

The Vow of Holy Obedience

I had a letter the other day telling me that a Vow of Holy Obedience had been imposed in Pasadena. From this I realised instantly that nobody in that enlightened district had the smallest idea what the Vow of Holy Obedience really is.

It is nothing whatever to do with obedience; it is a practice like or any of the other branches of Yoga. If you will read "Little Essays Towards Truth" you will find on Page 39 an Essay on the The perusal of this Essay should help you to acquire some idea of the philosophical basis which underlies this practice, but you must not suppose that the two stages can be run into each other. The trance described in the book is fundamental and of the order of Samadhi. Nevertheless, the training of the Vow should be of invaluable preliminary help to the attainment of the trance.

It seems best to begin by sketching out roughly the rules of the game. I say 'game' because the best way to regard it is as a game. The pupil must appoint a teacher. It does not matter in the least who the teacher is; he does not have to be a member of the Order or a distinguished spiritual authority of any kind. It is sufficient if he is intelligent, a good observer and psychologist and his attainments in these latter qualities will improve rapidly as his experience in playing the game increases. It may be better on the whole if he is not an initiate unless he is a very high initiate indeed. These half-baked adepts invariably muddle things and get them wrong. Human perversity or cussedness has its clear way with them.

It is much to be desired that the teacher and pupil should be living together or at least spending the great bulk of the hours of leisure in each other's company. The teacher must, of course, have a certain amount of common-sense. He must not, for instance, tell the pupil to jump out of a 56th floor room unless he is quite certain of being able to countermand the order before the pupil hits the sidewalk. The fundamental rule of the game is unique and simple. The pupil must do instantly what the teacher happens to order without reference whatever to the character of the order. It is really somewhat the spirit of the Light Brigade or of the rules of the Society of Jesus, but the difference is absolute because in this case the teacher has an object other than the training of the pupil and his emancipation from the thralldom of circumstance. In our practice the teacher gets nothing out of it but an increased knowledge of human nature and a certain technical skill both in observation and in the technique of making use of the results of that observation. So far as he can be consider

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in any respect a spiritual director, it is only in just this one way, that he should adjust the nature of his orders to the rate of progress made by the pupil. One point is fairly important. He should not space his orders too closely. The game loses its point if the pupil abandons his work or other occupation in order to attend exclusively to the acts of obedience. The teacher, on the other hand, ought to watch the pupil pretty closely all the time or nearly all the time. He has got to give him a chance to get interested in what he is doing before he tells him to get up and stand in the corner and say 'boo' six times or whatever it is. Nor should the orders be wholly arbitrary and absurd. The teacher should study his pupil's character very closely so as to be able to recognise instantly the sort of things that most annoy him and he must try to steer a careful course. One doesn't want the pupil to be altogether outraged to the point of losing his temper unless there is some special reason for emphasizing that part of the training which deals with this kind of self-control.

He must, in particular, be careful not to abuse his function. He must not in any way seek to influence the pupil; as I said at first he doesn't have to be the pupil's spiritual superior and he must be very careful not to get into his head that he knows better than the pupil what is good for him. In fact, the pupil himself should be able to assist very notably in the progress of the practice, especially when it comes to advanced stages where special points are involved.

In order to do this properly, it is of the first necessity, as in the case of every other practice, to make a minutely careful and meticulously accurate record. The teacher should moreover try to establish some sort of scale of marking so as to put on record the degree of hesitation shewn by the pupil at first in obeying the order.

Another point is that the element of surprise is extremely valuable. One doesn't want a routine of any kind unless it be decided to make a special feature of the practice the routine caused by the monotony of repeating the same aimless and useless act.

I really write this in considerable hope that a good deal of these remarks will be in most cases unnecessary. I should like to think that teacher and pupil are united by sincere love and devotion, by care for the well-being and advancement of both parties and it is also hoped that both will rapidly enter into the spirit of the game, regarded as a contest of wits, and make it not a boring magical practice but the most amusing part of the day's doings.

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to perturb him in any way by the giving of any order whatsoever. He has got to perform the required act with complete serenity, and indeed let me say, in the spirit in which the order happens to be given. It is not sufficient for him to carry out the order and get it over. Although he well knows it to be part of the game, he must treat it as if serious considerations were involved.

It will probably be best for a week or two to keep this game quite separate from life outside what I must call the classroom, but when a certain degree of automatic inattention to the order has been acquired, it might be convenient to extend the operation of the game to the petty irritations of daily life. He must acquire the faculty of treating every such occurrence with what I feel inclined to call sympathetic contempt.

This practice will be found to lead to complete self-mastery in the routine of ordinary life. It will provide complete anesthesia and after a certain stage of perfection has been attained it will even remove from the mind the liability to worry. I am so convinced of this that I feel inclined to seek a new goal and start it myself all over again.

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