature's laws and without attachment, we work out our current karma and create no more.

To explore this idea for your personal understanding, consider a karmic predicament that you have conquered. Remember how it disrupted your sense of harmony in living while you were caught in its throes, and what a good feeling it was to put it behind you. In this instance you discovered the key to harmony in action. You learned from your difficulties, discovered the correct action to take, and used the key to overcome your emotional turmoil by acting with a clear head and unattached, open heart. Remember to use this key of harmony in action and drive out doubt, anguish, and guilt.

### **The way to the rocky top**

photo by Colyn Boyce





### 3. KSHANTI

Now we approach the third portal:

236. Be of sure foot, O candidate. In Kshanti's essence bathe thy Soul; for now thou dost approach the portal of that name, the gate of fortitude and patience.

HPB calls *Kshanti* "patience sweet which naught can ruffle." Patience is the key to overcoming the lower mental plane. Here again, note that an element or skill seemingly from the previous plane – the emotional level – is used to gain control in the realm of lower mind. Patience brings an unruffled calm into our being. Just as it was harmonious action in the physical plane that gained control over the emotional realm, now it is a quiet emotional response, which is the key to conquering our relationship with the mental realm. All levels of our existence are interrelated in such a way that all parts work in concert with each other, and each field of action particularly affects the adjacent level as well as its harmonic twin, of which we will speak later.

The lower mental realm is where the lower self is always calculating for its own advantage. This faculty is the result of eons of development of the cunning and skill needed to survive and promote one's own well being. Such a hard-won trait has been useful in previous phases of our development. But now we are taking ourselves in hand, and learning to exercise control over this calculating ego of ours.

*At the Feet of the Master* refers to this qualification as discrimination, and tells us that we have to discriminate between the real and the unreal, the important and the unimportant, the right and wrong.

Patience results first of all from a clear understanding of the difference between the real and the unreal. If we understand the real, then we know that the wants and wishes of the small self are insignificant to the will of the ONE. This understanding makes it possible to distinguish between the important and the unimportant, and between right and wrong. We can use this quality to assist us in judging things from the standpoint of the good of the whole rather than the good of the personality.

HPB goes on to tell what will disable the key of patience:

238. Beware of trembling. 'Neath the breath of fear the key of Kshanti  
rusty grows: the rusty key refuseth to unlock.

Doubt and fear are the terrors of this region. Fear will block all progress and keep us in darkness. Our minds become paralyzed when they run around and around the same old nagging concerns. We become undone! Our constant little worries run rampant in our chattering minds and block us in many ways.

But if we can perceive the real, the eternal, we have nothing to fear, and do not have to allow our small Self to run the show. If we view things from the perspective of the higher Self, which lives in the eternal, the lesser worries fall into their places. We can see the larger picture so that there is no longer anything to fear. Fear is the concern that things will not turn out the way the small self wants. But when we see the vast scope of the plan and realize that all will work out in its own time, we will then be able to have infinite patience. We need to understand that our assignment for this lifetime is to *try*. Beyond that all will unfold in its own order.

For this key, *Kshanti*, consider a time you saw a fear melt away before the steady gaze of your discrimination. The conquering of fear is a cornerstone in your efforts to build patience.

As you do so, remember how it feels to overcome the thing feared – the strength and calm that it gives. My uncle liked to quote Shakespeare: “Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once” (*Julius Caesar* 2.2.32-3). It is the hundred feared things that are much more damaging to our journey than the actual events themselves.

Jesus said:

This is why I tell you not to be anxious about food and drink to keep you alive and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, the body more than clothes. Look at the birds in the sky: they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not worth more than the birds? Can anxious thought add a single day to your life? So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has trouble enough of its own. (*Matthew* 6:25-27, 34)

Patience means that we are centered in the process of our journey without straining for what we have not earned or striving to be ahead of our neighbour. Patience means that we are content to do our best and let the rest take care of itself.

A Chinese proverb says, “A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains.” And in Comanche wisdom the three virtues of life are compared to the owl, the bear, and the spider – the owl for wisdom, the bear for strength and the spider for patience. Of the three, the spider is the greatest because without it one will not develop either wisdom or strength.

