

## Some Difficulties of the Inner Life

### by Annie Besant

Published in 1913 and 1919

Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India  
The Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras. India

[Page 1] Every one who sets himself in earnest to the living of the Inner Life encounters certain obstacles at the very beginning of the pathway thereto, obstacles which repeat themselves in the experience of each, having their basis in the common nature of men. To each wayfarer they seem new and peculiar to himself, and hence give rise to a feeling of personal discouragement which undermines the strength needed for their surmounting. If it were understood that they form part of the common experience of aspirants, that they are always encountered and constantly over-climbed, it may be that some cheer would be brought to the cast-down neophyte by the knowledge. The grasp of a hand in the darkness, the sound of a voice that says: " Fellow-traveler, I have trodden where you tread, and the road is practicable" — these things bring help in the night-time, and such a help-bringer this article would fain be.

One of these difficulties was put to me some time ago by a friend and fellow-wayfarer in connection [Page 2] with some counsel given as to the purification of the body. He did not in any way traverse the statement made, but said with much truth and insight that for most of us the difficulty lay more with the Inner Man than with his instruments; that for most of us the bodies we had were quite sufficiently good, or, at the worst, needed a little tuning, but that there was a desperate need for the improvement of the man himself. For the lack of sweet music, the musician was more to blame than his instrument, and if he could be reached and improved, his instrument might pass muster. It was capable of yielding much better tones than those produced from it at present, but those tones depended on the fingers that pressed the keys. Said my friend pithily and somewhat pathetically: *I can make my body do what I want; the difficulty is that I do not want.*

Here is a difficulty that every serious aspirant feels. The improving of the man himself is the chief thing that is needed, and the obstacle of his weakness, his lack of will and of tenacity of purpose, is a far more obstructive one than can be placed in our way by the body. There are many methods known to all of us by which we can build up bodies of a better type if we want to do so, but it is the *wanting* in which we are deficient. We have the knowledge, we recognize the expediency of putting it into practice, but the impulse to do so is lacking. Our root-difficulty lies in our inner nature; it is inert, the wish to move is [Page 3] absent it is not that the external obstacles are insurmountable, but that the man himself lies supine and has no mind to climb over them. This experience is being continually repeated by us; there seems to be a want of attractiveness in our ideal; it fails to draw us; we do not wish to realise it, even though we may have intellectually decided that its realisation is desirable. It stands before us like food before a man who is not hungry; it is certainly very good food and he may be glad of it to-morrow, but just now he has no craving for it, and prefers to lie basking in the sunshine rather than to get up and take possession of it.

The problem resolves itself into two questions: Why do I not want that which I see. as a rational being, is desirable, productive of happiness ? What can I do to make myself want that which I know to be best for myself and for the world ? The spiritual teacher who could answer these questions effectively would do a far greater service to many than one who is only reiterating constantly the abstract desirability of ideals

that we all acknowledge, and the imperative nature of obligations that we all admit — and disregard. The machine is here, not wholly ill-made; who can place his finger on the lever, *and make it go* ?

