

Why Not I?

by C.W. Leadbeater

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Men join the Theosophical Society for various reasons; some because they sympathise with its objects, some because they think they can learn something from it, some because they meant to help the work it is doing. Whatever be their reasons, when they have grasped the principle of evolution, they are usually fired with enthusiasm for it. Seeing the possibility and the desirability of progress, they begin to be anxious to attain it; hearing how sadly the world needs helping, they wish to enroll themselves in the noble army of martyrs who devote themselves to that stupendous but somewhat thankless task — thankless, because the world still stones its prophets, and the discomfort of the process is but little mitigated by the prospect that a wiser posterity will presently raise monuments to them. When members have thus decided to hasten the process of their evolution, they enquire as to methods, teachers, helpers, and they soon hear from older students of the existence of the Brotherhood of Adepts, and of the fact that some of these Great Ones occasionally admit apprentices and instruct them in the work which has to be done. The aspirant feels that this is exactly what he would like, and he wishes to offer himself at once for such a position. But the older student explains to him that the offer must come from the other side — that all he can do is to make himself fit for such a post, and wait until the Master calls him.

When he further enquires as to the way in which he can make himself fit to be chosen, he is told that there is no mystery as to the qualifications required. They have been elaborately described in the sacred books of the ancients, they may be found in the teaching of every religion, and they are worked out minutely in modern Theosophical literature. It is easy to learn about them, but difficult to acquire them, and their practice seems out of touch with much that we find prominent in the life of the present day. History assures us that the thing has been done, but closer examination shows us that it has never been done exactly under existing conditions. Whenever in older times a man set himself definitely to live the higher life, he began by retiring to a cave or a habitation far removed from the world of men. So long as he remained among his fellows he was supposed to be living the life of the householder, who might be, and ought to be, a thoroughly good and honest man, but was engaged in doing the work of the world on the physical plane and not aiming specially at occult development. He participated in that higher life by making it possible for others, by providing for the needs of those who were wholly devoting themselves to it.

Now the hermit who lives in a cave or the monk who confines himself to his cell no doubt resigns what are commonly called the pleasures of the world, but he provides himself with admirably appropriate conditions for the work which he is trying to do. He sees very little of his fellow-creatures; he has cast aside all responsibilities; he has nothing to worry or trouble him, nothing to make him angry. Such a life is possible only for men of a certain temperament; but for them it is ideal in its freedom. That, however, is not at all the method of development recommended to the Theosophical student; he is expected to

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acquire the qualifications while still mixing with his fellows and trying to help them. Usually he has his living to get; he is constantly meeting other men, who are sometimes pleasant and sometimes the reverse, but in any case bring with them their own vibrations, which are different from his own, and so disturbing. He has his anxieties, he has inevitably many things about which he must think, and under those conditions he cannot expect to make such rapid progress in occult development as a man who has nothing else to do. At the same time, he can in certain ways do more good than a hermit. He can set an example; he can show by his life that it is possible to be in the world and yet not of the world.

One who desires to be accepted and taught by a Master should endeavour to understand exactly what the Master wants, and how the matter of receiving a man as an apprentice must envisage itself to Him. Every human being has a certain amount of spiritual strength, just as he has a certain amount of physical strength. Most men are ignorant of its very existence, and so let it lie dormant or fritter it away. A Master knows exactly how much force He has, and holds it to be His duty to use every ounce of it to the best advantage for the good of the world. It is that consideration, and that only, which determines whether He will or will not accept any person as an apprentice. There is no sort of favouritism about it. He does not take a person because he is recommended, or because he is the son of somebody who has been accepted before. Sometimes a student thinks:

“I know I am defective, but still I should like to be taught and helped; why should not the Master accept and teach us all?”

That is unreasonable, because to do that would not be a profitable investment of the Master's force. Any older student can teach a newcomer, and to ask the Master to do it would be like asking the Principal of a College or the Minister of Education of a country to teach an infant class. The Master is dealing with men en masse, in great blocks of thousands at a time, and in quite a different way; and we have to consider what is best for all, not for ourselves alone. It would be obviously unwise for the man who is Director of Education for a whole country to devote his time to teaching one little child, or even twenty or thirty. If the Master sees a promising person, we may imagine Him making a calculation in His mind. We may with all reverence suppose that He would say to Himself:

“If I accept that man, I shall have to spend so many hours over him; during that time I could do a certain amount of the wider work for the world. But I think that when he has been brought to a certain point he will be able to do work which will in the long run more than counterbalance what I could do in the time spent over him, and meantime he can be used as a channel; therefore he is a good investment.”

