

Qualifications for Chelaship by Mohini M. Chatterjee

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[Page 1] THE power of the Adepts over the forces of Nature, not generally recognised, has been enlarged upon on various occasions, but no account of them can possibly be satisfactory without bringing into prominence their goodness and their solicitude for the welfare of the race, which an ordinary man can no more comprehend than the Polynesian savage measure the intellectual heights of a Newton or a Galileo.

Surprise is often expressed that the philanthropy of the Mahātmas does not induce them to abandon their seclusion and work for men, among men. But the reason for such apparently strange conduct on the part of these Godlike men is not very far to seek. The productive power of our energies varies in accordance with the plane on which they operate. A bricklayer labouring from sunrise to sunset produces work which, when estimated in money, will be found to be but a small fraction of the money-value of an hour's work by a man of science. The difference in the effects generated by a given quantity of energy on the physical and intellectual planes is thus apparent. Those who are acquainted with the laws of **[Page 2]** spiritual dynamics know that the work produced by a given amount of energy on the intellectual plane is in its turn immeasurably less than that produced by the same quantity of energy acting upon the plane of spirit — the highest principle in man, according to occult doctrine. It is more unreasonable, therefore, to expect an Adept to work with us on the ordinary plane than it would be to suggest to Sir William Thompson to turn shoemaker.

The value of a scientific discovery as an intellectual triumph can be best estimated by a proper study of the various steps which have led up to it. Similarly, the excellence achieved by an Adept can only be appreciated, though in a very rough and incomplete manner no doubt, by a careful consideration of his preliminary training.

According to the most authoritative treatises on that occult science of which the Adept is a master, verified by the experience of its living students, none are admitted into the inner sanctuary for instruction until they reach a stage of spiritual development, characterised by the attainment of what, in the Brāhmanical books, are called the four "sādhanas" or accomplishments.

The first accomplishment, which a neophyte must have, is the right knowledge of the real and the unreal. The object to be attained by the help of the "Great Science" as it is called, being the realisation of the true, and Adeptship being but the mark of a **[Page 3]** certain stage of this realisation, it is clear that the first step to be taken is to gain an intellectual apprehension of what the truth is. But what is the truth? It will not do for the neophyte to ask the question like the jesting Pro-consul, and refuse to wait for the answer. Had Pilate asked the question in Samskrt he might have been answered out of his own mouth. For the Samskrt word itself offers a clue to the nature of truth. In that language truth and reality bear the same name, and reality is defined to be that which is unaffected by time, or, in the quaint phraseology of the

original, remains witness of the three divisions of time — the past, the present, and the future. The first accomplishment, therefore, consists in an intimate intellectual conviction of the fact that all and everything which appears to have an existence separate from Parabrahm is merely illusion (Māyā). Hence, it is clear that at the present stage of the Theosophical movement, the duty that lies upon the Society and all its members is to disseminate the knowledge of the Esoteric Doctrine, the true philosophy of the real and the unreal, as that alone is capable of laying the foundation of any progress whatever.

The second accomplishment marks the next step on the path, and is the permanent effect produced on the mind by the theoretical knowledge, which forms the preceding accomplishment. When the neophyte has once grasped the unreal character of the objects [Page 4] around him, he ceases to crave for them, and is thus prepared to acquire the second accomplishment, which is a perfect indifference to the enjoyment of the fruits of one's actions, both here and hereafter.

Exoteric students fall into a grievous error by their failure to catch the true spirit of the injunction against acting under the impulse of desire. They erroneously suppose that the best preparation for spiritual life is to forcibly repress all outward expressions of desire, entirely losing sight of the fact that even the most rigid abstinence from physical acts does not produce inactivity on the higher planes of spiritual or mental existence. Shankarāchārya, in his commentaries on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, one of the most authoritative of the Brāhmanical sacred writings, says that such a conclusion is simply delusive. A hasty supposition might here be made that these considerations will have the effect of sanctioning persistence in evil, but when the desire for improvement is constantly in the mind, and the character of the evil thoroughly realised, each failure to harmonise the inward with the outward nature will, by the revulsion of feeling thus produced, strengthen the determination to such an extent that the evil desire will be speedily crushed. This is why Eliphas Levi so vehemently denounces the institution of forced celibacy among the Romish priests. The personality of a man at any one moment is the result of all his previous acts, thoughts, and emotions, the [Page 5] energy of which constantly inclines the mind to act in a particular way. All attempts, therefore, to cure this mental bias by repressing its expression on the outer plane is as hurtful as to throw back into circulation unhealthy blood, seeking a natural outlet. The internal desire is always forging fresh links in the chain of material existence, even though denied outward manifestation.

