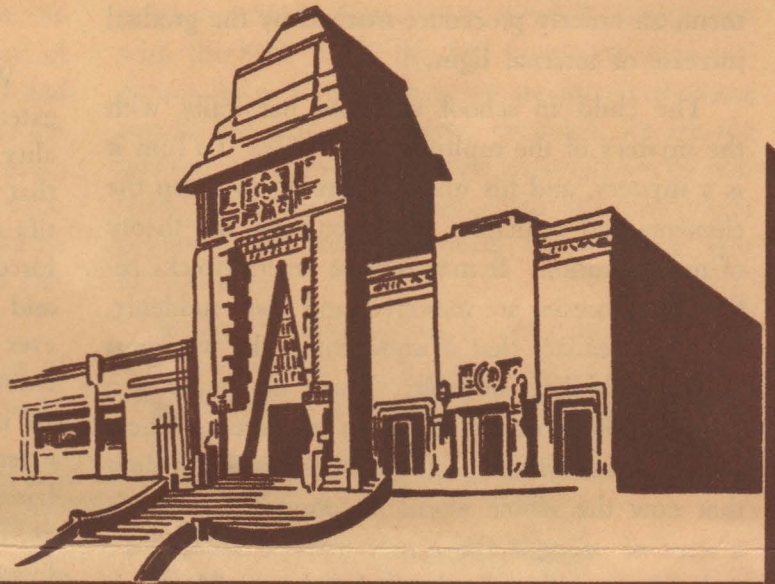


A MONTHLY LETTER

BY MANLY P. HALL



Eleventh Letter

DISCIPLINES OF MEDITATION AND REALIZATION

June 1941

Dear Student:

ILLUMINATION

To the mystic the word *illumination* means inward enlightenment. As the sun lights the physical world and sustains all life with its energies, so the Self, the spiritual sun, lights the inner world of spirit and preserves with its power the spiritual aspirations and ideals of mankind. There are many popular misconceptions about the metaphysical significance attached to the word illumination. To qualify and correct this confusion will go far to rationalize the mystical viewpoint.

Illumination is not to be interpreted as some kind of an external experience, but as an entirely natural consequence of living an enlightened life. Illumination does not confer perfection, nor does it bestow a sudden extension of spiritual powers. Rather it is a kind of dawning within the Self, the beginning of a greater light, the *Aurora* of Jacob Boehme.

Illumination never should be interpreted as an acceptance into some elite body of initiated adepts,

nor as an introduction into some arcane storehouse of secret lore. There are no fantastic pageantries, no robed figures, no priests or altars, no soul flights or similar absurdities so often suspected by the un-informed. Illumination is simply a process of awakening, of opening one's eyes, lifting another veil, opening another door, and looking toward the face of Truth. The consciousness has penetrated a little further into the wonders of living.

There is no cause for pride in illumination—if anything, the illumined student becomes more gentle and more humble. But there is no groveling humility. The disciple approaches Truth because it is his birthright. He neither demands nor supplicates. He obeys the Law, fits himself to receive light, and the light comes.

Illumination is not a single experience marked by an abrupt transition from a state of ignorance to a state of wisdom. It is a series of related experiences, a series of spiritual discoveries. There will be moments that seem more radiant than others, but the whole experience will extend over a period of many lives. Growth is a sequence of unfold-

ment, an orderly procedure marked by the gradual increase of internal light.

The child in school struggles heroically with the mystery of the multiplication table. To him it is a mystery, and his mind is seeking to grasp the elements and principles which underlie the theory of multiplication. It may require several weeks before the processes are mastered, and then, suddenly, the child realizes that it understands the workings of the multiplication table. There no longer is a mystery; the problem has been mastered. There is a secret inward flush of victory; there is a feeling that now the whole world is conquered; there is a sense of strength and a new determination to attack other problems and to solve them. The flash of understanding which solved the mystery of the multiplication table in the young student's mind was a sort of illumination. It was consciousness becoming aware; some light flowing into the fumbling mind revealed the mystery.

