

# Seeking the Master

by Dion Fortune

How shall he who has glimpsed the possibility of the Great Work find a Master who shall train him for its performance? This is the supreme question for the earnest seeker. But remember this, treading the Path is very different from studying the map.

The map may be studied by lamplight at the fireside; the Path is trodden out in the wind and darkness of the barren places of the soul, for the Path is within, and leads from brain consciousness, through subconsciousness, to superconsciousness. It is nevertheless by no manner of means subjective, and it is concerning the objective aspect of the quest that the student will no doubt be curious.

Let us consider the spiritual history of one who sets out on the quest and note the stages through which he will pass.

First there comes the formulation of the concept. He conceives the idea of initiation and the ideal of the Master's service, and desires to make his dedication. But is desire enough? Yes, it is enough **if it is strong enough and long enough**; if it continues unwavering and unshaken through all the testing of the soul that shall try its fibre, through the purgation that shall purify it for the Master's contacting, and through the toil of the training that shall fit it for the Master's service; if the desire for initiation continue unwavering through all this, it shall bring the pupil to the feet of the Master.

But how few achieve or even realise the strength of the desire that is needed to bring about initiation! The beautiful Eastern tradition tells of the Master who held his chela under water till he was half drowned, and then told him that when he desired light as fervently as he desired air, he would receive it. There is also a Western story that tells of the man who sold all he had in order to buy the pearl of great price. He who sets foot upon the Path may take nothing with him; naked are we born into the world, and naked we pass out of it into the higher consciousness. The *heavenly homesick* are many, but those who will endure the divine journey are few. It is impossible to make the best of both worlds, for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

It is only those for whom the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life have ceased to have any significance who will essay the journey that leads to the heights, and for them the journey will not be hard, because they travel light. He who goes empty-handed treads lightly; it is the great burden of egoistical necessities that renders the way toilsome.

**There comes to the soul a period of bitter conflict. It has glimpsed the divine ideal, it has drunk of the living waters of the spirit, and these have begotten in it a thirst which cannot be slaked upon earth; having known reality, it cannot find rest in appearances; and yet it has not exhausted the delights of matter. It is best that such a one should seriously count the cost before embarking upon the Great Quest and calling upon the Masters for aid in his search. For the Masters will take him at his word if he invokes them, and cause him to pass through the flame of circumstance so that all dross may be purged from the character; but if the ore of his nature be poor in spiritual metal, the conflagration thus caused will generate such heat that the gold will fuse and run, and the form of that man be lost.**

**It is the desireless man alone who passes into the Great Freedom, and when one who is ruled by desires essays the passage, these desires, being torn up by the roots, cause the soul to bleed. It is better that a ripening of the spirit should be achieved so that it parts with its fleshly desires naturally by outgrowing them, rather than do violence to the instincts of the nature. It is not the suppression but the outgrowing of desires that we should seek; ripe fruit parts readily from the stem, and the man who has learned the lessons that life has to teach will pass on without regrets. An incomplete, abortive experience of life is not a good foundation for illumination.**

**Initiation cannot be obtained in less than three incarnations of steadily directed effort. In the first incarnation the soul conceives the ideal and nurses it in secret, fulfilling all the duties of humanity in humility and patience, thus building character; in the second incarnation the soul undergoes testing and purification and has to meet its karma; this is sometimes spoken of as the seed incarnation; and in the third incarnation it rapidly recapitulates the development attained in the other two and is ready for the Path.**

**Each individual who conceives the ideal of initiation has to ascertain whether consciousness is being awakened for the first time, or whether memory is returning from the depths of the subconsciousness after the inter-natal sleep; it is here that the advice of a teacher who can read the Records is very necessary, for an imagination fired by the lust of adventure or the spirit of emulation may lead the aspirant grievously astray, causing him to venture out of his depth. It may also happen that the previous preparatory life may not have fulfilled its purpose and the preparation thus be incomplete; the work has then to be done over again before further advance can be made.**

**Finally, there are many souls who, after being initiated in the past, went astray into black-magic or failed in a test, and have laboriously to climb back up the ground they have lost. Such souls are often psychic, but have no knowledge of occultism, the senses remaining, but the contacts being broken and the memories obliterated by the Master who has been betrayed. For these the Path is forbidden until expiation has been completed and the wrong redressed. Their own instinct is the best guide in this matter, for they will know with an unerring certainty when the invisible barrier is down and they are free to go forward.**