Acceptance depends solely upon the fitness of the candidate. It is by no means only a question of what he will be able to do some day in the future, but also of how far he can be used here and now. Take an example. In the course of His work a Master may wish to produce some physical result — to send out an etheric current perhaps — in a certain town. He is working on the spiritual or intuitional level; how can He most easily achieve that physical result?

Several methods are available. He can project His force to the required spot at the spiritual level, and then drive it down by main force through the intervening planes; but that will waste a great deal of energy in the process of distribution. He can call to some pupil at a distance, give him the force on the higher

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plane, and tell him to go astrally to the spot where it is needed, and then transfer it to the physical level. That would take less of the Master's energy, but would expend more than is necessary of the pupil's. But suppose the Master had in that town a good student who had brought himself into harmony with the great work. He would utilise that man; He would pour the energy into him at the higher level, and use him as a channel for it, leaving to him the transmutation into physical-plane energy and the actual radiation of it in this lower world. The student as an ego would be conscious of the honour done to him, and would eagerly co-operate; but the personality in its physical brain might not know what was being done, though it would be sure to feel much uplifted and unexpectedly happy. When that feeling comes to the student, he may take it for granted that some blessing is being shed through him; when he wakes in the morning with a sensation of bliss and great content, he may know thereby that some good thing has been done through him.

It will be readily understood that a man who can often be used in that way is one whom the Master notices and is likely to draw nearer to Himself. Unfortunately men often allow themselves to get into a condition which makes them useless to the Master; then when He wants a channel in their neighbourhood, He looks at them and sees that they are not available, and so He chooses someone else to bear that blessing. It may be worth while to consider some of the reasons that make a student temporarily useless to the Master, and to try to understand why certain actions produce that particular result, so that we may avoid them.

First let us grasp the relation of our vehicles to one another. We speak and think of them as separate bodies, each functioning in a different world, and we are apt to forget how entirely they are also one. All matter is fundamentally the same matter; just as all kinds of substances in the physical world are all built of absolutely identical physical atoms, and the only thing that differs is the arrangement of those atoms, so all kinds of matter on the different planes from the highest to the lowest are built of identical bubbles, and the only thing which is different is the arrangement of those bubbles. So there is a very real sense in which it may be said that all our bodies are really one complex body, the different parts of which are closely interrelated.

We may take an analogy from our physical vehicle. As we see it, it is a form of flesh, and has the appearance of being built only of solid matter; but we know quite well that it is thoroughly interpenetrated with liquid, so that the slightest prick in any part of it at once produces a drop of blood. The blood interpenetrates the body so thoroughly that if it were possible (which it is not) to remove all the solid matter and yet maintain the liquid in the same position, we should have a perfect outline of the body built up in blood alone. In the same way the body is interpenetrated by air and other gases; and we could conceive, if it were possible in some way instantaneously to freeze those gases, that we might have a perfect outline indicated by them. But all these different kinds of matter make one body, and it would be impossible to affect one of the kinds of matter which compose it without equally affecting the others also. All the vehicles of which we speak as the causal, mental, astral and physical bodies interpenetrate one another; so that it is impossible to affect one without thereby influencing all the rest.

If therefore a man desires to offer himself as a channel for the force of the Master, he must have all these vehicles simultaneously in a calm and responsive condition; and anything which disturbs such a condition in any one of them will be an obstacle in the way of the Master's work.

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One of the commonest of these obstacles is worry. A man who allows himself to feel worried or anxious has his mental body in a condition of unrest which, to clairvoyant vision, gives it the appearance of the ocean when tossed by a tempest. Before a Master could use such a vehicle as a channel for His force, He would have to exert whatever amount of energy was needed to calm that troubled ocean and hold it absolutely still; and that would be far more trouble for Him than to manipulate the force Himself; so He will certainly choose some other way.

