

# Dāmodar and the Preparation for the Occult Path

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*The Indian Theosophist*, Dec. 2007

When we think about Dāmodar K. Mavalankar, one of the most prominent thoughts that comes to our mind is that of a successful chela (disciple).

Dāmodar joined the Theosophical Society in July 1879 and soon after he became the chela of Master KH. About five and a half years after that, in February 1885, he left Adyar after having obtained permission from his Master to go to his ashram in Tibet. According to HPB, there he would undergo his final period of probation<sup>1</sup>. In June 1886, seven years after Dāmodar joined the TS, Master KH wrote to Col. Olcott and from that letter we can gather that Dāmodar's probation, although exceptionally hard, had been successful.<sup>2</sup>

Dāmodar, as well as Mme. Blavatsky, considered the occult path as being that of Raja Yoga. But they used the term "Raja Yoga" in an esoteric sense. In her teachings to the Esoteric Section, HPB warned the aspirants that they should "study Patañjali's Yoga Philosophy—esoterically".<sup>3</sup> She advised:

Read Patañjali's Yoga Philosophy; but with caution, for it is very apt to mislead, being written in symbolic language.<sup>4</sup>

The Occult path differs from that of exoteric Raja Yoga in that the former doesn't have individual self-development and liberation as the ultimate goal, but is a means to a greater end: the benefit of the whole. To become a chela of the Masters of Wisdom is to begin to tread the path of the *esoteric* Raja Yoga. But since the function of the Masters is to further human evolution, chelaship is not something we can merely desire. A chela is someone who is being trained to help in that endeavour. And that training will affect all the different aspects of his nature, because, as Dāmodar pointed out:

... True occultism requires "physical, mental, moral and spiritual" development to run on parallel lines.<sup>5</sup>

So it is not enough just to practice meditation or austerities, or to do charitable deeds, or to study. All of them together, and more, have their place in the occult development or esoteric Raja Yoga. Therefore, a would-be chela is someone who is able to learn—in a deep sense, and has the necessary qualifications to begin treading the occult path. And for that, he has to first undergo a certain preparation.

The preparatory discipline in Patañjali's system is called *Kriya Yoga*, and it consists of three elements, namely: *Tapas* (self-purification), *Swadhyaya* (study) and *Isvara pranidhana* (surrender to the Divine). This discipline is traditionally seen as a set of individual activities by which the aspirant may become fit to his own path of yoga.

In his writings, Dāmodar wrote about the preparation to become a chela of the Masters of Wisdom, and as we will see, he was talking about this preliminary practice, though from an occult perspective. In an integral system of development as the occult path is, these elements are so interblended that it is hard to separate them. But we have to do it for the sake of the presentation, in order to offer a clear exposition. It is advisable however that everyone interested in the subject go later to the original articles and read them in their complete form.

## Self purification (*tapas*)

The first requisite for it [the Raja Yoga] is thorough purity of heart. Well might the student of Occultism say, with Zoroaster, that purity of thought, purity of word, and purity of deed—these are essentials of one who would rise above the ordinary level and join the "gods".<sup>6</sup>

Self-purification is an essential to the path. Some people believe they can perform all kinds of "spiritual" practices and techniques and advance on the path of spiritual development, without giving up their earthly habits, desires and passions. They consider the

advice of self-purification simply as a religious moral one, with no reality behind it. But the occult path doesn't consider moral life as an action to please a god. It is a scientific necessity, and to follow a series of techniques without purifying our nature will be useless from an occult perspective. Let us see the rationale of this. In explaining how to attract the attention of a Master of Wisdom, Dāmodar said:

The whole groundwork of spiritual progress then comes to this: *check your desires and learn to control your mind* . . . The desires and passions are, so to say, chains (*real magnetic chains*) which bind down the mind to these earthly carnal enjoyments and appetites. And he who wishes to rise superior to the Maya [illusion] which pervades this world must do so by breaking those adamantine chains which hold him prisoner in this transient world . . . If by our irresistible and strong will power, our indomitable courage, and our moral purity, we are determined, and set about to work in the right direction hinted at above, we cannot but *force* our way to a Guru . . .<sup>7</sup>

Treading the spiritual path means getting rid of the illusion that we are this separate, temporary personality, and thus become aware of our real nature, which is eternal and in unity with all. But how can we possibly be free from it if we are still bound to feed that personality? The yielding to its desires shows that our consciousness is still identified with it, and therefore, giving it strength.