The first question must be answered by such an analysis of self-consciousness as may explain this puzzling duality, the not desiring that which we yet see to be desirable. We are wont to say that [Page 4] self-consciousness is a unit, and yet, when we turn our attention inwards, we see a bewildering multiplicity of 'I's' and are stunned by the clamour of opposing voices, all coming apparently from ourselves. Now consciousness — and self-consciousness is only consciousness drawn into a definite centre which receives and sends out — *is* a unit, and if it appears in the outer world as many, it is not because it has lost its unity, but because it presents itself there through different media. We speak glibly of the vehicles of consciousness, but perhaps do not always bear in mind what is implied in the phrase. If a current from a galvanic battery be led through several series of different materials, its appearance in the outer world will vary with each wire. In a platinum wire it may appear as light, in an iron one as heat, round a bar of soft iron as magnetic energy, led into a solution as a power that decomposes and recombines. One single energy is present, yet many modes of it appear, for the manifestation of life is always conditioned by its forms, and as consciousness works in the causal, mental, astral, or physical body, the resulting 'I' presents very different characteristics. According to the vehicle which, for the time being, it is vitalising, so will be the conscious 'I'. If it is working in the astral body, it will be the 'I' of the senses; if in the mental it will be the 'I' of the intellect. By illusion, blinded by the material that enwraps it, it identifies itself with the craving of the senses, the reasoning of the [Page 5] intellect, and cries, *I want, I think*. The nature which is developing the germs of bliss and knowledge is the eternal Man, and is the root of sensations and thoughts; but these sensations and thoughts themselves are only the transitory activities in his outer bodies, set up by the contact of his life with the outer life, of the Self with the not-self. He makes temporary centers for his life in one or other of these bodies, lured by the touches from without that awaken his activity, and working in these he identifies himself with them. As his evolution proceeds, as he himself develops, he gradually discovers that these physical, astral, mental centers are his instruments, not himself; he sees them as parts of the *not-self* that he has temporarily attracted into union with himself — as he might take up a pen or a chisel — he draws himself away from them, recognizing and using them as the tools they are, knows himself to be life not form, bliss not desire, knowledge not thought; and then first is conscious of unity, then alone finds peace. While the consciousness identifies itself with forms, it appears to be multiple; when it identifies itself with life it stands forth as one.

The next important fact for us is that, as H. P. B. pointed out, consciousness, at the present stage of evolution, has its centre normally in the astral body. Consciousness learns to know by its capacity of sensation, and sensation belongs to the astral body. We sensate; that is, we recognise contact with something [Page 6] which is not ourselves, something which arouses in us pleasure, or pain, or the neutral point between. The life of sensation is the greater part of the life of the majority. For those below the average, the life of sensation is the whole life. For a few advanced beings the life of sensation is transcended. The vast majority occupy the various stages which stretch between the life of sensation, of mixed sensation and emotion and thought also in diverse proportions and the life of emotion and thought in diverse proportions. In the life that is wholly of sensation there is no multiplicity of 'I's' and therefore no conflict; in the life that has transcended sensation there is an Inner Ruler Immortal, and there is no conflict; but in all the ranges between, there are manifold 'I's' and between them conflict.

Let us consider the life of sensation as found in the savage of low development. There is an 'I,'

passionate, craving, fierce, grasping, when aroused to activity. But there is no conflict, save with the world outside his physical body. With that me may war, but inner war he knows not. He does what he wants, without questionings beforehand or remorse afterwards; the actions of the body follow the promptings of desire, and the mind does not challenge, nor criticize, nor condemn. It merely pictures and records, storing up materials for future elaboration. Its evolution is forwarded by the demands made upon it by the 'I' of sensations to exert its energies for the gratification [Page 7] of that imperious 'I'. Its is driven into activity by these promptings of desire, and begins to work on its store of observations and remembrances, thus evolving a little reasoning faculty and planning beforehand for the gratification of its master. In this way it develops intelligence, but the intelligence is wholly subordinated to desire, moves under its orders, is the slave of passion. It shows no separate individuality, but is merely the willing tool of the tyrannous desire 'I'.