Another very common obstacle is selfishness. In a man whose thoughts are centred upon himself, all the forces are moving inward instead of outward. Before such a man could be of any use to the Master, it would be necessary that all those currents should be checked and reversed, that their life-long habit of inward flow should be eradicated, and a new habit of exactly opposite nature should be established. It is at once obvious that to attempt to utilise such a man cannot be a profitable speculation. What the Master wants is a person in whom all the forces are flowing outwards towards others. Then there is already a radiation going on, and when He throws His force in, it is easy for Him to strengthen that radiation. Another point is that, unless the man is absolutely primitive and unevolved, along with the selfishness there is always disturbance. The ego knows something about evolution and the laws which govern it, and therefore his will is always favourable to progress, and so far as he is yet able to guide the personality he guides it in the direction of evolution. When the personality takes the bit between its teeth and runs away, it is always against his will; but the reins by which he holds it are not yet as strong as they will be, and so if he pulls too hard he knows that they will break, which often makes the position very difficult for him. He must make the personality strong in order that effective progress may be possible for it; and yet when it is strong it often uses its strength in directions which he does not approve. Thus wherever there is selfishness there is always at the heart of things a struggle, and that also makes it impossible for the Master to use a self-centred man.

Pride and conceit are forms of selfishness, and they also set the currents running inward instead of outward. A man who is conceited is never upon the watch for opportunities of usefulness, and so he often misses them. He is intent upon going his own way, and he is therefore not open to the influence from the Master which would set him moving in the opposite direction of helpfulness and service.

Irritability is another bar with which we frequently meet. Just as the mental body of the worried man is in a state of perpetual disturbance, so is the astral body of the irritable man. A healthy astral body should normally exhibit some four or five distinct rates of vibration corresponding to the nobler emotions, and it should show only those vortices which correspond to the principal centres in the physical vehicle; but the irritable man often shows fifty, sixty or a hundred small vortices, each like an open sore in the centre of a little tract containing an assortment of all kinds of unpleasant and undesirable colours. Through every one of these the man's force is escaping, and so he wearies himself and wastes strength unnecessarily, scattering round him unhealthy disturbing influences.

A man of this kind has no strength left to be employed in the Master's service; and even if a Master should exert the force necessary to reduce his chaos to order, any streams of energy which were sent out through him would be tainted by his ill-temper. I know well that for us, who are living in a century of savage hurry, it is difficult to avoid irritability; the haste and pressure of modern life cause great nervous suffering, which is apt to show itself in this very vice of chronic ill-temper. Just because people are overstrained they are often sensitive to things which in reality do not matter in the least, and should not be allowed to cause disturbance. Under such an influence a man allows himself to be troubled by what

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another says of him, or by some falsehood which is written about him in a newspaper — things which should not cause even a momentary annoyance to any man of a well-balanced and philosophical turn of mind.

Again, a man who frequently yields himself to depression is quite useless while under its influence. If we turn to the illustration of the astral body of a depressed person in *Man, Visible and Invisible*, we shall find that he has absolutely enclosed himself in a kind of cage. This cage would prevent the radiation of beneficent influences; and even if they were strong enough to break it, they would still carry parts of it with them, and would be polluted by it. Also, to break up such a cage in that violent manner would break up the astral body itself and cause serious harm. The same thing is true of avarice, though the coloration of the cage is different.

Another difficulty which sometimes stands in the way is ambition. I do not say that ambition is a bad thing in the worldly life, so long as its objects are not unworthy. If a man be a doctor or a lawyer, it is well that he should have the ambition to be a clever doctor or lawyer, in order that he may be able to do as much good as possible for his fellow-creatures in the profession which he has chosen for himself. But if the man's mind is so filled with ambition that there is no room for any other thought, that would be a bar against his being used for the transmission of higher forces. One cannot think of it as a sin; but the fact remains that it implies the continued presence in the various vehicles of a certain vibration which will be out of harmony with any that the Master is likely to wish to send through.

Sensuality also is an absolute bar. It may be associated with actual wicked thought, or it may simply be a survival from the animal kingdom through which we have passed; in either case it creates a chronic disturbance and sets up a type of undulations which would be entirely inharmonious with any higher forces.

Those who desire to be ready for the Master's call must cast off these fetters; they must clear these difficulties out of the way. Though it is simple enough to understand what is required, it is not easy to do it. The mere study of Theosophy presents no serious difficulties; with a little assiduity one may obtain a mass of information about planes and sub-planes, about rings and rounds and planetary chains; but that is not enough. What is required is an attitude towards life — an attitude of benevolent philosophic calm. I had an old nurse who, when anything went wrong, used to say:

“Don't mind; it will be all the same a hundred years hence.”