Now, we cannot get rid of illusion by applying a simple technique. We must gradually develop a special attitude that permeates every moment of our life. It is explained in a letter to W. Q. Judge:

You know the soul of man is composed of Spirit and Matter and thus forms a distinct individuality. Our chief end should be to preserve this individuality until the Soul is freed of all the Matter that stuck to it . . . One of the various things you must do in order to accomplish this is to leave off as much of worldly consideration as possible.<sup>8</sup>

This last statement could be interpreted (as it frequently is) as an advice to leave the world in order to lead "a pure life". Many so-called religious people go to the forest or the mountain away from temptations. But from an

occult perspective, that is erroneous for a couple of reasons. First of all, as Dāmodar wrote:

. . . The will [is] strengthened, the more it is exercised; and the more one meets with temptations—which can only be possible if he lives with his companions—the greater opportunities has he of exercising and thereby strengthening the will.<sup>9</sup>

The first point to consider is that going away from the world is not the way to overcome the personality. If our lower nature is not stimulated, our tendencies enter in a state of latency. But as soon as the stimulus appears again, the passions arise and the soul, having not developed the spiritual will power, will again fall slave to them. Therefore, the purification has to be done while living in the world. But then Dāmodar went on to say:

In this process, there does come a time when the constitution of one is so changed as to incapacitate him for work on the physical plane. He must then work upon it, through higher planes into which he must retire. But until that time arrives he must be with humanity, and unselfishly work for their real progress and advancement. This alone can bring true happiness.<sup>10</sup>

The second and perhaps more important point to consider is that, as we said, the occult path is meant to help humanity (we will examine this in more detail later). And generally the aim of a person who retires is only to work on his own liberation. He is not interested in anyone else. Now, once the chela becomes an Adept, he has no lesson to learn from the world and, moreover, he can work better for humanity being outside the world, because he has now the means to work on the spiritual plane. But until that time, retirement is useless (except if it is done for limited periods) and frequently a selfish deed. That is probably the reason why the Mahatma M. made a rather startling statement:

There are 100 of thousands of Fakirs, Sannyasis and Saddhus leading the most pure lives, and yet being as they are, on the path of *error*, never having had an opportunity to meet, see or even hear of us.<sup>11</sup>

The last point I want to mention here is that, besides the work a chela usually performs to help humanity in different ways, the very

process of self-purification, of fighting against the evil inside his nature, is a real service. Because we, as human beings, are a unity, and every time someone defeats an evil tendency in him, the whole of humanity shares the prize:

They [the chelas] have to thus pledge themselves to assist the MAHATMAS in that spiritual work by the process of self-evolution, for the energy, expanded by them in the act of self-purification has a dynamic effect and produces grand results on the spiritual plane.<sup>12</sup>

So far so good. But the question still remains, how can we possibly "leave off as much of worldly consideration as possible" without running out of the world? Dāmodar himself provides the answer, which takes us to the next element in our preparation:

Your only desire should be to do everything for humanity and not for yourself, i.e., although *you* are in the world, your *inner man* should be out of it. When you do this much, you will know other means of accomplishing your aim from the Adepts.<sup>13</sup>

### **Surrender to the Divine (*Isvara pranidhana*)**

In exoteric Raja-Yoga, this element of surrender to the Divine is mostly an inner personal sense of devotion to God, in a relationship that involves only the aspirant and the deity. However, in the occult path, the devotion to the Divine has far reaching consequences:

We must consider the whole mankind as one brotherhood for the whole creation has emanated from that eternally Divine Principle which is everywhere, is in everything and in which is everything and is therefore the source of all. We should therefore do all we can to do good to humanity.<sup>14</sup>

Since the whole humanity and other creatures are the emanation from the Divine Principle, the natural expression of surrender and devotion should be an active work for the good of the whole, ceasing to consider our earthly separate personality as the most important thing. That is, according to Dāmodar, the ideal of *real love* in Esoteric Theosophy:

. . . Our ideal of love being a perfect union

with the All by an utter abnegation of the self and by ardent sleepless endeavours for the good of all sentient beings—even the brute creation. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Now, this element of unselfishness is not self-destructive (as some would tend to consider) if we are talking about our *real* self, and not the passing personality. Instead, it is the path for the aspirant to succeed in his endeavour to "rise above the ordinary level", spiritually speaking:

