

Masters of Wisdom by C.W. Leadbeater

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[Page 1] THE existence of perfected man is one of the most distinctive, and also one of the most encouraging, teachings in Theosophy. It follows, if one thinks it out, from the doctrines of Evolution and Reincarnation. It is quite clear that if the spirit of man is steadily unfolding itself; if it comes again and again into new bodies, each in some way or other a little better than the last one; if we can see, as we do, men standing at all levels, on all rungs of this evolutionary ladder; then it is surely clear that this process of evolution does not stop with us. There certainly have been men greater in every way than any of us is, those men also were specimens of human evolution, and if they are still continuing in evolution they must assuredly still be greater than we. Where, then, are those men clearly greater than ourselves? This scheme of evolution must have certain definite stages, and it must have a goal. The probability would be, reasoning from analogy, that it has several goals; that is to say, it has an immediate goal and an ultimate goal, the last more difficult to understand, because we can see no particular reason why such a process should ever stop, but at any rate there is probably some immediate goal, the attainment of [Page 2] which would be the high-water mark of humanity as it stands at present. If that is so, then there should be some who have reached it, there should certainly be many who have come nearer to it than at the present time we have come. We have heard of great men of all times, the church, for example, tells us of her great saints in the past. These perfected men are saints, but they are also very much more than saints, for they are men who have achieved all that was set before them. As it is put in *The Light of Asia*, they have worked the purpose through of what did make them Man, and so they are now more than men. They are super-men, and are entering upon a higher stage of evolution than any we know.

Now the system of evolution is that the Monad, which is a spark of the divine fire, descends into matter. No words that we can use are strictly applicable to this Monad; it stands beyond our powers of expression altogether; but we come perhaps nearest to it if we call it simply a fragment of Divinity. There can truly be no fragment in that which is all-pervading, and yet any other term is, I think, somewhat more misleading. The Monad has been spoken of as a reflection of the Deity, but it is very much more than a mere reflection, and to our limited understanding the term fragment conveys more of the reality than the other. But of course one must admit that it is quite a wrong term to use. This fragment then, being a fragment of the Divine, has within itself all goodness, all perfection, in potentiality. What it [Page 3] has to do in the course of such evolution as may come to it is to unfold all this. As it stands, Divine though it be, it appears incapable of acting or working down here upon these lower planes. It needs to descend into matter in order to obtain definiteness, accuracy and a grasp of physical details, as it were. It must already know far more than we down here can know of the infinite, of the higher and altogether the grander side of everything, and yet it does not apparently possess the power of grasping physical details down here, the power of acting in physical matter with definiteness and precision. It can descend only to a certain level. So far as we are concerned, in this solar system it descends to the second of our planes. We speak in Theosophy of certain planes or subdivision of matter; of these we have seven, and counting from the top downwards this Monad descends to the second only, and would appear to be unable in its totality to penetrate beyond it. It can project a very small part of itself a good deal further down, as far down as the upper part of what we call the mental plane, which is the fifth from the top; it can reach only the higher part apparently of that plane, and there it again comes to the end of its possibilities. That

projection we call the ego. It corresponds closely with what some people call the soul. When the ego is still undeveloped he needs powerful and comparatively coarse vibrations to affect him at first, and since these do not exist on his own plane he has to put himself down to lower levels in order to find them. Therefore, he in turn does what the Monad [Page 4] did. He cannot as a whole descend any lower, but he can project a small part of himself down to the physical plane upon which we are now living, and to that small fragment of a fragment we give the name of the personality. Now that personality dips down into matter on behalf of the ego, or soul, of which it is a part, and its object is to return to that ego bearing with it the result of what it has learned to do. It, as a small part of that ego, learns to function down here, to work through a physical brain; learns to act in the astral and mental body, and then presently goes back again to the ego bearing with it the capacities which it has developed. The capacity to respond to one set of vibrations we should call love, to another would be devotion, to another sympathy, and so on. It can all be expressed in terms of vibration, and that is really in many ways the most scientific way to approach the matter. Anyway, this fragment goes back again and again to the ego from which it came, bearing with it each time slightly advanced powers. There comes a time in the process of evolution when the ego has unified the personality with itself. The man then enters upon a special training, and the end of that special training is to carry him as rapidly as may be to the level which is set for humanity in this particular set of worlds through which we are evolving. This particular cycle of evolution in which we are engaged has to take us to a certain definite level. When a man has attained that level he will have reached the stage at which the ego and the Monad [Page 5] are unified, when the Monad can use the ego simply as an instrument, and work through it on all the planes on which it has been developing. That is the end of purely human evolution, and a man is then fit for Adeptship.