There is something spiritual and mystical about the schoolboy's flash of understanding. If that inner light had not come, he would have studied in vain. Without understanding, learning is useless. Yet never by the wildest stretch of imagination would the schoolboy feel that he belongs to some secret order of superphysical beings merely because he has mastered the principle of multiplication. Nor would he expect his new understanding to become a universal panacea for ignorance. He soon finds that after mastering the principles of multiplication, he must learn the rules of division. Here he is confronted with new principles and new procedures. Again he must grope for the laws, and again he must find them within himself.

A little enlightenment does not bestow immunity from future effort, nor promise peace and security in some psychic summerland. There is nothing impractical about mysticism. The difficulty is that so many impractical persons seek refuge in mysticism without making any effort to correct the shortcomings in themselves.

REALIZATION AS ILLUMINATION

We have learned that realization is a gradual extension of universal energy through the personality of the human being. Also, we have learned that in order to become enlightened we must identify the personal consciousness with this universal force so that we may participate consciously in it and be moved by it as it moves through us. Wherever there is a point of contact between personal consciousness and universal consciousness, there is an extension of the personal consciousness. This extension is properly illumination. As two electric wires brought together will produce a spark at their point of junction, so the meeting of the lesser and the greater selves always is accompanied by a temporary expansion of the lesser self. This flash of energy is interpreted through the personality of the human being in terms of the sudden extension of awareness. Something sought for suddenly is found; something desired suddenly is felt.

Illumination always takes the form of solution, solving the problem most imminent to the Self. The composer with his unfinished symphony, the artist with his unfinished canvas, the poet with his unfinished verses, and the scientist with his unfinished experiments—each of these is confronted with a problem; each has gone as far as he can proceed unaided. Having exhausted the resources of conscious personal knowledge, each is groping for a solution. It may require days or months, even years, to complete the unfinished task. Without realizing it, each of these men is waiting for a miracle. Only a revelation, only some mystical extension of consciousness can make possible the completion of the work.

Then the light comes. How, no man knows; when, no man knows; why, no man knows. We do know, however, that effort is rewarded with accomplishment. That which we desire earnestly and honestly strive after will come. We may see the answer as in a dream; it may flash into our minds; it may leap out at us in the motion of the millstream, in the ripples of a pool, or in the flight of a bird. The clue may come from the thoughtless

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words of a friend, the notion of some mere acquaintance. But strangely, there is a little burst of awareness within the reason. The whole body and mind thrill with the acute knowledge that the answer is known, the solution is found. The experience of genius bears ample testimony that without consecration and perseverance, there can be no illumination. It is a reward for effort, not a substitute for effort.

The philosophic life is in itself the noblest of all the arts. To live well is the supreme test of

existence can be found only through communion with the Self. Only the Self knows its own purposes. As personal beings, we are merely shadows cast by the Self. As mortal creatures, we are the instruments by which the Self accomplishes its purposes. Illumination comes when the instrument begins to discover the reason for which it was fashioned.

Modern psychology has invented the term *mystical experience* to explain the mystery of illumination. Havelock Ellis, in summarizing the effect



A STONE RELIEF CARVING FROM THE HAN DYNASTY DEPICTING THE MEETING OF CONFUCIUS AND LAO-TZE. This fine old stone rubbing shows the two immortals of Ching exchanging the formalities of greeting at the entrance to the library of the Chou. The artistic treatment though apparently crude is regarded as one of the finest periods in Chinese primitive design.

wisdom. It is impossible to perfect living without illumination. It is only in those moments of contact during which the Self is in part revealed that the purpose of life can be more adequately realized. There can be no enlightened living without a realization of the reason for living. This reason can not be supplied by the intellect, nor can it be discovered by the senses. The true reason for our

upon his life which was produced by a mystical experience occurring to him, wrote in substance: After this experience nothing seemed to matter any more. Everything was so supremely right, so entirely as it ought to be, that no longer was there any space for doubt, concern, or dissatisfaction.