A cultivation of the feeling of unselfish philanthropy is the path which has to be traversed for that purpose [of purification]. For it is that alone which will lead to Universal Love, the realization of which constitutes the progress towards deliverance from the chains forged by Maya . . .<sup>16</sup>

Self-purification and unselfishness; why did he connect these two seemingly opposite concepts? Self-purification draws our attention towards ourselves, while the act of surrender takes it towards the others. However opposite they might seem it is only the combination of both that will provide us with the exact positioning to undergo our preparation for the occult path. Because this attitude of altruism or selflessness, when genuine, necessarily works to purify our nature. The motive of our purification is not a personal ambition for "spiritual" development or for coming in contact with a Master. It is the feeling that our shortcomings are a hindrance to the general good that gives us the strength to get rid of our personal nature. This constitutes the right foundation for a real morality. Otherwise, what we call morality and acquisition of virtues might be only a new selfish ambition and act only upon our external nature, leaving the "I" untouched. Therefore, the way of "leaving off as much of worldly consideration as possible" without retiring to an isolated place is "by an utter abnegation of the self and by ardent sleepless endeavours for the good of all sentient beings."

Finally, this feeling of universal love is also the foundation to the acquisition of real spiritual knowledge (*Brahmavidya*):

Every student, even a tyro, of occultism knows the acquisition of *Brahma-Vidya* is dependent entirely upon the development of a feeling of universal love in the mind of the

aspirant . . . Yoga Siddhis [psychic powers] are only the accessories of *Brahmavidya*, i.e., Esoteric Theosophy, the acquisition of which is guided only by unselfish philanthropy and universal love.<sup>17</sup>

That will be our next point.

### Study (*swadhyaya*)

The main work of the Adepts to further human evolution seems to be on the spiritual plane. Therefore, a chela has to learn how to reach his higher nature first, in order to help humanity on that plane later. In another letter to Judge, Dāmodar says that the first step in occultism is to "etherealise", that is, spiritualise, our nature. And then he asks:

How can we etherealise ourselves? . . . by obtaining knowledge of the Forces of Nature—in one word, by studying occultism . . . And just as one step leads you to certain progress, more Knowledge will lead you to a greater progress . . . The more he [the occultist] studies and understands the action of the Forces of Nature, the more is he in a position to benefit Humanity.<sup>18</sup>

He wrote the above when speaking about a process that the occultist must undergo, based on his occult knowledge. The exposition of that process is beyond the scope of this article, but the point I want to stress here is the necessity of knowledge as the foundation to practical work.

We are dealing with the preparation of the aspirant, not with the work of an occultist. And the aspirant is still not pure enough as to manage practical knowledge without risk. What then is his task, in relation to the occult knowledge?

Before a person can have the privilege of being admitted as a chela even, he has to pass through a succession of lives, and *prepare* himself *theoretically* for the task. I do not know but that according to western notions this may sound very strange; but, nevertheless, it is a fact. The man has to study theoretically first, and develop within himself this germ of adeptship, before he can ever hope to approach the Secret Sanctuary in any capacity.<sup>19</sup>

We have here the third element of the preparatory yoga: the study (*swadhyaya*). The study of occultism develops his intellectual

aspect and teaches him the general principles upon which he will work in the future, as an occultist. And although that may happen in another life, the soul retains the knowledge, and it enables the aspirant to regain quickly the knowledge in each one of his new bodies.

In the third part of his article on *Contemplation*, Dāmodar says that the student must first learn the general axioms of occultism. But this learning is more than merely reading, accumulating information, and building an intellectual philosophy based on somebody else's understanding. The aspirant has to do his own work if it will be part of his preparation for the occult path. Therefore, he described that process of learning in the following terms:

What the student has first to do is to *comprehend* these axioms and, by employing the deductive method, to proceed from universals to particulars. He has then to reason from the "known to the unknown", and see if the inductive method of proceedings from particulars to universals supports these axioms. This process forms the primary stage of true contemplation. The student must first grasp the subject intellectually before he can hope to realize his aspirations.<sup>20</sup>

The (philosophical) deductive method here indicates the study and comprehension of the laws of nature in their *universal* and metaphysical aspects, and then, by using analytical reasoning, we should try to realize how those general laws should affect our *particular* planet, humanity, or life and situations. In the (scientific) inductive method, we work with a limited number of *particular* related facts we observe (either in our psyche or in the world) and analyse them trying to arrive at a *general knowledge* that is, a theory, which may explain all the facts of that kind.