All the lower kingdoms, and the evolution which has been going on through them, are preparatory for that of which I am speaking to you, because you will remember the ego descends only when individualization takes place. That is what is meant by individualization, the definite separate ego entering into the man. We are all at a definite stage in evolution, some of course in advance of others, but broadly speaking our position is this: Our physical bodies are developed, and they should be perfectly under our control. Of course, we know in many cases they are not, but we all recognize that they should be; that part of our evolution is attained. We have fully developed the next vehicle, the astral body, but that is as yet not completely under control, except in the case of a very few. The astral body is the vehicle of emotion and desire, and the majority of the human race unquestionably lives in its emotions and for its emotions and for its desires. Some few there are who have conquered this lower self and transcended all desires, and live for altogether other and higher purposes; but as yet they are only a few, and the majority of men are still at the stage where they ought to be working to gain control over this body of emotion and desire. The next vehicle, the mental body, is with all of us only in [Page 6] process of development. Intellect certainly has done a vast amount for us, but it is capable of doing very much more, and it will do very much more. Our mental bodies are as yet only very partially developed, except in the case of a very few.

Now when these three vehicles have been subordinated to the ego, the man is ready to enter upon that higher, special form of training, but it does not follow, of course, that the man who has become an Initiate has perfectly developed all these; it is quite certain that he has not, because if he had, he would have then attained Adeptship. But the man who is treading the Path must have single-mindedness, he must have only the one aim — the aim of helping evolution. When the path of descent into humanity has been accomplished, when the man has attained Adeptship, then he proceeds to live his real life, the life of the Monad, to which all that has happened previously is only the introduction. If one can grasp this conception of evolution, one sees at once that our actions and our objects in any one life can be only relative, only of small account, as compared to the whole. When a man thinks he lives only this one life

here, of course the aims of this one life are the things of real importance to him, but when he realizes that this life is only one day in a larger life, all these things which are for one day only are things of subordinate account. Now such a man, having become an Adept, having attained that goal of human life, usually drops material bodies altogether, but he retains the power to take a body at [Page 7] any level whenever it is needed for his work. I cannot go aside now into the work which he is doing, but we may imagine it to be very much like that which is usually attributed to the angels. The word angel is derived from a Greek word meaning messenger. The angels are the messengers of God, and so these people who are more than human become His messengers also, and humanity is only a stage through which they have passed in order that they might develop the power to be His messengers, the faculties required for such work. Most of them, as I have said, have no physical bodies, and they pass entirely away from our ken, but some of these perfected men remain in touch with the world in, order to fill offices which are necessary for the progress of evolution in the world.

Human progress is not left to take care of itself as many have thought; it is being steadily guided, surely, though slowly, on its way; the progress is very slow, this progress of humanity through the centuries, yet it is definite progress, it is after all moving, and as it moves it is definitely guided. I know that the whole of evolution looks a mere chaos when regarded from below, but when looked at from above one sees that, however slow it may seem, the progress is orderly. The attainment of perfection is a possibility which is certainly lying before every man in the course of his evolution, and at any given moment he may turn his attention to that evolution of his and may hasten it very greatly if he will take it intelligently in hand. Very few of these great and [Page 8] perfected men stay behind in order to fill these places in connection with the direction of the different developments of terrestrial evolution. Out of that small body again quite a small number are willing to take apprentices, to take men who are like-minded with themselves, and train them to do the work which they are doing. Those who have already reached that level, so far as this world is concerned, are a small body of men only; you will easily understand that they are men, not of one nation, but of all the developed nations of the world. These are men who, having attained, are free from the usual laws governing humanity — I mean such laws as compel a man to take incarnation in this place or that. They are no longer forced into any incarnation; if they take a body it is for the purpose of helping humanity, and they can take that body where and when they please. It is not of any particular importance in what race they choose to present themselves.