Havelock Ellis had glimpsed the Law. For one brief second he had looked out through the win-

dow of his personal self into the greater world that lay beyond. Light had come within. The mood could not be sustained. In a fraction of a second it was gone, but the consequences of that mood were profound and lasting. No matter what he might say, no matter what others might say to him, no matter what conclusions might be reached by the "fifty jarring sects," Havelock Ellis was sustained by a personal experience. Others argued; he knew. Others wondered, hoped, and feared; but he had experienced a certainty. He could not convey that certainty to any other living creature. If others ridiculed or disapproved, he could not confer his understanding or convince them. The certainty was his own, but he could not share it. He could state it, but had no power to force conviction.

To the earnest student, the desire for illumination may become a serious handicap. If we are too conscious of the ends we desire, we may become neglectful of the means by which we hope to achieve those ends. To exist from day to day longing to be illuminated is to fall almost certainly into the illusions of wishful thinking. If the longings stimulate the imagination, it will soon bring about pseudo-psychic experiences which to the hopeful and imaginative soul assume the proportions of cosmic enlightenment.

Illumination never can come until the causes for it have been definitely established. It is a kind of effect of and a crowning of effort. Do not wait for it. Do not hope for it. Do not wonder about it. Do not fear that it will not come. Develop realization; normalize and beautify life. And illumination will be the normal and natural consequence, not as a single episode, one tremendous burst of enlightenment, but as a steady release and increasing flow of understanding into and through the lower faculties of the reason.

It has been pointed out often that tension and effort are detrimental to spiritual progress. This is especially true in so abstract and sensitive a subject as illumination. The story is told of a Zen monk studying in Kamakura who practiced the

disciplines daily for twenty years in order to earn for himself the merit of illumination. At the end of this time he still was untouched by the flame of the Self. Discouraged at last, he climbed to the top of a tall pagoda, determined to cast himself off. He had given up all hope. Having come to the final resolution and being utterly resigned, he flung himself from the pagoda. As he fell, realization came—and so great was the enlightenment that manifested through him that he landed unhurt at the foot of the tower. He immediately rushed to the abbot for an explanation of the phenomenon that had occurred.

The old man listened gravely to the account, and then nodded his approval and understanding. "My son," he explained, "for these twenty years you have tried to force the Real. You have dominated that which will not obey the orders of any living thing. You have striven desperately to discover that which no man can discover. Truth must discover you. At last, having failed in all your efforts to grasp the formless aspect of light, you became utterly discouraged. You gave up. You relaxed. You tried no longer. In your very desperation you came to a state of peace. Life was purposeless without Reality. You no longer desired to live. For an instant all of your psychic organisms were calm. And in that instant the twenty years of your discipline bore fruit. The light came. You no longer plagued with the intensity of your own desires that which can come only during desirelessness."

Detachment truly is part of the mystic disciplines. Too many beginners in metaphysical matters are longing after liberation, and too few are performing the disciplines of liberation. There is no liberation except through realization and illumination. These are the only escapes from the "wheel of the Law." Yet they are not really methods of escape. More correctly they are the outgrowing of the limitations by which most mortals are afflicted. As birth is the only entrance into the physical life, so enlightenment is the only entrance into the spiritual life. However, we must not desire too intensely after spiritual release or we shall

cheat ourselves out of some part of physical experience.

For the philosopher, "all things in good time." Without undue haste and without undue delay, without regret and without anxiety, the mind established in wisdom flows toward the Real. Under such conditions illumination is as natural as life itself. And only when it is entirely natural is it real. So-called illumination produced in any other way and by any other means can be but hallucination.

The disciple can protect himself in one regard. He can ask himself constantly whether the spirituality which he believes he has achieved is consistent with what he knows about his own spiritual integrity. If he seems to know more than he is, to be wiser than his virtues, to be more advanced than the standard of his thinking and living, then he certainly is deceiving himself. His progress is not real, but imaginary, and he should set himself immediately to the task of correcting conditions before delusions further confuse him. We are not worthy of enlightenment merely because we desire it, but only when we have won it. And there are so few who are willing to earn. The masses expect nature to bestow its greatest gifts regardless of worthiness.