Contest only begins when, after a long series of experiences, the Eternal Man has developed sufficient mind to review and balance up, during his life in the lower mental world, between death and birth, the results of his earthly activities. He then marks off certain experiences as resulting in more pain than pleasure, and comes to the conclusion that he will do well to avoid their repetition; he regards them with repulsion and engraves that repulsion on his mental tablets, while he similarly engraves attraction on other experiences that have resulted in more pleasure than pain. When he returns to earth, he brings this record with him, as an inner tendency of his mind; and when the desire 'I' rushes towards an attractive object, recommencing a course of experiences that have led to suffering, he interposes a feeble protest, and another 'I'—consciousness working as mind—makes it felt and heard, regarding these experiences with repulsion, and objecting to being [Page 8] dragged through them. The protest is so weak and the desire so strong, that we can scarcely speak of a contest; the desire 'I', long enthroned, rushes over the weakly-protesting rebel, but when the pleasure is over and the painful results follow, the ignored rebel lifts his voice again in a querulous "I told you so," and this is the first sting of remorse. As life succeeds life, the mind asserts more and more, and the contest between the desire 'I' and the thought 'I' grows fiercer and fiercer, and the agonised cry of the Christian Mystic: "I find another law in my members warring against the law of my mind", is repeated in the experience of every evolving Man. The war grows hotter and hotter as, during the devachanic life, the decisions of the Man are more and more strongly impressed on the mind, appearing as innate ideas in the subsequent birth, and lending strength to the thought 'I' which, withdrawing itself from the passions and emotions, regards them as outside itself, and repudiates their claim to control it. But the long inheritance of the past is on the side of the monarch it would discrown, and bitter and many-fortuned is the war. Consciousness, in its outgoing activities, runs easily into the worn channels of the habits of many lives; on the other hand, it is diverted by the efforts of the Man to take control and to turn it into the channels hewn out by his reflections. His will determines the line of the consciousness-forces working in his higher vehicles, while habit largely determines the direction of those [Page 9] working in the desire-body. The will, guided by the clear-eyed intelligence, points to the lofty ideal that is seen as a fit object of attainment; the desire-nature does not want to reach it, is lethargic before it, seeing no beauty that it should desire it, nay, is often repelled by the austere outlines of its grave and chastened dignity. The difficulty is that I do not *want*. We do not want to do that which, in our higher moments, we have resolved to do. The lower 'I' is moved by the attraction of the moment rather than by the recorded results of the past that sway the higher, and the real difficulty is to make ourselves feel that the lethargic, or the clamorous, 'I' of the lower nature is not the true 'I'.

How is this difficulty to be overcome ? How is it possible to make that which we know to be the higher to be the habitual self-conscious 'I' ?

Let no one be discouraged if here it be said that this change is a matter of growth, and cannot be accomplished in a moment. The human Self cannot, by a single effort, rise to manhood from childhood, any more than a body can change from infancy to maturity in a night. If the statement of the law of growth bring a sense of chill when we regard it as an obstacle in the way of our wish for sudden perfection, let us remember that the other side of the statement is that growth is certain, that it cannot be ultimately prevented, and that if law refuses a miracle, it, on the other hand, gives security. Moreover, we can quicken [Page 10] growth, we can afford the best possible conditions for it, and then rely on the law for our result. Let us then consider the means we can employ for hastening the growth we see to be needed, for transferring the activity of consciousness from the lower to the higher.

The first thing to realise is that the desire-nature is not our Self, but an instrument fashioned by the Self for its own using; and next that it is a most valuable instrument, and is merely being badly used. Desire, emotion, is the motive power in us, and stands ever between the thought and the action. Intellect sees, but it does not move, and a man without desires and emotions would be a mere spectator of life. The Self must have evolved some of its loftiest powers ere it can forego the use of the desires and emotions; for aspirants, the question is how to use them instead of being used by them, how to discipline them, not how to destroy. We would fain *want* to reach the highest, since without this wanting we shall make no progress at all. We are held back by wanting to unite ourselves with objects transitory, mean and narrow; cannot we push ourselves forward by wanting to unite ourselves with the permanent, the noble and the wide? Thus musing, we see that what we need is to cultivate the emotions, and direct them in a way that will purify and ennoble the character. The basis of all emotions on the side of progress is love, and this is the power which he must cultivate. George Eliot well said: *The first condition of human [Page 11] goodness is something to love; the second, something to reverence.* Now reverence is only love directed to a superior, and the aspirant should seek one more advanced than himself to whom he can direct his love and reverence. Happy the man who can find such a one when he seeks, for such finding gives him the most important condition for turning emotion from a retarding force into a lifting one, and for gaining the needed power to *want* that which he knows to be the best. We cannot love without seeking to please, and we cannot reverence without taking joy in the approval of the one we revere. Hence comes a constant stimulus to improve ourselves, to build up character, to purify the nature, to conquer all in us that is base, to strive after all that is worthy. We find ourselves quite spontaneously *wanting* to reach a high ideal, and the great motive power is sent along the channels hewn out for it by the mind. There is no way of utilizing the desire-nature more certain and more effective than the making of such a tie, the reflection in the lower world of that perfect bond which links the disciple to the Master.