Build patience as you overcome your fears, and the key to traversing the third portal is yours to wield.

### **The wisdom of the owl**



photo by Colyn Boyce

## 4. VIRAGA

The portal of patience brings us smoothly to the next key, which is desirelessness, or *Viraga*. *At the Feet of the Master* calls this qualification Dispassion. This is a pivotal key, for it represents the ability finally to turn from a focus on the outer world and rein in the personality. *Viraga* is a deep self-forgetfulness, leaving behind personal hurts and turning to a caring for others. In the pathway into the inner worlds, seeking gain for oneself is the serpent that lurks under every flower. A self-focused, separatist attitude converts any attempts at occult knowledge into black magic or the left hand path.

*Viraga* does not mean being without emotion; instead it refers to our ability to direct our emotional natures through our higher nature. Until we can renounce the less noble, selfish tendencies of the lower self we will continue to be engulfed in darkness. To quote HPB:

240. Beware, disciple, of that lethal shade. No light that shines from Spirit can dispel the darkness of the nether Soul, unless all selfish thought has fled therefrom, and that the pilgrim saith: "I have renounced this passing frame; I have destroyed the cause: the shadows cast can, as effects, no longer be." For now the last great fight, the final war between the *Higher* and the *Lower Self*, hath taken place.

When we reach the fourth portal, the monsters we face on the other side are said to be our own children – the thought forms we have built in creating our personal self. They swarm around us and make it difficult to see clearly beyond the self.

241. But once that thou hast passed the gate of Kshanti, step the third is taken. Thy body is thy slave. Now, for the fourth prepare, the Portal of temptations which do ensnare the *inner* man.

243. If thou would'st not be slain by them, then must thou harmless make thy own creations, the children of thy thoughts, unseen, impalpable, that swarm round humankind, the progeny and heirs to man and his terrestrial spoils.

The monsters here are our own thoughts – thoughts generated by the self for the self – a part of the *Ahamkara*, or I-making quality inherent in all humans. To go beyond self, it is essential to place the good of the whole above all personal desires. All true growth of spirit is the diminution of ego; otherwise it is distorted. Master M confirms this in the statement:

A man who places not the good of mankind above his own good is not worthy of becoming our *chela* [student] – he is not worthy of becoming higher in knowledge than his neighbour. If he craves for phenomena let him be satisfied with the pranks of spiritualism. (*Mahatma Letters*, chronological 33)

In other words, the goal is not to gain power or the ability to perceive or perform phenomena (the lower *Iddhis*), but to forget the glamour of self, and work for others. Consider this in light of the popular focus on psychic ways to get rich, win a sweetheart, or gain powers that make us feel we personally are special; all feed that ravenous wolf of self. The goal of this key is equanimity, being balanced in oneself without caring more for self than others, and recognizing clearly the purpose and function of life as a part of the greater whole.

245. For, on Path fourth, the lightest breeze of passion or desire will stir the steady light upon the pure white walls of Soul. The smallest wave of longing or regret for Maya's gifts illusive, along *Antahkarana* – the path that lies between thy Spirit and thy self, the highway of sensations, the rude arousers of *Ahamkara* – a thought as fleeting as the lightning flash will make thee thy three prizes forfeit – the prizes thou hast won.

The fourth key opens the portal through which we cross from the outer to the inner realms. This portal is sometimes called the bridge within, or the *Antahkarana*.

The first three keys relate to the outer person, the physical, emotional and lower mental vehicles; the final three keys relate to the inner self, comprised of the higher mental, intuitional, and unitive spirit. These are aspects of the higher self often referred to as the causal body or eternal self. *Viraga* sits in the middle as the bridge between the inner and outer, or higher and lower, selves.

252. Hold firm! Thou nearest now the middle portal, the gate of Woe, with its ten thousand snares.

253. Have mastery o'er thy thoughts, O striver for perfection, if thou would'st cross its threshold.

The 10,000 snares are the children of our thoughts. In order to cross the bridge safely, we have to completely master our mental functions – the field of action in the third portal.

259. A sense of pride would mar the work.

261. [T]hy Soul has to become as the ripe mango fruit: as soft and sweet as its bright golden pulp for others' woes, as hard as that fruit's stone for thine own throes and sorrows, O Conqueror of Weal and Woe.