And really, you know, if one thinks of it, that is true. If some sorrow or sickness comes, it is very hard for the moment, but think how you will look back upon it from the heaven-life. Someone says something nasty about you; a hundred years hence it will not matter what he said. Except to himself it does not matter even now; why should you worry yourself about it? It is the custom to grow angry if someone speaks ill of one; but it is a bad custom. It is the fashion to let the astral body be disturbed under such circumstances, but it is a silly fashion; why should we follow it? If a man has been so wicked as to speak unkindly and untruly, it is he who will suffer for the wrong he has done; why should we unnecessarily allow our astral bodies to cause us suffering also?

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What we do to others — that matters much to us, because it involves our responsibility; but as to what others do to us, what happens to us in the way of fortune or misfortune from without, we may say quite coolly in the words of the Californian philosopher:

“Nothing matters much; most things don't matter at all.”

We must become indifferent to praise and blame, yet keenly alert for any opportunity of being useful. We must regard everything from the platform of universal brotherhood, trying always to see the good in everybody and everything, because to look for and to emphasise the good is a sure way of intensifying its action and evoking more good.

The man who adopts that attitude will make progress, for he will have plenty of force to spare for good work. The ordinary man of the world wastes nearly all his force in personal feelings — in taking offence, in annoyance, in envy, in jealousy; and so he has little left for unselfish purposes. It is the man who forgets himself who will be remembered by the Master. When the Master sees that he has worked steadily and selflessly for some years, and seems likely to be steadfast, He may examine him with regard to his fitness for apprenticeship. A Master takes a fully-accepted pupil into such close relationship with Himself that the standard of fitness must necessarily be high; and that is why the probationary stage is often a long one. Before the Master can take a man as part of Himself, there must be in that man no thoughts and no feelings which the Master could not tolerate within Himself — not because of His disgust for them, but because they would interfere with the work. Sometimes a member says: “I am deeply in earnest, and anxious to serve; I have worked and studied for years; why does not the Master accept me?”

The only reply we can give is:

“My dear sir, you are the man who ought to know that. What quality have you within you which would hinder a Master in His work? Besides, the question is never why should not a Master accept a man, but why should He? What is there in the man which makes him worthy of so high an honour?”

But when, as I have said, a man has worked well for some years, when it seems reasonably certain that he will remain steadfast and loyal, it may be that one day a Master will say to one of His pupils:

“So-and-so is a good man; bring him to me to-night.”

That means that the Master will accept him on probation, and will keep him closely under His eye. The average length of that probation is seven years, but it may be shortened or lengthened according to circumstances. It is well that on the physical plane the candidate should be near someone who is either an Initiate or an accepted pupil, for in that way he may learn much. Through such an one he may receive occasionally a rare encouraging word from the Master; the attitude and daily life of the older pupil may give him many a hint as to what his own should be. It is not often the doing of any one brilliant action that brings a man to the feet of the Master; the message comes usually to one who is working away and not

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thinking of it.

There are many different Masters, and some candidates find themselves drawn to one of these Great Ones, and some to another. It does not matter; all are members of the same Great Brotherhood and all are engaged in the same glorious work. Sometimes the strongest attraction of the candidate is to one of the more advanced pupils instead of to a Master — because the pupil, whom he has seen and knows, is more real to him than a Master whom he has not consciously met. That usually means that when that more advanced pupil becomes an Adept in some future life, the candidate will wish to be his pupil. But if such a candidate is fit for acceptance before his chosen teacher has taken the Initiation which enables him to accept him, that teacher's Master will accept the candidate provisionally, and look after him until such time as the pupil is able to take him in hand. Meantime the Master will work upon him principally through the pupil whom he loves; and thus his teaching will come along the line of his strongest affection.

The Theosophical Society is drawing towards the end of its thirty-eighth year; and much fruit of its long labour is even already showing. The results of its work in the outer world are patent to all, but it has not been without certain inner results which are not so generally known. Through it a number of students have drawn near to the Great Brotherhood to which it owes its inception, and have proved for themselves the truth of the teaching which it has given to them. Of our great Founder, Madame Blavatsky, who endured so much of toil and suffering that she might bring the Light to us, it may be said that she has seen of the travail of her soul, and has been satisfied. Yet it seems to us that her crown should shine yet more gloriously — that even more of those who owe their progress to her should be treading the Path which she trod. The Gate stands open as of old; who will they be who shall qualify themselves to enter?