**The aspiration of the soul for initiation should be formulated and held with an unswerving determination; it should be meditated and brooded over in the night watches and every action of the waking hours should be dedicated to the perfecting of character and the service of humanity and through it of the Masters; but the soul should wait in humility for psychic experiences, not seeking to project itself out into the astral spaces where it has neither guide, chart nor compass. In due season, when the time is ripe, it shall indeed travel the astral ways, but under the care of a guide and not alone.**

**The Masters receive souls as pupils, not for the benefit of the soul, but for the benefit of the Great Work. A man is not trained for the sake of his zeal or enthusiasm, but only in so far as he is of value as a servant. It is for this reason that a selfless desire to serve is the surest path to the Master. No one who desires knowledge or power for its own sake ever succeeds in obtaining the innermost essence of it. He may become a magician, or an astral seer, or even possess deep intuitional wisdom, but the spiritual Light of the Innermost is unlit.**

**Let us make no mistake. It is the Spirit which is the goal of the quest, all else is a means to an end, all else an appearance, not a reality; and though appearances may not necessarily be delusion, but rather a true and accurate symbolism and system of correspondences, they cannot satisfy the hunger of the spiritual nature after the Spirit of God. The astral body functions on the astral plane, and the mental body wakes to consciousness on the mental plane when it receives its initiation, but the spiritual body must needs wake to the world of spirit before the sevenfold man is completed. Neither mentality nor emotion will satisfy the needs of the spirit.**

**In Union with the Divine, which the Western esotericist conceives to be the supreme initiation of this universe, the Spark of Divine Spirit, which is to man what the grain of sand is to the pearl, wakes into consciousness within the fully-formed sixth-plane body of spirit. This is the first of the cosmic initiations, because the Divine spark, being, metaphorically speaking, of the Plane of God, has passed beyond the Ring-pass-not of the projected universe into the noumenal cosmos where the consciousness of the Great Entity dwells.**

**This supreme spiritual ideal must never be lost sight of in all the long course of the Path; it alone is the goal, for nothing else can give the final and full completion. If this landmark be kept always before the eyes, the traveller will not wander from the way, for although his journey must be by stages and through different kinds of country, and although the discipline of each must be undergone in order to build up the completion of the soul, he must never pause or rest until he has reached the ultimate divine union. Neither must he, at any stage of the Path, turn aside and build a house, thinking that in the perfection of that phase he shall find completion.**

**Each height he climbs will but reveal the height beyond, and from each crest he must descend into the valley of humiliation in order to mount to the height of the next discipline. Neither astral sight nor magical powers are ends in themselves, but**

rather subserve the ends of the adept, who, unless he have also the powers of the spirit, is but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; but yet, if he have the things of the spirit and have not these also, he must needs be of those who wait in subjective bliss for the end of the day of manifestation, for without the Powers of the Planes he cannot return to help humanity on its upward path; he must be a magician if he is going to be a Master, for without the occult arts he cannot pass from plane to plane. This is a very important point, and one to be seriously considered in the choice of an esoteric school or teacher.

Let us now consider the actual stages in the training of the seeker who, having formulated a true ideal, has caused his light to shine forth in the dark places of the world. By thinking of the Masters we attract their attention, for it is unbelievably easy to establish a magnetic link with those who are always more ready to give than we are to receive; and if anyone after thinking about the Masters and formulating a wish to be accepted as a pupil, finds that the circumstances of his life are beginning to blow up for storm, he will know that his application has been accepted, and that the preliminary tests have begun.

At every point in his life he will be tested for freedom from desire: yet it must not be thought that the service of the Masters necessarily means bankruptcy and bereavement; a man may have great wealth and yet the things that money can buy may mean so little to him that he never troubles to buy them, leading instead a life of the utmost simplicity and using the whole of his vast resources in selfless service, asking neither reward nor thanks. Such a one would feel relief rather than loss were he deprived of his fortune. But if there is one who, even with the slenderest means, clings desperately to his slight security, he will be tested by financial loss until he realises that, if we take the Master at his word and seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, all these things shall be added unto us.

