

Mysteries of the Soul

Reflection 8 - Conveying the eightfold path

Spiritual text: The Gatha's of Zarathustra, Yasna 50

Great souls, who have been liberated from the wheel of birth and death following the dying of their physical bodies, have the choice to be born again on earth in a physical body as a bodhisattva in order to aid humanity. If they do choose to reincarnate, what do they do then? There is no specific answer to that question, for there is a wide range of possibilities. It is certain that, just like all other people who incarnate, a bodhisattva will receive a draught of oblivion, due to which must search for that vocation within his own life. The form in which the vocation manifests itself depends greatly on the possibilities of the person concerned and the circumstances in which he or she was born. In spite of the great inner wisdom which she possesses, such a bodhisattva must again go the path of liberation in order to once again weave a new shining garment and a new golden robe. All natural resistances must be conquered so that the soul and the spirit-soul may become active.

We know about great initiates such as Krishna, Moses, Zarathustra, Buddha and Jesus who began movements that grew into widespread religions. And there are the well-known names of great souls whose actions brought about renewal within existing religions. From the West we can think of Meister Eckhart, Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme; from the East, for example, Aurobindo, Bodhidharma, Rumi and Vivekananda.

We also know the names of great souls who were leaders on a practical level, such as Mohandas Ghandi, Mother Theresa and Nelson Mandela. We do not know if they were bodhisattvas, but we can determine that they were blessings for humanity. Fortunately there have been and still are many bodhisattvas on earth who did not or do not become well-known because they serve more or less anonymously.

In harmony with culture

When a bodhisattva incarnates on earth and considers it his vocation to drive people directly towards spirit-soul development, he will first of all have to go the path of spirit-soul development himself, on the basis of a deep inner desire. This will cause a gradual growth of the inner understanding and on this basis a philosophy can be developed, that is in harmony with the people and the culture in which he or she lives.

Siddharta Gautama Buddha developed teachings containing the so-called eightfold path. Patanjali also spoke about an eightfold path, but then again it was different from the one developed by Buddha. The eightfold Buddhist path to enlightenment is summarised as:

1. right understanding
2. right intent
3. right speech
4. right action
5. right livelihood
6. right effort

7. right mindfulness
8. right concentration

This simple list, combined with an extensive philosophical system, offers practical guidelines for pupils of the soul to follow the spiritual path, to live the teachings and to come to soul-realisation. Lists such as the four noble truths are not just the result of thought-processes, but arise from a knowing that proceeds from numerous experiences and inner elevation. A bodhisattva can address the public directly. He or she can also address a group of devoted pupils with whom he or she is actually going the inner path. The latter situation is sometimes referred to as a mystery school, in which pupils of the mysteries follow the mystery-path.

Founders of mystery schools sometimes use philosophies of predecessors or contemporaries in order to conform to that with which pupils of the mysteries are accustomed. However they do not, in principle, depend on these sources, because they are able to create in an original way. After all, the spirit-soul is active within them. They are living from the world of the soul and the spirit-soul and therefore they are capable of drawing directly from these sources. It is naturally paramount that a founder of a mystery school and every other servant within a mystery school actually lives the teachings that he or she conveys, not by following the rules but from a renewed state of being. That state is a precondition for gathering together a group of pupils of the mysteries who can go the spiritual path collectively by virtue of the active liberating force that radiates from the founder and the teachings.

Here we recognise the three Buddhist jewels of wisdom to which the pupil can resort: the buddha (the igniter of the light), the dharma (the teachings) and the sangha (the community of pupils). This is a universal structure that can be seen in all mystery schools such as those of Buddha, Pythagoras, Socrates and Jesus. The further a mystery school develops, the further the teachings develop as well. The basic principles remain the same, of course, but when the pupils of the mysteries have reached a certain level of realisation, a new impulse is needed to be able to continue the inner process of renewal. The renewed teachings are not contradictory to the original teachings, rather they are subtler, higher and experienced personally. The teachings must be renewed when necessary, as expressed in the cyclic process model of the enneagram in which the three elements of a mystery school have been integrated with six coherent process steps (see image 8).

Siddhartha Gautama, who became the Buddha, lived in a multideity Hindu culture that had long ago been pure but had degenerated and fallen into idolatry. Buddha did not give the gods a place in his teachings not because they do not exist – the divine, after all, can express itself in infinite ways – but because they were worshipped out of selfish motives, enriching the priestly caste of the Brahmins.