As a matter of fact some sixteen of these Great Ones are individually known to me. I know of many more than that, but these are those with whom I have more or less come into contact, and these I find to belong to most of the leading races. Four of these are at present wearing Indian bodies; two of them are at present in English bodies. One of the very greatest of all is in an Irish body, two are Greek, and three others have bodies in Aryan races, but I do not know what was the place of their birth. There are some others still greater who come from another evolution altogether. So that you see there is no [Page 9] foundation for the common idea that all such teachers belong to the one race, nor do they all live together like monks in a monastery on this plane.

What are the particular characteristics of an Adept ? His powers are many and to us most wonderful, because he understands perfectly the working of many laws of Nature which are at present to us a sealed book. But perhaps the characteristic which dominates all others in an Adept is that he looks upon everything from a point of view quite different from ours. He has absolutely no desires or thoughts connected with himself; he is thinking only and absolutely about the work that he has to do; he exists for that, and his work is always in some form or other helping forward this process of evolution; he exists

entirely for that, and there is no thought of himself. Now that is so different a point of view from the ordinary one that it is hard for people to understand at all, but there are some enthusiasts, who live only for some great cause with which they have identified themselves, who will be able to grasp the idea, will be able to understand that a man may truly forget himself in this great work. Another very striking characteristic is the all-round development of the Adept. All of us, you must know, I think, are imperfect in our development, that is to say, one side of our character, one set of our qualities, is usually developed much more than the other. The Adept is equally developed along all lines, and because of that he strikes us always as a very wonderful person, because on every point, as it were, he is able [Page 10] to meet you, along every line he is able to understand perfectly. We are often asked, suppose an ordinary man were to meet an Adept, would he know that he was an Adept? I think probably not; he would certainly know that he was in the presence of one who was impressive, noble, dignified, but there would be no definite external peculiarity by which he could divine the fact that the man was an Adept. He would see in him a calmness, a benevolence, a certainty, expressing the peace which passeth all understanding. And yet there would be nothing to mark him out from any other good man, except perhaps the wisdom that he would show. He would be, I think, more silent than most, for an Adept speaks only with a definite purpose, only for the purpose of encouraging or helping on the great work, and he certainly does not waste his forces in idle conversation. He would be always kindly, and yet have a very keen sense of humor, but a humor that would never be exercised in a way that would wound anyone, but only to help a man on his way, or generally to make the man see a thing in the proper light. A man without a sense of humor would certainly not make progress along occult lines; it is a very necessary quality indeed. So, we might say, the ordinary man might meet an Adept and certainly not know him as such; he would hardly fail to be impressed by the man, but he certainly might not recognize his occult power.

Now as to the question of evidence of their existence, I myself needed no evidence of their [Page 11] existence, because I knew at once that if evolution were true, and if reincarnation were a fact, there must be such men somewhere, and it did not seem to me at all unreasonable that one should sometimes be able to come in contact with them. But for you who approach the thing in a somewhat different way, there is plenty of testimony available. We all came into this matter through the teaching of our great founder, Madame Blavatsky; she herself bore witness that she had seen many of these Masters, that she had stayed in the house of one of them, and that she had met many of them over and over again, and was indeed in constant communication with them. Her co-founder, our first President, Colonel Olcott, also bore witness to exactly the same thing; he himself had on many occasions encountered these Masters, and had seen them both astrally and physically. Our present Vice-President, Mr. A. P. Sinnett, gave the same testimony, as also our present President, Mrs. Annie Besant. She knows personally many of these Great Ones, and can tell you that she has seen them over and over again under circumstances which entirely preclude any idea of mistake or error of any sort. I can myself give the same testimony that I have seen a great number of them, and know very closely, and if one may venture to say it, intimately, all those whom I have just mentioned to you. Many of our members have been privileged to see one or two of the Great Masters, many others have recollections of them which are hardly sufficiently defined to [Page 12] be brought forward as testimony to others, although entirely convincing to the man or woman who experiences them. The only objection which is made to such testimony is that we may have dreamt these things, or we may have been deluded, and the reason why it is possible to make such a suggestion as that is that the circumstances of the case preclude us from frequently meeting these Great Ones, when both they and we are wearing our physical bodies.