Another useful way of stimulating the desire-nature as a lifting force, is to seek the company of any who are more advanced in the spiritual life than we are ourselves. It is not necessary that they should teach us orally, or indeed talk to us at all. Their very presence is a benediction, harmonizing, raising, inspiring. To breathe their atmosphere, to [Page 12] be encircled by their magnetism, to be played on by their thoughts — these things ennoble us, unconsciously to ourselves. We value words too highly, and depreciate unduly the subtler silent forces of the Self, which, *sweetly and mightily ordering all things*, create within the turbulent chaos of our personality the sure bases of peace and truth.

Less potent, but still sure, is the help that may be gained by reading any book that strikes a noble note of life, whether by lifting up a great ideal, or presenting an inspiring character for our study. Such books as the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, *The Voice of the Silence*, *Light on the Path*, *The Imitation of Christ*, are among the most powerful of such aids to the desire-nature. We are apt to read too exclusively for knowledge, and

lose the moulding force that lofty thought on great ideals may exercise over our emotions. It is a useful habit to read every morning a few sentences from some such book as those named above, and to carry these sentences with us through the day, thus creating around us an atmosphere that is protective to ourselves and beneficial to all with whom we come into contact.

Another absolutely essential thing is daily meditation — a quiet half-hour in the morning, ere the turmoil of the day begins, during which we deliberately draw ourselves away from the lower nature, recognize it as an instrument and not our self, center ourselves in the highest consciousness we can reach, and feel it as [Page 13] our real self. " That which is Being, Bliss and Knowledge, that am I. Life, Love and Light, that am I." For our essential nature is divine, and the effort to realize it helps its growth and manifestation. Pure, passionless, peaceful, it is *the Star that shines within* and that Star is our Self. We cannot yet steadily dwell in the Star, but as we try daily to rise to it, some gleam of its radiance illumines the illusory ' I ' made of the shadows amid which we live. To this ennobling and peace-giving contemplation of our divine destiny we may fitly rise by worshiping with the most fervent devotion of which we are capable — if we are fortunate enough to feel such devotion — the Father of the worlds and the Divine Man whom we reverence as Master. Resting on that Divine Man as the Helper and Lover of all who seek to rise — call Him Buddha, Christ, Shrî Krshna, Master, what we will — we may dare to raise our eyes to the ONE, from Whom we come, to Whom we go, and in the confidence of realized sonship murmur: *I and the Father are One, I am That*

One of the most distressing of the difficulties which the aspirant has to face, arises from the ebb and flow of his feelings, the changes in the emotional atmosphere through which he sees the external world as well as his own character with its powers and its weaknesses. He finds that his life consists of a series of ever-varying states of consciousness, of alternating conditions of thought and feeling. At one [Page 14] time he is vividly alive, at another quiescently dead; now he is cheerful, then morbid; now overflowing, then dry; now earnest, then indifferent; now devoted, then cold; now aspiring, then lethargic. He is constant only in his changeableness, persistent only in his variety. And the worst of it is that he is unable to trace these effects to any very definite causes; they *come and go, impermanent*, and are as little predicable as the summer winds. Why was meditation easy, smooth, fruitful, yesterday ? why is it hard, irregular, barren, today ? Why should that noble idea have fired him with enthusiasm a week ago, yet leave him chill now ? Why was he full of love and devotion only a few days since, but finds himself empty now gazing at his ideal with cold, lack-luster eyes ? The facts are obvious, but the explanation escapes him; he seems to be at the mercy of chance, to have slipped out of the realm of law.