Some members of the TS tend to get lost in the metaphysical aspect of Theosophy, others, to narrow their interest on the practical or experiential side of it, but Dāmodar says a would-be theosophist should use both methods of learning on the same subject, and see if he arrives to the same knowledge by either way.

This process can be done either in meditation or as a general attitude in our life, developing an intellect that is both scientific and philosophical (the religious aspect having

to deal more with our mystical spiritual perception than with our intellect). In this way, the learning is not so much the accumulation of facts but of developing a capacity for observation and reasoning, and since the subjects under study should be “the axioms of occultism” or of the spiritual life, that study will gradually develop *Buddhi*, our spiritual intuition.

Of course, if we are committed, we don’t need the warning he gives at the end of that article:

To turn this [study] to a useful purpose, what is theoretically comprehended must be practically realized.<sup>21</sup>

We will end with a statement that is especially significant to our institution, because it deals with its very foundation. This should be the aim of every earnest member of the TS that aspires to become a Theosophist. If it is well understood, we will have taken a definite step in the direction towards the path of the Bodhisattvas:

. . . Prepare yourself to perceive the truths which are not given to all to comprehend, and gain as much mastery as you can over the theoretical side, assisted by psychical development. This you cannot achieve better than by *realizing* the grandeur and the intellectual eminence of the leading idea of our society, viz., Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. The various theosophical publications must by this time have given you a glimpse of the fact that this idea is the first step on the ladder leading to the attainment of that most difficult of all accomplishments—Nirvana. . . . Remember that humanity is but part of nature, and to attain Nirvana one must identify himself with nature *through* humanity to thus merge into the universal totality; this you will see can be done only by a thorough comprehension and proper study of the sublime idea of Brotherhood.<sup>22</sup>

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## References

<sup>1</sup> *The Theosophist*, August, 1932, pp. 623-34

<sup>2</sup> C. Jinarajadasa (Comp.), *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom* First Series, Letter No. 29.

<sup>3</sup> B. de Zirkoff (Comp.) *HPB Collected Writings (CW)* Vol. 8, “Modern Idealism”, p. 97

<sup>4</sup> *CW* Vol. 9, “Correspondence”, pp. 165-6

<sup>5</sup> Sven Eek (Comp.), *Dāmodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Society (DPTS)*, “Contemplation: I”, p. 388

<sup>6</sup> *DPTS*, “Contemplation: I”, p. 393

<sup>7</sup> *DPTS*, “Letter from Dāmodar to Carl H. Hartmann”, pp. 303-4

<sup>8</sup> *DPTS*, “Correspondence between Dāmodar and W. Q. Judge”, pp. 27-8

<sup>9</sup> *DPTS*, “Real Knowledge”, p. 517

<sup>10</sup> *DPTS*, “Real Knowledge”, p. 517

<sup>11</sup> T. Barker (Comp.), *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Letter No. 134

<sup>12</sup> *DPTS* “The Metaphysical Basis of ‘Esoteric Buddhism’”, p. 432

<sup>13</sup> *DPTS*, “Correspondence between Dāmodar and W. Q. Judge”, p.28

<sup>14</sup> *DPTS*, “Correspondence between Dāmodar and W. Q. Judge”, p. 27

<sup>15</sup> *DPTS*, “Rejoinder”, p. 375

<sup>16</sup> *DPTS*, “Contemplation: I”, p. 393

<sup>17</sup> *DPTS*, “Oxford Mission Shots at Occultism”, p. 371

<sup>18</sup> *DPTS*, “Correspondence between Dāmodar and W. Q. Judge”, pp. 68-9

<sup>19</sup> *DPTS*, “Letter from Dāmodar to Carl H. Hartmann”, pp. 305-6

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<sup>20</sup> *DPTS*, “Contemplation: III”, p. 399

<sup>21</sup> *DPTS*, “Contemplation: III”, p. 400

<sup>22</sup> *DPTS*, “Letter from Dāmodar to Carl H. Hartmann”, p. 306