The contrast between the intellectual and the mystical viewpoints is exemplified by the meeting of Confucius and Lao-Tze. Confucius was a man possessing the highest mental and reasoning powers. Not only was his mind profound, but he retained to the end the delightful qualities of humor and curiosity that revealed intellectual superiority. His thought was profound, gentle, and dignified. He sought to educate China, and to release through the Chinese consciousness the noble traditions which had descended through centuries of scholarship and culture.

But Confucius was not a mystic. His spiritual nature never escaped the conventions of thought. He never denied mysticism, but admitted simply and honestly that he was unqualified to indulge in its abstractions. He honored the mystic, studied

the mystical books, and even wrote commentaries upon some of them. His knowledge was encyclopedic, but it is doubtful if he ever experienced that conscious extension into participation with infinites which the mystic terms illumination. This does not mean that Confucius was unenlightened, and here is a fine distinction. The trained mind properly disciplined may arrive at the same conclusion that the mystic approaches through realization. The difference lies in the degree of conscious participation in the known. The intellectual approaches Truth as something possessing form and dimension outside of his own nature. But the mystic approach to Truth is that of consciousness finding itself as formless and dimensionless Reality.

Lao-Tze, in his life, his teachings, and his personality, was completely the mystic. He moved through his world untouched by the literalisms of life. His scholarship was entirely within himself. He contacted the literature and art of his time without being in any way caught or entangled in the maze of their intellectual or emotional grandeur. He was in this world, but never of it, dwelling always apart in the distant heights of his own realization. Somewhat older in years than Confucius, he was far older in spiritual understanding.

The mystical difference in age has been adapted adroitly by Taoist painters in depicting these two great men, as is illustrated by a fine old Chinese painting. It bears the title "Lao-Tze and the Infant Confucius." The great Taoist saint is sitting in the shadow of a great rock from which springs the ragged, twisted form of a storm swept pine. Lao-Tze, represented as an aging man wrapped in a somber mantle, is gazing down with the benign serenity of a wise and loving parent at the babe he is holding in his arms. Confucius, with the intent, frank, and trusting expression so often seen on the faces of intelligent children, nestles securely in the old man's arms. The whole conception is noble and meaningful. It is unlikely that there is any historical foundation for the picture. It is a symbolical representation of the parenthood of realization when compared to intellectual accomplishment.

Much has been made of the traditional meeting of Confucius and Lao-Tze on the steps of the library of the Chou. It was on this occasion that Confucius described the spiritual accomplishment of Lao-Tze as being comparable to a great dragon twisting and turning in space, flashing through clouds which obscured the mental lives of normal human beings. This dragon soared upward through all the states of being and then streaked downward into the very depths of matter, a great immeasurable spirit ascending and descending at will, flying free in space, unlimited by any mortal restraint. He could admire this free spirit, but he could not bring his own personal experience into rapport with so cosmic a consciousness.

To the Taoist, the dragon represents illumination. It conveys to his mind the strange powers of the Real. It is the only creature in the Taoist mythological system that is entirely self-sustained, inhabiting the great field of Tao itself. The dragon is Space as consciousness. It dwells in the Absolute, moving back and forth with perfect freedom in the limitless vistas of Reality. Space, or Tao, eternally is moved by the tides of Law. Within it are all shapes, all forms, all motions. This mystery is expressed by representing universal extension as a sea of currents and energies filled with nebulous whirlings and patterns designed to express immense cosmic processes. Here, self-nourished and unique, one without a second, dwells the dragon, expressing in its form the infinite courage of realization which sustains itself in the mystic ocean of the universal Self.

Lao-Tze perceived instantly with mystical penetration that Confucius was incapable of the mystical comprehension. The men met, performed the formalities, conversed for a little time, and parted. Lao-Tze returned to the gray walls of his library, and Confucius, to the secluded grove where he discoursed with his disciples.