Ora et labora

A mystery school is not only meant for learning, but particularly for praying and working. It is only possible to reach fulfilment – to possess an active spirit-soul – by means of both inner and outer work. In earlier days this principle was indicated by the Latin adage '*ora et labora*', or 'pray and work'. In this context, praying is to be understood as being in harmony, through the force of the spirit-spark, with the divine dimensions outside time and space.

The power field of a mystery school has to be of a great purity and a high vibration in order to drive pupils of the mysteries to spiritual awareness and renewal. But that does not mean that a mystery school must be perfect. That is impossible, as such a school consists of people, and human personalities are not perfect, not even if the spirit-soul is active within them. Pupils of the mysteries face the challenge of learning how to deal with imperfections and frictions that they encounter within their mystery school in a soulful way, as this way is precisely the path to inner growth.

There is the possibility that a spiritual school may have too many pupils with meager soul quality and inner comprehension. Then the question arises if such a school should be continued. In this respect it is useful to refer to a great spiritual teacher who considered it to be his mission to unconditionally liberate people from organisations and rituals that obstruct the search for truth: Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986). In his youth and adolescence, theosophical circles considered him to be the world teacher. So he became the head of the Order of the Star, an organisation with some 40.000 members worldwide! In 1929 he emphatically distanced himself from it by dissolving the organisation, because he had experienced that someone who follows somebody else, stops following the truth. In his dissolution speech he said, among other things:

'You have the idea that only certain people hold the key to the kingdom of happiness. No one holds it. No one has the authority to hold that key. That key is your own self, and in the development and the purification and in the incorruptibility of that self alone is the kingdom of eternity. ... Those who really desire to understand, who are looking to find that which is eternal, without beginning and without an end, will walk together with a greater intensity, will be a danger to everything that is unessential, to unrealities, to shadows. And they will concentrate, they will become the flame, because they understand. Such a body we must create, and that is my purpose.'

After this he gave lectures all over the world in order to refer people back to themselves and to stimulate them to discover the truth themselves, on the basis of awareness. He did not want any followers. It was his objective to liberate people, to drive them towards freedom and to help them to distance themselves from all limitations, because that is the only way to find eternal joy and bring about the unconditional realisation of the soul.

Inner development

Krishnamurti knew and fully understood the spiritual path. He had been thoroughly educated in the theosophical philosophy and had such a high grade of soul quality that it took no effort for him to live in accordance with elevated spiritual directives. Krishnamurti ascertained that elevated teachings can be a prison for people who lack inner understanding because they place authority outside themselves, thus obstructing their own inner development.

A special paradox can be recognised on the spiritual path. On the one hand, if we pursue inner development on the basis of the spirit-spark then certain teachings and practices are urgently needed, because for inner growth you need somewhere to direct your attention. Inner growth does not unfold automatically, but requires conscious attention. On the other hand, teachings and practices can prove to be prisons if there is no understanding, or too

little of it, and if little or no corresponding work has been done in the practice of life. As 'The Voice of the Silence' states:

'Yea, ignorance is like unto a closed and airless vessel; the soul a bird shut up within. It warbles not, nor can it stir a feather; but the songster mute and torpid sits, and of exhaustion dies. But even ignorance is better than head-learning with no soul-wisdom to illuminate and guide it.'
(II:12:13)

Teachings and methods are therefore essential for a spiritual path, but they may turn into cages – dogmas that hamper spirit-soul development. If the intended inner transformation has taken place in a pupil of the soul, then the teachings are no longer necessary for him or her, in principle. The teachings may even become like ballast. Teachings are intended to be realised, and if you have realised them in your life, you are free from them. One day when the Buddha had explained the doctrine of 'karma' – of cause and effect – to his pupils and they indicated that they understood, he immediately put his explanation into perspective by saying:

'O monks, even this insight that is so pure and clear; when you cling onto it, cherish it, guard it, become attached to it, you do not understand that the teachings are like a raft that has the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to. Suppose, monks, there is a man journeying on a road and he sees a vast expanse of water, of which this shore is perilous and fearful, while the other shore is safe and free from danger.... Now, that man collects reeds, sticks, branches and foliage, and binds them into a raft. Carried by that raft, labouring with hands and feet, he safely crosses over to the other shore. Having crossed and arrived at the other shore, he thinks: 'This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, labouring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not lift this raft on my head or put it on my shoulders, and o where I like?' What do you think about it, O monks? Will this man by acting thus, do what should be done with a raft? ... In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to.'