The only way to free oneself from the bonds of Karma, producing birth and death, is to let the stored-up energy exhaust itself merely as a portion of the great cosmic energy, and not to colour it with personality by referring it to self. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* itself speaks on this subject with no uncertain sound. The great Teacher Krshna reproves Arjuna for having expressed a disinclination to perform the duties pertaining to his sphere of life. The reason is perfectly plain: in reference to the great reality everything of this world is unreal: therefore to renounce the duties entailed upon us by our birth for something equally unreal only accentuates the ignorance which makes the unreal appear as the real. The wisest course, suggested by Krshna, is that Arjuna should perform all his duties unselfishly. "Thy right is only to the act", says the teacher, "it ends with the performance of the act and never extends to the results". We must perform our duty for its own sake and never allow the mind to dwell on the fruit of our actions, either with pleasure or pain. [Page 6] Purified from the taint of selfishness, the act passes by like water over the lotus-leaf, without wetting it. But if the act is done as a means to the attainment of a personal end, the mind acquires a tendency to repeat the act, and thus necessitates further incarnations to exhaust that tendency.

From the above considerations it is abundantly clear that occultism enjoins upon its votaries the necessity of an ardent and sleepless desire for the performance of duty, the sphere of which is enlarged

by the first accomplishment, which requires a thorough recognition of the unity of the individual with the all. It is not enough to have a sentimental perception of this great truth, but it must be realised in every act of life. The student, therefore, to begin with, must do everything in his power to benefit all on the ordinary physical plane transferring his activity, however, to the higher intellectual and spiritual planes as his development proceeds.

This leads us to the consideration of the third accomplishment, which is the acquisition of the "six Qualifications", in Samskrt "Sama" it consists in obtaining perfect mastery over the mind (the seat of emotions and desires), and in forcing it to act in subordination to the intellect which has already been purified and strengthened in attaining the two degrees of development dwelt upon. This is done, the mind is thoroughly cleansed of all evil and foolish desires. [Page 7]

The injunction to chasten our minds before purifying our acts might at first sight appear strange, but the practical utility of the course laid down will be obvious on reflection. We have already seen how varying effects are produced by a fixed amount of energy, according to the plane on which it is expended, and certainly the plane of the mind is superior to the plane of the senses. In the next place, forced abstinence from physical evil goes but very little way towards the evolution of that energy which alone can give us the power of approaching the truth. Our thoughts, governed under ordinary circumstances by the law of association, make us contemplate incidents in our past life and thus produce as much mental disturbance and draw as much on our mental energy as if we repeated the acts in question many times over. "Sama" then is really the breaking up of the law of the association of ideas, which enslave our imagination; when our imagination is purified, the chief difficulty is removed.

The next qualification, the complete mastery over our bodily acts ("Dama" in Samskrt) follows, as a necessary consequence, from the one already discussed, and does not require much explanation.

The third qualification, known by the Brahmans as "Uparati", is the renunciation of all formal religion and the power of contemplating objects without being in the least disturbed in the performance of the great [Page 8] task one has set before oneself. What is here expected of the aspirant for spiritual knowledge is that he should not allow his sympathies and usefulness to be narrowed down by the domination of any particular ecclesiastical system, and that his renunciation of worldly objects should not proceed merely from an incapacity to appreciate their value. When this state is reached, danger from temptation is removed. They alone, the Hindû poet says, are possessed of true fortitude, who preserve the equanimity of their minds in the presence of temptation.

Fourth in order comes the cessation of desire, and a constant readiness to part with everything in the world (Titiksha). The typical illustration of this given in our mystical literature, is the absence of resentment of wrong. When this qualification is completely attained, there arises in the mind a perennial cheerfulness, washing away every trace of solicitude or care.

Then is acquired the qualification called "Samādhāna", which renders the student constitutionally incapable of deviating from the right path. In one sense this qualification is the complement of the third given above. First, all egotistical motives, tempting the man to travel out of his chosen path, lose their hold over him, and finally he perfects himself to such an extent that, at the call of duty, he can

unhesitatingly engage in any worldly occupation with the certainty of returning to his habitual life after completing his self-imposed task. [Page 9]