It is this very uncertainty which gives the poignancy to his distress. The understood is always the manageable, and when we have traced an effect to its cause we have gone far on the way to its control. All our keenest sufferings have in them this constituent of uncertainty; we are helpless because we are ignorant. It is the uncertainty of our emotional moods that terrifies us, for we cannot guard against that which we are unable to foresee. How then may we reach a place where these moods shall not plague us, a rock on which we can stand while the waves surge around us?[Page 15]

The first step towards the place of balance is taken when we recognize the fact — though the statement of it may sound a little brutal — that our moods do not matter. There is no constant relation between our progress and our feelings; we are not necessarily advancing when the flow of emotion rejoices us, nor retrograding when its ebb distresses us. These changing moods are among the lessons that life brings to us, that we may learn to distinguish between the Self and the not-Self, and to realize ourselves as the Self. The Self changes not, and that which changes is not our Self, but is part of the transitory

surroundings in which the Self is clothed and amid which it moves. This wave that sweeps over us is not the Self, but is only a passing manifestation of the not-Self. *Let it toss and swirl and foam, it is not I.* Let consciousness realize this, if only for a moment, and the force of the wave is spent, and the firm rock is felt under the feet. Withdrawing from the emotion, we no longer feel it as part of ourselves, and thus ceasing to pour our life into it as a self-expression, we break off the connection which enabled it to become a channel of pain. This withdrawal of consciousness may be much facilitated if, in our quiet times, we try to understand and to assign to their true causes these distressing emotional alternations. We shall thus at least get rid of some of the helplessness and perplexity which, as we have already seen, are due to ignorance. [Page 16]

These alternations of happiness and depression are primarily manifestations of that law of periodicity, or law of rhythm, which guides the universe. Night and day alternate in the physical life of man as do happiness and depression in his emotional life. As the ebb and flow in the ocean, so are the ebb and flow in human feelings. There are tides in the human heart as in the affairs of men and as in the sea. Joy follows sorrow and sorrow follows joy, as surely as death follows birth and birth death. That this is so is not only a theory of a law, but it is also a fact to which witness is borne by all who have gained experience in the spiritual life. In the famous *Imitation of Christ* it is said that comfort and sorrow thus alternate, and " this is nothing new nor strange unto them that have experience in the way of God; for the great saints and ancient prophets had often-times experience of such kind of vicissitudes ... If great saints were so dealt with, we that are weak and poor ought not to despair if we be sometimes hot and sometimes cold ... I never found any so religious and devout, that he had not sometimes a withdrawing of grace or felt not some decrease of zeal." (Bk. II, ix, 4, 5, 7.) This alternation of states being recognized as the result of a general law, a special manifestation of a universal principle, it becomes possible for us to utilize this knowledge both as a warning and an encouragement. We may be passing through a period of great spiritual illumination, when all seems to be easy of [Page 17] accomplishment, when the glow of devotion sheds its glory over life, and when the peace of sure insight is ours. Such a condition is often one of considerable danger, its very happiness lulling us into a careless security, and forcing into growth any remaining germs of the lower nature. At such moments the recalling of past periods of gloom is often useful, so that happiness may not become elation, nor enjoyment lead to attachment to pleasure; balancing the present joy by the memory of past trouble and the calm prevision of trouble yet to come, we reach equilibrium and find a middle point of rest; we can then gain all the advantages that accrue from seizing a favorable opportunity for progress without risking a slip backwards from premature triumph. When the night comes down and all the life has ebbed away, when we find ourselves cold and indifferent, caring for nothing that had first attracted us, then, knowing the law, we can quietly say: *This also will pass in its turn, light and life must come back, and the old love will again glow warmly forth.* We refuse to be unduly depressed in the gloom, as we refused to be unduly elated in the light; we balance one experience against the other, removing the thorn of present pain by the memory of past joy and the foretaste of joy in the future; we learn in happiness to remember sorrow and in sorrow to remember happiness, till neither the one nor the other can shake the steady foothold of the soul. Thus we begin [Page 18] to rise above the lower stages of consciousness in which we are flung from one extreme to the other, and to gain the equilibrium which is called yoga. Thus the existence of the law becomes to us not a theory but a conviction, and we gradually learn something of the peace of the Self.