There is no record of any opinion that Lao-Tze may have expressed as the result of his meeting with the greatest scholar of his time. Confucius, however, did describe to his disciples his impres-

sions of Lao-Tze. He was profoundly affected and sought earnestly to find some spirit of mysticism within himself. He had the greatness to recognize greatness, but not the realization to share in the lofty speculations of the initiated mystic.

This brings to consideration two important Taoist doctrines concerning illumination. The first is courage, and the second is sufficiency. By courage is understood that strength of purpose by which the consciousness steadfastly approaches the Real. Here realization must support the quest. It is not sufficient to desire Truth. It is necessary to strengthen desire with the courage of conviction. Truth not only brings liberation, it brings also undreamed of responsibilities to the Self. That which is realized becomes the absolute law of living. There can be no departure from inward reality. Once man knows, he must do, or else his knowledge will torture him. Failure to think, to act, and to live that which is realized, or any effort on the part of the lower nature to compromise realization, produces a desperate conflict within the life.

It is an axiom that that which is realized is naturally performed. But we must remember that for the average person, realization is imperfect and the moments of conscious extension are separated from each other by relapses into what may be termed human interludes. Only the most highly evolved mystic who has devoted many lives to the unfoldment of the mystical disciplines within himself can maintain his realization continuously. The intermittent flashes of greatness, termed by the Taoists the "blinking of the dragon's eye," therefore result in a material condition requiring a high measure of personal courage.

There must be first the courage and dedication to depart from the errors of other men and to devote the life to a reality which is beyond the understanding of associates and friends. Then there must be the courage to face the inevitable failures of good intentions. There must be realization deep and true enough to accept these backslidings without emotional intemperance. There must be no self-condemnation, no interludes of remorse, no

periods of despair. Realization must be true enough to sustain the consciousness in tranquillity for the success and failure which alternate in the life of the disciple. To lose tranquillity, in what some feel to be the right aims of self-censure, is again to fall into error. As surely as there must be no spiritual ambition, so there must be no spiritual remorse.

The quest for the Real must become a continuous, gentle effort. Unmindful of results, realization is the end that all things in nature are accomplishing in the fullness of time. Nothing can hasten Law. It is its own speed. Nothing can be delayed beyond the limitations imposed by the immaturity which is intrinsic to all mortal creatures.

The second Taoist doctrine concerning illumination emphasizes the necessity for sufficiency. The doctrine creates itself, sustains itself, abides by itself, moves impelled by its own nature, and has no home but Space. This attacks the fundamental human impulse toward dependency. Even religion subtly inculcates a doctrine of dependency. Man ever is searching for a strength outside of himself upon which he can cast his burdens.

Many persons studying mysticism are seeking for some source of security to which they can turn in time of trouble. This insufficiency has no place in a doctrine of realization. The dragon-soul abides only in the shadow of eternity itself. The illuminated consciousness must be completely self-sustaining, unaffected by any sense of aloneness.

As enlightenment increases, the desire to share it increases; but with this desire comes likewise the realization that it is impossible to share the Real. Realization is an inward experience which can come only to those who have won it in their own right. It can not be conferred. The impulses which realization bestows upon the personality will not be understood by others less developed.

Lao-Tze dwelt alone in the old libraries, wandering like a ghost up and down through the passageways, surrounded by thoughts of other men, yet untouched by those thoughts. In like manner, the mystic, though bound physically to the life of his world, must understand the freedom of his

inner life or else he will be very much alone. A few will venerate him from afar off, but none will understand him. Jesus, praying in the garden of Gethsemane, was alone. His disciples could not keep one vigil with him. Their realization could not go with him into the presence of the Father.

Realization brings with it sufficiency, but unless the growth toward it be entirely natural and unaffected by ambition, the disciple will find it difficult to maintain sufficiency without leaning on some error for support. His realization will not be continuous enough in its earlier stages to prevent some conflict between the personal and impersonal phases of his life. He must recognize and realize the difference between freedom and aloneness. The man who is alone has a certain freedom which he often fails to appreciate. The man who is free finds in his freedom an aloneness that often is difficult to bear. If such conflict arises, it must be met by realization.