One other qualification is necessary to crown the neophyte's work, and that is an implicit confidence in his Master power to teach and his own power to learn (Sraddha). The importance of this qualification is liable to be misunderstood. An unswerving confidence in the Master is not required as a means of building up a system of priestcraft, but for an entirely different reason. It will perhaps be readily granted that the capacity for receiving truth is not the same in every mind. There exists a saturation-point for truth in the human mind, as there is one for aqueous vapour in the atmosphere. When that point is reached in any mind, fresh truth becomes to it indistinguishable from falsehood. Truth must by slow degrees grow in our minds, and a strict injunction is laid down in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* against "unsettling the faith of the multitude" by a too sudden revelation of esoteric knowledge. At the same time it must be remembered that no man can be expected to seek after a thing, the reality of which is improbable; the dream-land of an opium-eater will never be a subject of exploration to anyone else. The truth perceived by the higher faculties of the Adepts cannot be proved to one who has not developed those faculties, otherwise than by showing its consistency with known truths and by the assertion of those who claim to know. The sanction of a competent authority is a sufficient guarantee that the investigation will not be fruitless. But to accept any authority as final, and to [Page 10] dispense with the necessity of independent investigation is destructive of all progress. Nothing in fact, should be taken upon blind, unquestioning faith. Indeed, the Eastern sages go so far as to say that to rely solely on the authority of the Scriptures is sinful. The wisdom of the course actually followed is almost self-evident. Reason is the immediate perception of the fact that the eternal is alone true, and reasoning is the attempt to trace the existence of a thing all through the scale of time: the longer the period over which this operation extends the more complete and satisfactory is the reasoning considered to be. But the moment any fact of knowledge is realised on the plane of eternity, reason becomes changed into consciousness — the son is merged in the father, as the Christian Mystic would say. Why then, it may be asked, should confidence in the teaching of the master be a requisite qualification at all? The reply lies on the surface. No one takes the trouble to inquire into what he does not believe to be true, such confidence in no way demands surrender of reason. The second part of this qualification, the confidence in one's own power to learn, is an indispensable basis of all endeavour to progress. The poet uttered a deeper truth than he was aware of, when he sang:

Yes, self-abasement leads the way
To villain bonds and despot's sway.

The moment a man thoroughly believes himself incapable of realising the highest ideal he can [Page 11] conceive of, he becomes so: the conviction of weakness, that apparently supports him, really robs him of his strength: none aspire for what they consider absolutely beyond their reach. Occultism teaches us that infinite perfection is the heritage of man. He must not blaspheme against his innermost divine self, the Augoeides of the Greeks and the Âtmã of the Brahmans, by self-abasement, for that would be the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost. Christian doctors have tried in vain to identify this particular sin the deadliest of all: its true significance lies far beyond the narrow horizon of their theology.

The last accomplishment required is an intense desire for liberation from conditioned existence and. for transformation into the One Life (Mumukshatva). It may be thought at first sight that this qualification is a mere redundancy, being practically involved in the second. But such a supposition would be as erroneous as to conceive Nirvãna as the annihilation of all life. The second accomplishment is absence of desire for life as a means of selfish enjoyment: while the fourth is a positive and intense desire for a kind of life of which none but those who have attained the first three accomplishments, can form any

adequate conception. All that need be stated is, that the Neophyte is expected to know the real nature of his Ego and to have a fixed determination to retain that knowledge permanently and [Page 12] thus get rid of the body, created by allowing the notion of "I" to fasten itself upon an illusory object.

We shall now pass to the consideration of the minimum amount of these accomplishments indispensable to a successful study of occultism. If the desire for liberation, which constituted the last accomplishment, is only moderately strong, but the second, indifference to the fruits of one's action, is fully developed and the six qualifications well marked, success is attained by the help of the Master, who moulds the future incarnations of the pupil and smooths his path to Adeptship. But if all the accomplishments are equally well marked, Adeptship is reached by the pupil in the same incarnation. Without the second and fourth accomplishments, however, the six qualifications "water but the desert". In recent Theosophical publications two classes of the Mahātma's pupils are mentioned — accepted and probationary pupils (chelas). The first class consists of those who have acquired the four accomplishments up to a certain point and are being practically trained for Adeptship in this life: to the other class belong such pupils as are qualifying themselves, under the guidance of the Masters for acceptance.

A few words may here be said regarding those who study occultism without any intention of aspiring for regular chelaship. It is evident that by theoretical study of the Esoteric Doctrine the first of the four [Page 13] accomplishments can be achieved: the effect of this in regulating a person's next incarnation cannot be over-estimated. The spiritual energy thus generated will cause him to be born under conditions favourable to the acquirement of the other qualifications and to spiritual progress in general.

One of the greatest of India's occult teachers says on this point that a theoretical study of the philosophy, though unaccompanied by the requisite accomplishments, produces more merit than the performance of all the duties enjoined by the formalities of religion eighty times over.