It may be well also for us to realize that the way in which we face and live through this trial of inner darkness and deadness is one of the surest tests of spiritual evolution. " What worldly man is there that would not willingly receive spiritual joy and comfort if he could always have it ? For spiritual comforts exceed all the delights of the world and the pleasures of the flesh . . . But no man can always enjoy these divine comforts according to his desire; for the time of trial is never far away . . . Are not all those to be

called mercenary who are ever seeking consolations ? . . . Where shall one be found who is willing to serve God for naught ? Barely is anyone found so spiritual as to have suffered the loss of all things." (Bk. II, x, 1; xi, 3, 4) The subtle germs of selfishness persist far on into the life of discipleship, though they then ape in their growth the semblance of virtues, and hide the serpent of desire under the fair blossom of beneficence or of devotion. Few indeed are they who serve for nothing, who have eradicated the root of desire, and have not merely cut off the branches that spread above ground. Many a one who has tasted the subtle joy of spiritual [Page 19] experience finds therein his reward for the grosser delights he has renounced, and when the keen ordeal of spiritual darkness bars his way and he has to enter into that darkness unbefriended and apparently alone, then he learns by the bitter and humiliating lesson of disillusion that he has been serving his ideal for wages and not for love. Well for us if we can be glad in the darkness as well as in the light, by the sure faith in — though not yet by the vision of — that Flame which burns evermore within, THAT from the light of which we can never be separated, for it is in truth our very Self. Bankrupt in Time must we be, ere ours is the wealth of the Eternal, and only when the living have abandoned us does the Vision of Life appear.

Another difficulty that sorely bewilders and distresses the aspirant is the unbidden presence of thoughts and desires that are incongruous with his life and aims. When he would fain contemplate the Holy, the presence of the unholy thrusts itself upon him; when he would see the radiant face of the Divine Man, the mask of the satyr leers at him in its stead. Whence these thronging forms of evil that crowd round him ? Whence these mutterings and whisperings as of devils in his ear ? They fill him with shuddering repulsion, yet they seem to be his; can he really be the father of this foul swarm ? Once again an understanding of the cause at work may rob the effect of its sharp poison-tooth, and [Page 20] deliver us from the impotence due to ignorance. It is a commonplace of Theosophical teaching that life embodies itself in forms, and that the life-energy which comes forth from that aspect of the Self which is knowledge, moulds the matter of the mental plane into thought-forms. The vibrations that affect the mental body determine the materials that are built into its composition, and these materials are slowly changed in accordance with the changes in the vibrations sent forth. If the consciousness cease to work in a particular way, the materials which answered to those previous workings gradually lose their activity, finally becoming effete matter and being shaken out of the mental body. A considerable number of stages, however, intervene between the full activity of the matter constantly answering to mental impulses and its final deadness when ready for expulsion. Until the last stage is reached, it is capable of being thrown into renewed activity by mental impulses either from within or from without, and long after the man has ceased to energize it, having outgrown the stage it represents, it may be thrown into active vibration, made to start up as a living thought, by a wholly external influence. For example: a man has succeeded in purifying his thoughts from sensuality, and his mind no longer generates impure ideas nor takes pleasure in contemplating impure images. The coarse matter, which in the mental and astral bodies vibrates under such impulses, is no longer [Page 21] being vivified by him, and the thought-forms erst created by him are dying or dead. But he meets someone in whom these things are active, and the vibrations sent out by him revivify the dying thought-forms, lending them a temporary and artificial life; they start up as the aspirant's own thoughts, presenting themselves as the children of his mind, and he knows not that they are but corpses from his past, re-animated by the evil magic of impure propinquity. The very contrast they afford to his purified mind adds to the harassing torture of their presence, as though a dead body were fettered to a living man. But when he learns their true nature, they lose their power to torment. He can look at them calmly as remnants of his past, so that they cease to be the poisoners of his present. He knows that the life in them is an alien one and is not drawn from him, and he can " wait, with the patience of confidence, for the hour when they shall affect *him* no longer ".