The Master Jesus is the Master of Compassion, and His Kingdom is the Kingdom of Love, but if we love any creature or thing with a purely personal love, a love that enjoys the sensation of loving rather than the good of the beloved, we shall assuredly be tested by the withdrawal of the thing desired. But if we love with a love so completely selfless that we would stand aside without a pang if the beloved might thereby receive a greater good than it is in our power to bestow, then we love with the Greater Love which shall not be taken away, neither can height nor depth nor any other creature prevent the expression of our power of love.

Do not let it be thought that in the sacrifices of the Path any duty has to be put aside: it is not duties, but desires that have to be forgone. Every legitimate duty has to be fulfilled, not evaded, and every human debt paid before we are free to make the dedication which the study of the Secret Wisdom involves. There are, however, many ways to the Masters of Wisdom, and one of them is the Path of the Hearth--fire, whereby in the fulfilling of household duties in love, initiation is won.

The sacred duties of the home are the steps on the path, and it often falls to the lot of those who in past incarnations have pursued knowledge for its own sake rather than for service, that they should follow this discipline. Let these dedicate themselves to it as to the Master, but using all leisure to study faithfully and provide the necessary basis of knowledge, and let their motto be:

Earn the means first, God surely will contrive  
Use for our earning.

Wherever the soul finds itself, from that point it must start upon its journey; no one can stand in the shoes of another. The soul must always "make good" on that which lies to its hand before it enters upon the path. If that soul finds itself as a clerk or a cook, it must become an efficient clerk or a good cook; the Masters have as little use for incompetence as they have for sin, and if we are incompetent in the discharge of any section of our undertakings, a substratum of weakness will underlie the whole nature, and the tests of the Path will find it out.

In due course the time will come when the Seeker, having safely undergone the preliminary tests, finds the Path itself opening up before him; having made the utmost of the means at his disposal and exhausted them, further opportunities are given him. The exhaustion of material placed to hand for his practice is a very important point in connection with advancement. A seeker may sigh for books beyond his means, and feel unable to advance in his studies for lack of them, but has he exhausted the possibilities of the municipal free-library? Or he may desire deep teaching on meditation, but has he learnt to keep his head during the rush hours of his business?

All these things are used by the Masters as discipline. They observe the proficiency of the pupil in them before they advance him, and one of the surest tests is the tidiness of the room a person occupies and the orderly conduct of his affairs. An occultist needs an even temper and an iron nerve, and there are few walks in life that cannot be made to afford opportunities for the development of these essential qualities.

All having been done, then, that the Seeker can do in solitude, the Star Lodge under which his path is being taken allots to him a Guide. The office of guide is one of the first that is filled by a soul that has advanced beyond incarnation in matter. After the last death of the body of one who has dedicated himself to the service of the Masters, the newly liberated soul is employed in the great humanitarian work that goes on on the astral plane; this work is well known to all engaged in spiritualistic research, and need not be entered into in detail in these pages, and the office of guide is one of its subdivisions.

A guide acts as a messenger between the Master and the pupil, conveying instruction by means of telepathic suggestion to the subconsciousness of the soul in his care; he also has the task of protecting his charge during his first expeditions

onto the inner planes, safeguarding him during the difficult moments of transition from one plane to another and supporting him until he has learnt skill in making the transition through the states of consciousness.

For a period varying from a few months to several years the relation of guide and seeker continues, and by the end of it they are as well acquainted with each other as any other pair of friends. Guides are simply human beings of a lofty type who have no physical bodies, and their personality is that of the last incarnation. A time may come, however, when the guide is ready to advance to higher work, but the seeker is not yet ready for the next stage, and then a new guide will be allotted to him and the other will withdraw, though he may from time to time visit his one-time charge; for these friendships of the inner planes are just as real as those of the earth-plane.

When the time arrives, however, that the pupil is able to come and go between the planes with confidence and sureness, and can himself receive the commands of his Master, he no longer needs the help of his guide, who is then withdrawn for other work.

Many souls are trained entirely from the inner planes in this way, but there are others which do not so readily develop psychism and for them another method is used. The guide will act as the pupil link between another servant of the same and Master who has already been trained in the physical body, and will thereby place the student under a Teacher.

Now, a Teacher is not a Master, and no one worthy of the name would claim the title. His function is to inform the pupil, not to dominate him. But a teacher, adequately to fulfil his function, must be a psychic, and it is worse than useless for the aspirant to study with any occultist who is not, for how shall the blind lead the blind? Psychism is the eyes of the soul on the planes of form, and there must be adequate astral vision if the student is to be properly handled and effectually protected.