When realization is highly developed, time and place cease. Time and place are intimately involved in the pattern of relationships. When time and place have been absorbed by realization, then aloneness and distance are gone. As Confucius said of Lao-Tze's spirit: Realization moves back and forth, up and down, in and out. The interlude of aloneness lies in the critical amount of adjustment between personal and universal consciousness. Universal consciousness can not be alone because it is part of everything; it is a participation in life which precludes forever any acceptance of isolation. But this realization is not equally achieved.

It is because of certain great problems such as these that we have so carefully emphasized the necessity of developing realization by gentle and normal means. If the development be entirely correct, the motion of the consciousness will be so gradual and so normal that these abrupt interruptions will be passed through almost without incident. Universality will increase to the same degree that the personality decreases, with a corresponding decrease in stress and strain. If, however, for any reason, the effort at development is forced and the flow of consciousness is interrupted

by mental or emotional complexes, then such problems as aloneness inevitably will manifest themselves.

If such occur, the disciple should slow his forward motion and gather up the loose ends which his enthusiasm or spiritual ambitions have caused him to overlook. He should proceed no further in the extension of some one part of his consciousness until his realization is sufficient to assure the continuity and normalcy of his living. Not to make such correction will result in misery and temporary failure. His aloneness may cause him to rush ahead into unwise attachments or falsely to glorify as a spiritual virtue his sense of isolation. The latter course of action produces the hermit, the recluse, and the fanatic who believe that there is some spiritual virtue in frustration. Such a course of action renders consciousness less suitable for normal realization and usually ends in a stalemate.

From the foregoing it will become more evident how delicate are the adjustments which are necessary to a normal spiritual growth. When we realize that most students of mysticism are not even aware of the necessity for these adjustments, it is not difficult to understand why most of them turn out to be impractical and intolerant. It is not the failure of mysticism itself, but the failure of the disciple to bring to the subject an adequate background of general knowledge and normal viewpoint. Each must protect himself with his own understanding against what the unbeliever has rather appropriately termed "sickly mysticism."

It is unfortunate that the world has been trained to accept as virtuous, traits of character which are not necessarily superior. The Hindu holy man sitting on a bed of spikes gains a certain popular sanctity because he endures physical discomfort for his belief. It is perfectly proper to respect his sincerity, but not to admire his understanding. The same attitude is appropriate toward the Christian saints and religious leaders. To shorten one's life and to multiply one's sufferings may reflect devotion, but certainly such actions should not be set up as standards for normal spiritual development.

The intention may be right, but the realization that is the true spiritual development must be comparatively slight.

How much more appropriate to the ideals of mysticism it is to symbolize growth by a beautiful, spontaneous, happy unfoldment like that of the opening flower, than by some example of the cruelty of the will which would accomplish Heaven by afflicting its own body with a heartless despotism. Therefore, be not deceived by the standards of spirituality which others set up. Do not try to emulate the lives of others even though they may have a high reputation for sanctity. Search for realization associated with beauty, gentleness, peace, and simple dignity. Spiritual progress is not to be achieved by any creed of cruel action, or by the heartless inhibition of normal impulses.

REALIZATION

This month let the realization contemplate the mystery of illumination. Try to experience inwardly a sense of gentle awakening. Go out into the dawn and meditate upon the daily awakening of the world. See how the darkness gives way to a dim light that spreads slowly across the surface of the earth. Observe how this light brings gradually into life all the sleeping wonders of nature. Then the rising of the sun, its own rays touching one by one into the very consciousness of living creatures until each stirs and takes up again the tasks of day.

There is no conflict, no struggle. There is light in the world and the acceptance of light—the acceptance of light as natural, as normal, as the simple reawakening of that which has known light and darkness before.

Illumination is a dawn within the Self. The light of the spirit brings into life the innumerable aspects of realization. An empire of effort awakes and all life continues its search for peace.

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall