

The Call of Isis

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CHAPTER 15 **THE TRAVELLER AT THE GATEWAY**

All our essays so far have been trial runs: astral projection through trance, dream changing, and sporadic 'magnetic' happenings. These merely show a sign-post that there are other spheres of consciousness transcending our own. Finally, we have to learn to be able to ascend and descend the planes of being with conscious will. Otherwise we are the plaything of various forces, and have no power of choice. Travelling on the London underground system, one chooses one's destination; and one learns where to change trains, which moving stairway to use. So in learning to change one's level of being, one has to learn the rules for safe progress.

As usual, when we wish to learn how to do something that is new and strange, it is best to take simple instances in our every-day lives. Spending an evening in earth life, we can choose whom we shall meet, where to go, and what to do when we get there. The young people in the Castle can choose to walk down the avenue during the evening, and go to either of the two public houses in the village. Within one of these they can sing ballads, drink moderately or too much, argue, or make friends. Another of them can choose to stay in the Castle and play classical records. Someone else is busy writing a book in the library. A girl is making a dress. And others sit with me in group meditation. An older visitor has gone early to bed and is fast asleep.

So in our experiments with consciousness, it is of vital importance to choose where we want to go, what we want to do, and why. Otherwise we will not only waste time and energy, but may get lost.

For there is always that person who is led into spending an evening, in an unpleasant way, and is left with a hangover from too much drinking, or a bad headache from excessive study.

It must be realized that though good may be termed absolute, the expression of the absolute in this earth life is relative to the person and circumstances. So ethics are absolute and of God: morality, what one chooses to do, is relative to one's spiritual age, one's natural talents, and one's particular path. I emphasise this because, when it comes to choice, one is not really free to criticise the way anyone else elects to spend his time. Sincerity is the most important thing. To sing ballads in the local public house, if one really likes it, is infinitely more worth-while than to sit through highbrow records as a duty, when really one is bored: or to sit pretending to meditate, in order to feel spiritually superior to other people.

This relativity of choice also applies to a person's aspiration for heightened consciousness. It is easy to believe that it is good to ascend, to be 'up', and to visualize oneself joining the angels in heaven, but how sincere is one?

I once made up a ridiculous story of the Day of Judgement, in which angels suddenly appeared to humanity, and said that they were going to whisk the Do-gooders up to heaven! The unrighteous could stay behind on earth for many more lives, without any missionaries, welfare workers and the rest of the Righteous. The unrighteous were naturally extremely pleased at this, and

announced at once that public houses would remain open all night, that censorship could go, and that now at last they were free to be happy in their own way. As they saw the Righteous whirl up to heaven in spaceships, they heartily thanked the angels; and looked forward to a cheerful future, having plenty of food, drink, sex and babies.

However, I could not picture the Righteous as being that pleased. They had been spending hours in churches singing about going to heaven, leaving behind all earthly fleeting pleasures, but now . . . did they like the prospect before them as they floated upwards? Never again would they feel the lash of rain and wind, to laugh, to eat, to drink, to make love. Never again could they argue and fight, gossip, or experience bodily pleasure. They could put up with such deprivations, if the Unrighteous were to suffer in hell. But to have to leave them inheriting the earth, actually enjoying themselves! This was too much.

What is this heaven like that you are taking us up to? They might well ask the angels. And the reply? Heaven is as you have portrayed it. You are expected to spend your time there singing psalms and playing the organ - in plainsong. Not even Gounod is allowed in such a heaven.

The punishment of the hypocrite is to receive what he pretends he likes. The fate of all snobs.

So when we determine that we want to increase our consciousness, we must first be sure that we really want to do this: and do not secretly yearn to go off and make money, or travel by jet-plane to some more earthly paradise. For to be half-minded in this matter is to lose both worlds, this one and the next.

As regards the motive, when I began studying these matters, I was at first much impressed by high-flown expressions of ideals. Now I have learnt to respect a genuine heart's desire however humble, rather than an elaborately worded expression of altruism. For it is not the surface mind that tells the truth, but the inner promptings of the soul. Some of the deepest people have the best sense of humour! Yes! I think that is my own personal criterion. A sense of humour and spiritual pride cannot co-exist.