An occult student is as much in need of protection during the early stages of his training as a hermit crab that has left one shell to search for another, otherwise he will develop nerve trouble and exhaustion. These indispositions are not a *sine qua non* of occult development, neither do they show the spirituality of the nature, but are a sign of faulty training; they do not redound to the credit of the student, but to the discredit of the teacher. No occult work should be attempted by a person in a devitalised or unbalanced condition; everything must be put aside until he has recovered his physical fitness, and it is the duty of the teacher to look after the physical condition of the pupil as carefully as after his spiritual condition.

The teacher knows the pupil by the seal of the Master which is stamped on the aura just above the head, but how is the pupil to know the teacher and be sure that he is not in the hands of a charlatan? Firstly, because the teacher will ask him for no money for his instruction. This is the supreme test of an occult teacher, and

effectually rules out the mercenary. A man, however, may be well-intentioned and idealistic, but nevertheless a fool; how is the pupil to know that he is not getting into the hands of an incompetent? He must exercise the same care and discretion as he would in transacting any important business matter on the physical plane; he must make enquiries as to the reputation and record of the person into whose hands he proposes to commit his spiritual life.

He must observe closely the character, outlook, and type, of the pupils by whom the Teacher is surrounded, for here will be seen the clearest indication of the nature of the teaching given, and it is an indication that cannot lie. "By their fruits ye shall know them," and the wayfaring man, though a fool, knows the fruits of the Spirit when he sees them. Purity and peace; a sane mind in a sound body; charity of thought and action as well as of word; order and cleanliness of both mind and environment; fair dealing and the honourable meeting of obligations; and above all, the simple kindness that sweetens human intercourse; but where these are lacking, beware. "Against such there is no law."

Occult training should build nobility of character and balance of mind. If it fails to do this, there is something wrong. What shall it profit a man if he sees the heavens open and loses his reason? It is better to have five senses and sanity than psychism and a lack of balance. A teacher of any system of occult training can only be justified by results. Good intentions may serve to protect the individual who ventures into the Unseen in search of knowledge for himself, but they are not sufficient equipment for the one who undertakes to train another.

Some cry "Peace, peace," where there is no peace, refusing to see signs of mental and physical deterioration in their pupils, and regarding the symptoms of nervous tension as incipient psychism. Unskilled in the processes of the mind, they fail to recognise dissociation and hallucination when they see them, regarding abnormal phenomena as evidence of unfolding powers. Seership is an integration of the individuality, not a disintegration of the personality. The great problem that always besets the seer is the problem of synthesis, the maintenance of open communications between the higher and lower self, and the translation of the abstract into the concrete so that it may be assimilable by consciousness, and no system of training which tends to loosen the cohesion of the personality can produce satisfactory results.

Other teachers, accustomed to operate an ineffectual system, may suddenly lose their heads when an exceptionally sensitive pupil begins to get results and naturally turns to them for explanation and guidance. Not being psychic themselves, they are unable to see what the pupil sees, and if all does not go smoothly--and under such circumstances it is not very likely to go smoothly--they become panic-stricken and drop the pupil like a hot coal. The condition of such a one is deplorable, and generally ends in severe breakdown or even insanity. The condition of the teacher is not less deplorable, though the karmic results may not manifest so quickly.

It cannot be repeated too often that an iron nerve is needed for all occult operations, and especially for an initiation, and unless an occultist has the power to read the records and discern the karma of an applicant, and to read the aura and discern the condition, he should not undertake to train a pupil in esoteric science.

Every true initiator knows that he has to share in the karma that shall be generated by any pupil he trains. If that pupil make good use of his knowledge and does well, the initiator is thereby advanced, and a highly evolved group is of incalculable value to any occultist, hence the folly of withholding advancement out of jealousy. On the other hand, the abuse of occult power has a disastrous effect not only on the person who uses it, but on the group in which he was trained. Just as the pupil should be careful in placing himself in the hands of a teacher, so the teacher has just as great need to be careful in the acceptance of a pupil, and the applicant must be prepared to submit to tests before he is trusted. He should be wary of the ever-open door. Those who have treasures, guard them.