Obtaining this center key of dispassion, desirelessness, or equanimity is a more difficult task. We have to be able to extract our personal likes and dislikes from our attitudes. We have to gain a sense of evenness in order to relate to each person equally. To explore this quality in yourself, think of a person of whom you are quite fond and be aware of the expansive feelings in your heart. Then turn your attention to someone who is merely an acquaintance and try to feel as caring and concerned for the second person as for the first. Feel the struggle within your heart.

From this exercise you can gain the sense of how much work there is to be done in crossing the bridge between the personal and impersonal.



Bridging the gulf

## 5. VIRYA

At this point we have gone beyond the qualities referenced in *At the Feet of the Master* and approach the more difficult inner workings of our being. The first four portals were no easy task, but they have prepared us to move ahead and face the fifth portal. Its key is:

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

*Virya* is the energy of steady focus, continuing effort without pride or demand for progress. We have to be persistent against all odds. We can feel no sense of discouragement, even in the face of overwhelming odds or when we feel that we have failed.

274. Remember, thou that fightest for man's liberation, each failure is success, and each sincere attempt wins its reward in time. The holy germs that sprout and grow unseen in the disciple's soul, their stalks wax strong at each new trial, they bend like reeds but never break, nor can they e'er be lost. But when the hour has struck they blossom forth.

276. Henceforth thy way is clear right through the *Virya* gate, the fifth one of the Seven Portals.

*Virya* results from a concentrated and gentle force of being that comes from a continuous identification with higher mind. No ridicule, no criticism, no isolation, no danger can shake one from the total commitment to the higher Self. Traveling in this realm, the pilgrim faces the pitfalls of pride and sloth. Once having achieved success over the prideful personality, one cannot languish or dawdle but must be ever vigilant.

This quality of persistence within the higher mental realms has a harmonic resonance with the virtue designated for the lower mental plane. There is a connection between the patience of *Kshanti* and the fixed determination of *Virya*. Patience must be balanced by determined effort, and determined effort must be balanced by patience. Otherwise we might hold back and do nothing forever, or rush forth in a rash and unreasonable manner – doing more harm than good.



There is an interesting poem by Walt Whitman, who himself had a major spiritual revelation while on a cruise ship heading up the Atlantic seaboard. After this experience he was never the same and his poetry took on a mystical focus. In the following poem, he compares his soul to a spider that persistently throws out its filaments into the unknown ether, hoping to catch hold somewhere in those vast reaches.

### **A Noiseless Patient Spider**

*A patient noiseless spider,*

*I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood belated,*

*Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,*

*It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,*

*Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.*

*And you O my soul where you stand,*

*Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,*

*Ceaselessly running, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,*

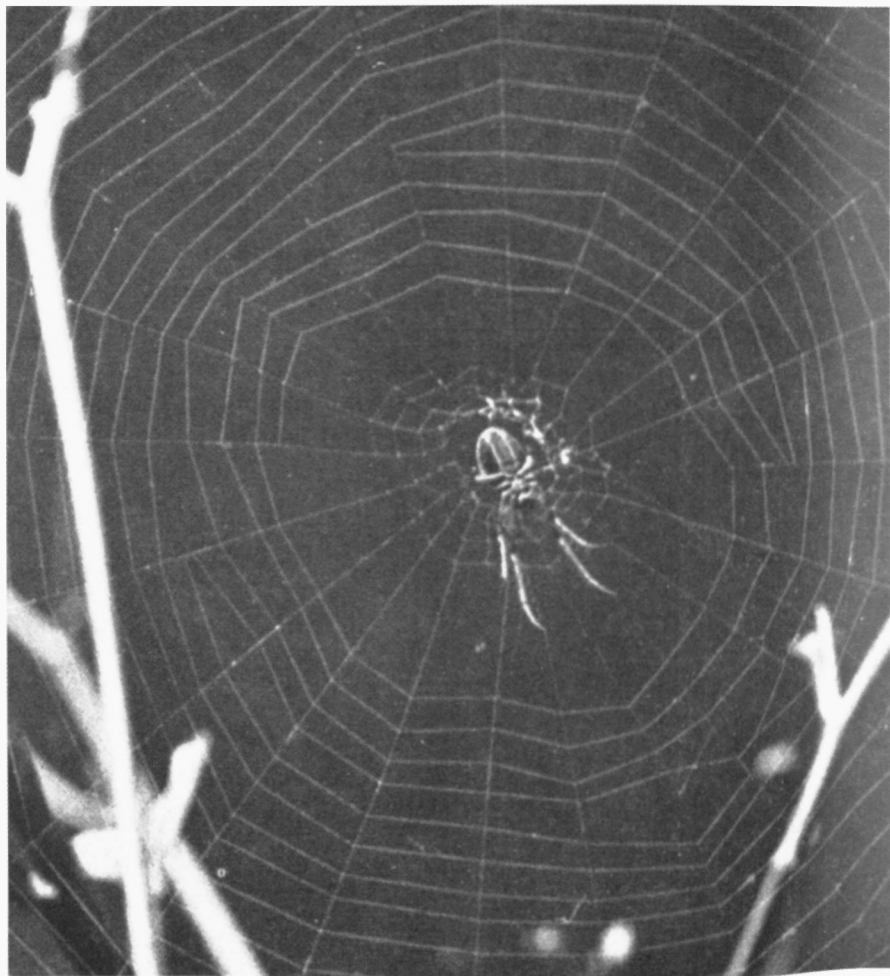
*Til the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,*