I notice that the young are apt to rush into an attempt at mystical experience without any caution. They are sincere, yes: wholehearted! But prudence is also needed. One takes one step at a time.

Once I told a cautionary tale on this subject, as a group of us sat under the Weeping Ash on the Castle terrace. It was a hot sunny August day, and it was my turn to give the morning's talk. But it was not a talking sort of day. In the distance was the hum of the lawnmower bringing us the smell of newly cut grass. The birds were singing in the wilderness behind us, and the sun came through the light green ash leaves, making us drowsy. Still more distracting, Shep, our sheepdog, had joined us, jumping up and licking us . . . But I still wanted to convey an idea on evolving consciousness. So I asked to be inspired. This story came through.

"There was a holy man who lived in the South of India," I said. "He belonged to that dark race who were inhabitants of the country centuries before the coming of the Four Castes. He sat naked under a palm tree. A group of disciples sat round him. His wisdom was suitable for their hearing; for he spoke of one-pointedness, of purity, of samadhi. He told of the all-pervading Self, and of the spark of that self within all creatures. When the disciples were dispersed, the Holy Man noticed that one lingered. This was a young student, the most intellectual of his disciples.

"The young man said: 'Holy Guru, I have indeed been enlightened by your teachings. My heart is full of ecstasy. I am determined on a life of renunciation; and have already repudiated any thought of marriage. However, there is one thought that is darkening my mind. It is said that you hold a secret class at night! And I ask, what manner of pupils and what manner of teachings can come of darkness?'

"Said the Holy One: 'My dear son; doubt is indeed darkness. I council you to banish all doubt from your mind. Think not of the night or what occurs there, and you will attain the light.'

"But the young man was not so easily satisfied. His whole mind was now obsessed by the mystery of the secret class. Were great secrets being kept from him? He could not even meditate with propriety. A thousand conjectures tormented him. He had to find out.

"So one evening he determined to hide himself in his Master's house, and uncover the mystery of the night. So when the Guru was saying his evening prayers by the sacred pool, the disciple hid himself behind a black carved chest in his Master's simple room.

"Soon the Holy man entered the room, and sat on his deerskin mat in profound meditation. Nothing else happened for a few hours. Then, as the time grew towards midnight, the disciple felt his scalp crawl with terror. For something was oozing up from the earth floor. It was a creature of the darkness, furry, with orange eyes. To join him, there came from the rafters a green reptile with scales and eyes on stalks and eight legs, like no monster the quivering disciple had ever imagined could exist. Now there gambolled in little pink prickly things who giggled. These the disciple found particularly revolting, because they ran up and down the chest and turned somersaults on the floor.

"Finally, this dreadful company was completed with the arrival through the earth of two demons with horns, one fat and thin; the other, round and chubby. They were accompanied by a very small purple dragon with bat-like wings, who appeared to be highly favoured, for he coiled about the Holy One's feet. Needless to say, none of this disturbed the Guru's meditation in the slightest. The disciple was terrified less the chattering of his teeth might be heard by this assembly of monsters, and that he should forthwith be devoured.

"Now, at the appropriate time, the Guru began a lengthy and extremely erudite sermon on the all-pervading Self. It was on the lines of his morning's discourse; but more profound. The monsters listened with respectful attention. Not so the disciple, who was unable to benefit from the sublime truths so exquisitely elucidated. Finally his sufferings were mercifully ended by a deep swoon.

"In the morning, when the Holy One had gone forth to bathe, the disciple managed to crawl out from behind the chest unobserved, and escape into the fresh air.

"However, he now had acquired a facial twitch, a paralysed left arm; and his hair had gone white.

"The Guru surveyed him kindly when he saw him lying by the pool 'My dear son,' he said; 'I observe that the Path is not yet for you. Always remember that to take two steps forward, it is wisest to take one backwards. Your father's farm has need of an additional worker.'

"So the disciple went home to his father, and worked on the land. After all, he had gone to the Guru to learn. And he had learnt."

So I ended the story and it was time for us to help rake the grass off the lawn.