He must remember, however, that the teacher cannot reveal his system to the unobligated, and the more he knows, the less he will be inclined to tell, and even the most cautious must be prepared to take something on trust. But if, considering the teacher, he feels that he desires to become even as he, then he will be safe in enrolling himself. But if, after observing the life of the teacher, he feels that he must reject the character while absorbing the knowledge, he will be very unwise to have any dealings at all with that person, because he will find that, in actual practice, **he is unable to maintain the distinction.**

A man may teach natural science without any considerations of personal character entering into the matter, but not so with occult science. The essence of occult training does not lie in what is taught, but in the influences that emanate from the teacher and gradually tune the pupil to higher and higher vibrations. The teacher has to transmit the forces of the Master until the pupil becomes *en rapport* with that Master; it is in this that the real value of the training lies, not in the information that is communicated. Everybody teaches much the same things; some a little more, some a little less, and there is not great divergence of opinion between the different schools; but there is an immense difference in their vitality and purity.

If a teacher have evil or unsublimated aspects in his own nature, these aspects will put him in touch with the corresponding potencies in the unseen world, and when he seeks to bring through the force of his Master, he will be working on a mixed contact, and the results for the pupil will be good and evil inextricably blended. Under such circumstances, the teacher tends more and more to be dissociated from his Master, and is therefore working upon a falling tide, and as the higher forces fail, the lower come more into evidence. Such an one is an exceedingly dangerous acquaintance for anyone who is at all sensitive.

However strong he may feel himself to be, no pupil may hope to be stronger than his teacher, for if the latter does not know more than he does, why go to him? Never



believe that you will be able to sort out the wheat from the tares before the harvest. If the teacher is a man of impure life, you cannot fail to be involved in impurity. If he be unscrupulous, you will be sacrificed to his love of power or gain. I have heard it argued that the willingness to face the odium of association with evil-doers is one of the tests of the Path; to stand by the teacher through good and ill report is indeed a test, but to condone evil action is not the test, in such a case, is of a contrary nature.

Are you prepared to lose your chance of initiation rather than receive it from unclean hands? Are you prepared to refuse the Waters of Life if they are polluted with dirt? On the answer to these questions much depends. Is it the test that you should condone the dirt for the sake of the teaching? Or is it that you should reject the opportunity on account of the contamination? Follow your instinct. It will lead you to the place where you belong.

But remember this, no one has the power to give you initiation or deny it to you. As soon as you are entitled to it, you claim it by right, not grace. If one channel closes, another will open up. Claim your initiation from the Masters, not from any Lodge; Fraternity, or Order upon the physical plane. And although the vote of such an assembly has the power to close any particular Lodge to you, it has not the power to close the Order if that Order be a true occult fraternity, for in such case the decision does not rest with those upon this plane, but with Those upon the Inner Planes whence the Order derives its power.

If the guardians of the gates on the physical side persistently deny access to those to whom it is due, the stream of force issuing through those gates will be deflected to another channel, a bare and boulder-strewn course will lie where there had been a navigable river, and the Waters of Life will flow elsewhere, but the Waters of Life will not cease to flow because human judgment declares them private. No seeker after truth need fear human judgment. The issue lies between him and his Master and none other. If he fit himself for initiation, he will receive it, if not from one hand, then from another; but if he were not ready for it, the greatest adept in the cosmos would be unable to bestow it on him.

Never hesitate to take your stand boldly upon a principle in occult matters. Never be guided by anybody's opinion in seeking the solution of an occult problem. Look within and seek to hear the still small voice of conscience, for it shall be to you the Voice of the Master. But before so listening, invoke the Master, and ring yourself about with the sacred circle of His power, drawing it in the air with your hand while invoking the Name of the Master Jesus, the supreme Initiator of the West, for there is such a thing as telepathic suggestion; and if you have reason to believe that this is at work, if you find ideas obtruding themselves in your mind which would not normally find tolerance there, then you would do well to conduct the meditation that shall make clear your path in a church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, for into that Presence and potency can come nothing that maketh or worketh a lie.

---

Scanned and hand-corrected by [A. Grinder](#) from his copy of the periodical *The Occult Review*, Vol. XLV, No. 4; April 1927.

According to Grinder, *The Occult Review* was a popular occult magazine. Beginning publication in London, January, 1905, it ran until the Second World War. Published by Ralph Shirley and distributed in Britain, the US, and Australia/New Zealand, literally every theosophist, occultist and New Thinker of any significance of the era can be found in its pages.

Historical Hermetic Documents recommends: [A. E. Waite](#), site of [A. Grinder](#), which features additional historical hermetic documents from the same sources.