*Til the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere; O my soul.*

This kind of steady determination is so necessary in the subtle realms of higher mind where there may be no sense of progress, and in which one has made every effort to leave the self behind. During attempts at meditation one can seem to hang in an indefinable void with no place to gain a toehold.

In considering *Kshanti*, we explored an example of personal success in building patience. To understand the application of *Virya*, think of something you

still want to overcome — perhaps an irritable attitude, a lazy streak, over-indulgence, or a lack of commitment to regular meditation. There is no end to the things we humans can get ourselves into that we then have to work our way out of, or that we can feel ourselves too busy or self-important to tackle. For *Virya*, commit to conquering this shortcoming and plan for persistent attempts to overcome, knowing that previous failures were only steps toward success. Call on your higher self for the added courage and resolve to achieve victory. In doing so, you hold in your being the fifth key, that of strenuous perseverance.



**The patience of the spider**

## 6. DHYANA

The sixth key is *Dhyana*, for the portal of the same name. *Dhyana* means meditation. An individual can possess nothing more valuable than some point of access to the quiet refuge of the inner Self.

269. Beware, lest in the care of Self thy Soul should lose her foothold on the soil of Deva-knowledge.

270. Beware, lest in forgetting SELF, thy Soul lose o'er its trembling mind control, and forfeit thus the due fruition of its conquests.

276. . . . Thou art now on the way that leadeth to the Dhyana haven, the sixth, the Bodhi Portal.

277. The Dhyana gate is like an alabaster vase, white and transparent; within there burns a steady golden fire, the flame of Prajna that radiates from Atman.

278. Thou art that vase.

Less is said about this, the sixth *paramita* or portal, than about the others, but it is a major tool to use in our lives every day. Treading the path of service and self-denial, we can never lose touch with our inner being. On the one hand we should think little of our needs, and ourselves, but on the other we have to realize that cultivation of this inner life is paramount for being able to accomplish all the rest.

HPB compares the pilgrim's conscious awareness in the Buddhist field to a transparent jar. If the higher mind is held in absolute stillness, the flame of the Highest can shine through without a flicker or distortion. From this stillness sounds the voice of the silence, without whose guidance we quickly lose our way. But this clarity only happens when the life lived is in total harmony with the deepest levels of understanding. In other words, the key of *Dhyana* has a harmonic resonance with *Shila* (harmonious actions). Whatever insights come from meditation must be carried out in daily living, or else they disappear into vapour with no concrete manifestation, and thus echo the Biblical warning, "Faith without works is dead." (*James 2:26*)

For *Dhyana*, remember an inward realization you have had that needed to be acted upon, but that you have let slide. Think about ways you can express that realization in your life. The true method of cultivating intuition is to honour it by acting on its promptings. Commit to regular meditation and to honour your insights by practicing them, and you will hold the key of *Dhyana*.



photo by Colyn Boyce

## 7. PRAJNA

The key to the final portal is *Prajna*, or wisdom – the flame burns steadily in the jar. The pilgrim has become every one of the keys, and every one of the portals. The pilgrim has embodied all of the previous *paramitas* – charity, harmonious living, patience, equanimity, perseverance, and meditation – in order to become fully wise, fully human, an enlightened being.