Of course, there are those who say that the whole Theosophical idea is a sort of fraud, and that we simply pretend to have seen these Great Ones. A great many people are uncertain about the testimony,

because they say: "You have seen these people, but you have seen them when you were in your astral body, and you have brought back the memory of that into your physical brain. We do not know anything about astral bodies, we are not even certain that we possess such things, and we cannot be sure that the recollection brought in that way is a true recollection; it seems to us to be very much in the nature of a dream". But since many of us are, and have been for many years, in daily communication with these Great Ones, it would surely need a somewhat phenomenal power of dreaming, if all our experiences of this kind are but vivid dreams. Spiritualistic friends have sometimes asked me: "How do you know these Masters of yours really exist on the physical plane; may they not be, after all, spirits from higher spheres, who have somehow mesmerized you, and are pretending to live on the physical plane ?" All I can [Page 13] say is that if there could be so complete a dominion as that sustained over all these years, then I suppose that might be so; I do not know that I am in a position to prove anything to the contrary, because of course on that theory we may be hypnotized to believe anything. If any evidence can be taken, here is the evidence of these people, and many others. These things exist, but there is this objection, that a great number of the interviews which take place happen when we are in our astral bodies, and the Great One in his physical body; sometimes the process is reversed, when we in our physical bodies suddenly find standing beside us one of these Great Ones in a materialized form. You will say that also might be some sort of hallucination. As I have told you, these Great Ones keep themselves to a large extent apart from humanity, simply because they can do very much better and more satisfactory work when they are so apart. You must think of them as great spiritual powers, as working on the souls of men and not on their bodies. You will find that both Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott tell you in their books that they themselves, being in their physical bodies, have met some of these Great Ones, also in their physical bodies. Similar testimony is given by various other writers.

I myself, for example, can bear witness that I have seen two of these Great Ones when both they and I were in our physical bodies. In one case I had the honor of receiving an invitation to dine and spend the night at the house of one of these great men who [Page 14] lived in India, so there at least I had the fullest possible proof of physical existence, and as I had previously seen the same Great One many times in the astral body, to meet him in his physical body was additional proof. In the case of one of the European Adepts, I had the privilege of meeting him in the Corso in Rome. So you see there is evidence for those who desire the evidence, testimony just precisely as you would get with regard to the existence of any other persons whom you had not yourself seen. But I have never needed the testimony for myself, because of the fact that I feel certain that these people must exist, and, therefore, to be told that they do, is only exactly what one would expect.

The interest for me has always centered round how one may learn from them; how one may come closely into touch with them, and be trained to help in this wonderful work they are doing, the forwarding of the evolution of humanity. We were told in the early days of this possibility when we spoke to Madame Blavatsky herself, and asked her: "Is it possible for us in any sort of way to learn more than this, can we in any way get into touch with these Great Ones of whom you tell us, can we work for them?" She said: "Yes, certainly you can, but remember that they have no favorites; they will take a man certainly and make him an apprentice, but they will do so only if he promises to be a useful apprentice, only if he shows by his character now that he will be able to work as they worked when he has been taught; because any [Page 15] man who still has within himself anything of self-seeking, any man who is thinking of his own progress and not of the work to be done, will certainly not come into touch with them, just because it would waste their time to invest it in training him." For though their powers seem to us like those of a God, they are so far greater in every way than ourselves, and themselves are so much nobler - yet each Master's power is after all limited. And Madame Blavatsky told us that they hold themselves

responsible for using that power to the very last ounce of it, for putting it to the very best possible use for the progress of evolution. If by teaching a man they could obtain within reasonable time a good instrument, one who under their guidance would do a vast amount of definite good in the world, definite good for the progress of evolution then they would consider it worth their while to invest in that man the amount of time necessary for his training; but if they did not think that the man would repay their trouble, then they would consider the time spent in teaching that man would not be spent to the best advantage.

And so absolutely the only way for any person to come to be accepted by them is to go to work and show what he can do without the training to be an unselfish and workman, to get to work on some altruistic undertaking. So long as he is working absolutely without thought of himself, and only for a cause which is definitely for the good of humanity, then such a man has the possibility of being noted and guided by some of these Great Ones, for they [Page 16] are ever on the watch for those who will take their places in the future. Therefore, anyone may come near to them in that way, but it is not by any sort of favoritism, it is simply by going to work and deserving their notice. The knowledge of the plan of evolution is available to us all as Theosophists; there it is for us to study, and if, having studied it, and having gained some sort of understanding, we wish to draw nearer to them, the path is always open. Be sure that we can reach them only by making ourselves unselfish as they are unselfish, by learning to forget our personal selves and devoting ourselves, as they do, wholly to the service of humanity.