Sometimes in the case of a person who is making rapid progress, this temporary revivification is caused deliberately by those who are seeking to retard evolution, those who set themselves against the Good Law. They may send a thought-force calculated to stir the dying ghosts into weird activity, with the set purpose of causing distress, even when the aspirant has passed beyond the reach of temptation along these lines. Once again the difficulty ceases when the [Page 22] thoughts are known to draw their energy from outside and not from inside, when the man can calmly say to the surging crowd of impish tormentors: "You are not mine, you are no part of me, your life is not drawn from my thought. Ere long you will be dead beyond possibility of resurrection, and meanwhile you are but phantoms, shades that were once my foes."

Another fruitful source of trouble is the great magician Time, past-master of illusion. He imposes on us a sense of hurry, of unrest, by masking the oneness of our life with the veils of births and deaths. The aspirant cries out eagerly: "How much can I do, what progress can I make, during my present life?" There is no such thing as a *present life*; there is but one life — past and future, with the ever-changing moment that is their meeting-place; on one side of it we see the past, on the other side the future, and it is itself as invisible as the little piece of ground on which we stand. There is but one life, without beginning and without ending, the ageless, timeless life, and our arbitrary divisions of it by the ever-recurring incidents of births and deaths delude us and ensnare. These are some of the traps set for the Self by the lower nature, which would fain keep its hold on the winged Immortal that is straying through its miry paths. This bird of paradise is so fair a thing, as its plumes begin to grow that all the powers of nature fall to loving it, and set snares to [Page 23] hold it prisoner; and of all the snares the illusion of Time is the most subtle.

When a vision of truth has come late in a physical life, this discouragement as to time is apt to be most keenly felt. "I am too old to begin; if I had only known this in youth" is the cry. Yet truly the path is one, as the life is one, and all the path must be trodden in the life; what matters it then whether one stage of the path be trodden or not during a particular part of a physical life? If A and B are both going to catch their first glimpse of the Reality two years hence, what matters it that A will then be seventy years of age while B will be a lad of twenty? A will return and begin anew his work on earth when B is ageing, and each will pass many times through the childhood, youth and old age of the body, while traveling along the higher stages of the path of life. The old man who *late in life* as we say, begins to learn the truths of the Ancient Wisdom, instead of lamenting over his age and saying: "how little I can do in the short time that remains to me," should say: "how good a foundation I can lay for my next incarnation, thanks to this learning of the truth." We are not slaves of Time, save as we bow to his imperious tyranny, and let him bind over our eyes his bandages of birth and death. We are always ourselves, and can pace steadfastly onwards through the changing lights and shadows cast by his magic lantern on the life he cannot age. Why are the Gods figured as [Page 24] ever young, save to remind us that the true life untouched by Time? We borrow some of the strength and calm of Eternity when we try to live in it, escaping from the meshes of the great enchanter.

Many another difficulty will stretch itself across the upward path as the aspirant essays to tread it, but a resolute will and a devoted heart, lighted by knowledge, will conquer all in the end and will reach the Supreme Goal. To rest on the Law is one of the secrets of peace, to trust it utterly at all times, not least when the gloom descends. No soul that aspires can ever fail to rise; no heart that loves can ever be abandoned. Difficulties exist only that in overcoming them we may grow strong, and they only who have suffered are able to save.