We may not have achieved this lofty height yet, but there are many reverberations of growth in each of these qualities as we traverse our path. At each level of development, all of the keys come into action – not in sequence, but simultaneously synchronised – all parts developing more or less in step with each other.

At the full achievement of the last step of *Prajna*, one's highest selfhood, united with the all, is finally supreme, and the personality is eliminated as a psychological factor. Universality alone continues. We find ourselves where we began – with the attitude of unity and brotherhood for all. At this final threshold into full wisdom we have achieved the ability to see the divine in everyone we encounter. When this has occurred and the aspirant takes the final step through the *Prajna* portal, all of nature rejoices.

279. Thou hast estranged thyself from objects of the senses, travelled on the "Path of seeing," on the "Path of hearing," and standest in the light of Knowledge.

281. Know, Conqueror of Sins, once that a Sowanee [a practitioner in meditation] hath cross'd the seventh Path, all Nature thrills with joyous awe and feels subdued. The silver star now twinkles out the news to the night-blossoms, the streamlet to the pebbles ripples out the tale; dark ocean-waves will roar it to the rocks surf-bound, scent-laden breezes sing it to the vales, and stately pines mysteriously whisper: "A Master has arisen, a MASTER OF THE DAY."

284. Shall he not use the gifts which it confers for his own rest and bliss, his well-earn'd weal and glory – he, the subduer of the great Delusion?

285. *Nay*, O thou candidate for Nature's hidden lore! If one would follow in the steps of holy Tathagata, those gifts and powers are not for Self.

286. Would'st thou thus dam the waters born on Sumeru? [Mt Meru, sacred Mountain of the Gods]. Shalt thou divert the stream for thine own sake, or send it back to its prime source along the crests of cycles?

287. If thou would'st have that stream of hard-earn'd knowledge, of Wisdom heaven-born, remain sweet running waters, thou should'st not leave it to become a stagnant pond.

We cannot become a stagnant system. The practice of brotherhood or charity is paramount at every step. As Master KH said in *Mahatma Letter 5*:

The term “Universal Brotherhood” is no idle phrase. Humanity in the mass has a paramount claim upon us . . . It is the only secure foundation for universal morality. If it be a dream, it is at least a noble one for mankind: and it is the aspiration of the *true adept*.