After his enlightenment Buddha passed the teachings that he had developed on to the people of his time, of his culture, during his entire life. And that can also be said of Zarathustra. This Persian prophet developed extensive teachings that grew into the religion of Zoroastrianism.

Thinking, feeling and doing good

In line with many spiritual teachers, Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, emphasised that true faith is not simply the acceptance of a philosophy but thinking, feeling and doing good by means of reflecting the divine light. It is the inner assignment of man to reflect the light of the heavens on earth, through the awakened spirit-spark, by means of which the creation can be saved from evil. This reflection of the divine light is possible only when man has become receptive and transparent for that light. Zarathustra expresses this beautifully, from a prophetic vision, in his song of praise of Yasna 50:

*'With truth moving my heart, with best thought inspiring my mind, with all the might of spiritual force within me, I venerate thee, o Lord, with songs of thy praise!
And at the last, when I shall stand at thy gate I shall hear the echo of my prayers from thy abode*

of songs. To thy prophet inspired by thy truth, o Lord, to thy prophet revealing thy message in hymns, do thou come with thy grace, o Lord! Do thou give him thy hand of manifest help, that he may bring enlightenment and bliss.

As I lift my voice in songs of thy veneration, actuated by truth to direct my speech the right path of wisdom; give to Zarathushtra, o Lord, the inspiration of the Spirit to enunciate thy ordinance.

Yoked are the ardent steeds of thy veneration, as we approach thy realm, o Lord, come, great power, unto me with thy spirit of truth and thy good mind, hasten thus unto my help!

Singing hymns of thy praise, o Lord, and with hands outstretched shall approach thee. In adoration, with enlightenment from truth and the Spirit I shall verily reach thy presence, o Lord!

Here we see that Zarathustra is clearly a person who is animated by the spirit. He experienced an unwavering certainty, a great joy and a powerful drive, all of which came to expression in this vision. That was not always the case. When we read earlier songs of Zarathustra, it becomes clear that he experienced loneliness, doubt, desolation and inner darkness as well. That is understandable, as every pupil of the soul goes through a phase on the spiritual path called *'the dark night of the soul'* by the Spanish mystic John of the Cross.

The dark night of the soul

At the beginning of the spiritual path, the personality-soul is creative and the soul is receptive. What matters now is that the personality-soul surrender to the soul, and thereby die in a symbolic sense, so that the spirit-soul can become creative and a renewed personality-soul can arise, thus becoming a suitable instrument for the spirit-soul. The purifying period of the dark night of the soul begins when the old personality-soul has more or less died but the spirit-soul is not yet active. As the name implies, this phase, which can last for many years, can be an unpleasant experience. The pupil of the soul has lost his worldly interests, feels lonely and abandoned and has no more future perspective left. In this case there are two ways to escape from that unpleasant situation which feels rather like a depression. The first way is to no longer pay attention to the spiritual path and to return to the fleshpots of Egypt, that is to say to once again immerse oneself in all kinds of fascinations that this world has to offer, so that the soul will fall asleep again.

The second way is to practice patience and perseverance and continue to feed the soul with what is good, true and beautiful, remaining in contact with fellow pupils who are also going through that process or have passed through it. Then, over time, the light of the spirit-soul will irrevocably break through. Zarathustra had experienced this and therefore began his song with the words:

'On whom can I count for help? On whom can I depend to protect my possessions? On whom but on thy truth, and on thyself, o Lord, when invoked with the enlightened mind! Tell me, o Lord, how should they act and work who care for this joy-giving world with its pastures? Living upright lives under the recurring splendour of the sun, apart from the repudiators, living ordered lives in harmony with the law of truth, these shall reap the blessed reward!'

From the moment of the inner breakthrough, the earthly figure of the pupil of the mysteries will begin to shine, due to the reflection of the light of the soul. Then the pupil of the mysteries will be able to clearly think and to be a beacon of light for all who still wander in darkness. This person who is animated by the spirit will announce the dawn of a new era in accordance with the prayer in Zarathustra's hymn.

'With these hymns shall I come to thee, o Lord! To thy truth, aided by the deeds of the Spirit, seeking earnestly the reward of the beneficent, and receiving it, I shall be master of my own destiny. The good deeds that we shall perform as those we have performed, the things that are precious to the eye illumined by the Spirit, the radiance of the sun shimmering down which heralds the day, they all, in accord with truth, testify to thy glory, o Lord! The poet of thy praise, I call myself, o Lord! And so shall I remain, o truth, as long as my power lasts, let the world-creator help me through the Spirit, through his grace let that be done which shall most promote the great cause!'