As HPB said,

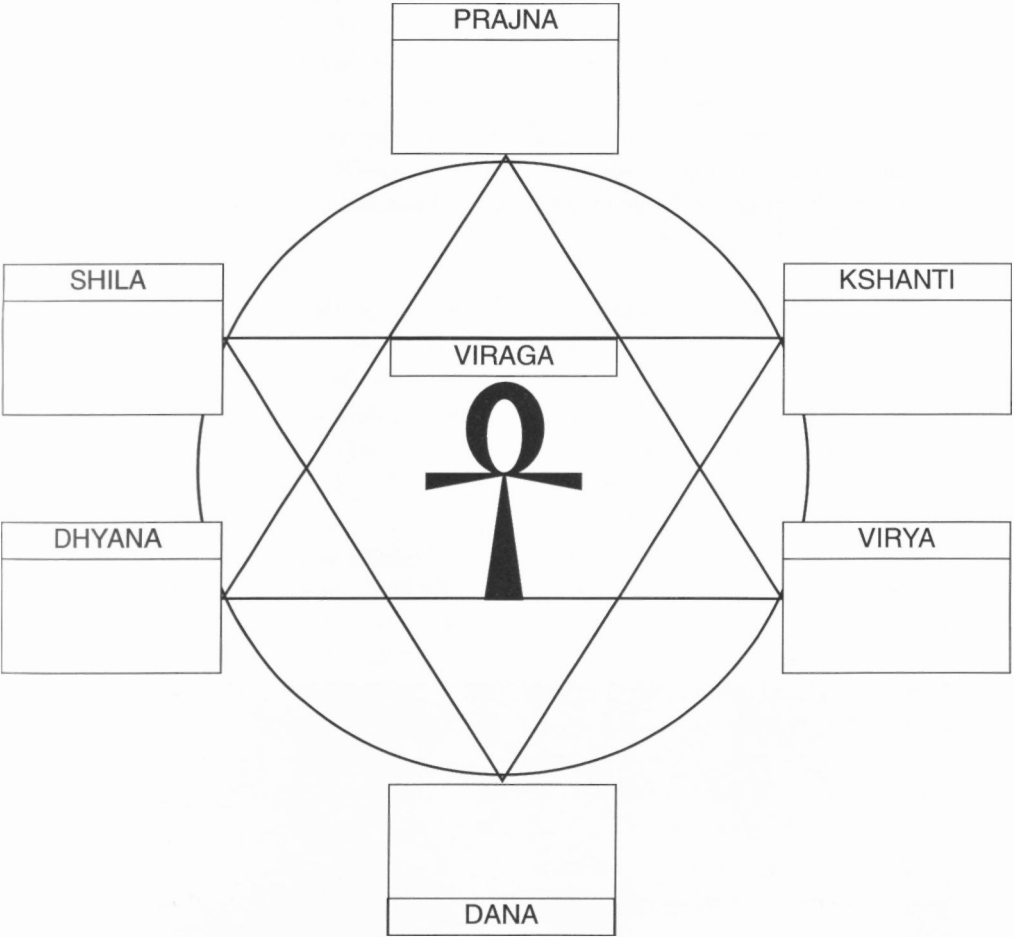
There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the Universe . . . For those who win onwards there is reward past all telling – the power to bless and save humanity (*Collected Writings* 13:219).

These seven keys are inextricably interrelated. They overlap in many ways, so that you cannot begin using one key without the rest of them beginning to come into play. To demonstrate this interrelationship, look at the illustration. Note that *Dana*, *Shila*, and *Kshanti* form a triangle that relates to the outer personality. Moreover, if you connect the points from *Prajna* to *Dhyana* to *Virya* and return, you see the triangle that reflects the inner self.

Every connecting line touches on *Viraga* – the bridge between the personality and inner Self. This is where the sacrifice of self occurs and thus, in its midst, it is appropriate to place the Ankh, representing spirit (as symbolized by the circle) sacrificed on, yet victorious over matter (as symbolized by the cross). We may encircle all the points as one key as they are actually one. This composite Key is the symbol for Theosophy worldwide, altruism being a cornerstone of Theosophy.

Madame Blavatsky said that altruism is an integral part of self-development and a foundation for the Theosophical Society. Each one of us, as members and

# THE VIRTUOUS KEY





aspirants to the lofty goals of Theosophy, carry the pattern of that composite or master Key within ourselves. We are becoming the path, the seven keys and the seven portals.

As a way of summing up, I borrow from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* the verse about the ring of power:

*One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,  
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.*

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring is evil and must be destroyed: it commands all the other rings of power and dominates anyone who uses it. It represents selfishness and malevolence, the very opposite of the altruism that is the One Key underlying the seven keys of the *paramitas*. So we can restate that verse from *Lord of the Rings* to describe the keys and the gates, which we are both seeking and becoming:

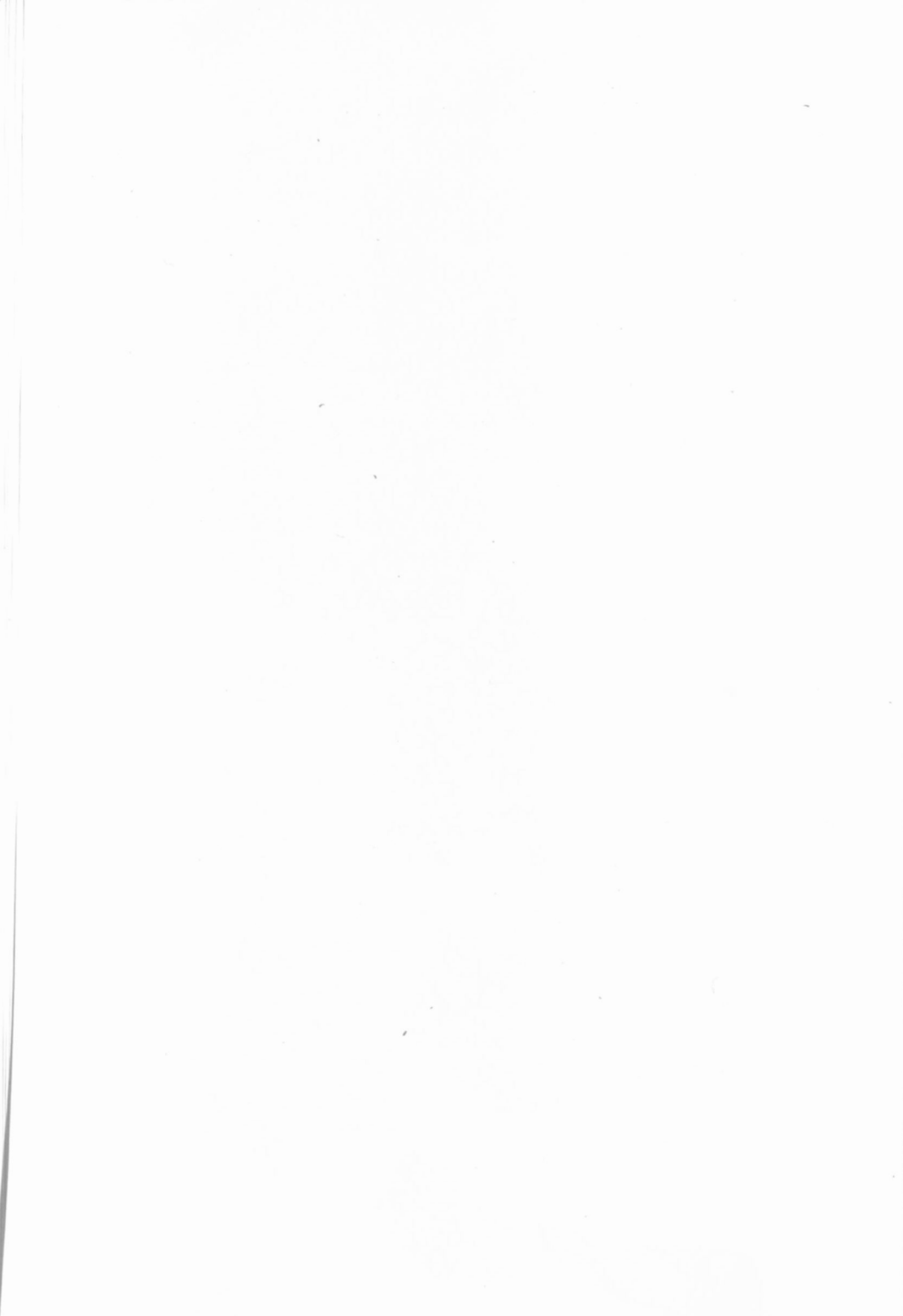
*One Key to guide them all, One Key to find them,  
One Key to bring them all and in true service join them.*

The Path begins and ends with brotherhood, sisterhood, and familyhood. By whatever name, that is the Key that incorporates all others and without which we cannot enter even the verdant pastures at the very beginning of the journey.

Let us first and foremost as Theosophists, as spiritual seekers, take this greatest of keys and open the gates of our own hearts to everyone and everything around us. Thus we will win the reward past all telling – the power to bless and save humanity.



photo by Colyn Boyce



## ***Biographical Details***

### **BETTY BLAND**

Betty Bland is National President of the Theosophical Society in America. She is a national lecturer for the American Section of the Society and has presented workshops on the spiritual life both in the United States of America and abroad. Her professional life has included work as a teacher, employment counsellor, systems analyst and entrepreneur.



Betty is interested in the practical application of theosophical principles to everyday life situations. She has been a member of the Society since 1970 and has served in many capacities for local and regional activities. She has served also on the Boards of Directors of The Theosophical Order of Service and Theosophical Book Gift Institute.