

SPIRITICITY July, 1947

SALVATION

By A. J. Truesdell

As we look steadfastly to a ruling power above thinking and feeling, we become startled witnesses to a realm that is independent of the carefully laid plans of men exercising their intellectual capacities to accomplish. However, this ruling power is in no way opposed to man; actually, it lends itself to his direction.

On the Heights we become acquainted with the original claim that nothing is done by power of mind, nor might of intellect, but "by my Spirit." Here, we tread the ground traversed by the philosophers and sages. We have the feeling that the immortals have passed this way. For, this is the way of salvation.

The world has a way of proving over and over that it contains no benevolent saving grace. Those who give the world power are traitors to their Origin and to themselves. We must look to the Heights. Only here shall we fellowship with others who have seen and attested to their reality. Emerson, with his descriptions of what he called "the Over-Soul," Spinoza, the God-intoxicated man, Socrates, Isaiah, Moses, -- all the seers and prophets, have spoken of the beautiful but very practical practice of looking past the limitations of the three-dimensional realm into the very face of Divinity.

When a man dares gaze toward the Most High, he is usually so startled at the complete change swiftly taking place in and about him, he can do little but wonder. He is filled with awe. This wonder is, I believe, what is translated in the Scriptural writings as "fear". "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever."

Continued practice of training the attention of the mind toward the Heights helps us to become more and more consciously coherent about what is seen and felt. We become more articulate; our descriptions are truer; we feel that we have returned to a place or state that is familiar. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved."

This feeling of returning causes vague memories to rise in consciousness. As we turn away from appearances, turn our backs upon the abominations created by vain imaginations, we touch the borderland of reality and truth. A sense of interior well-being supplants fear. Though it is strange at first, startling, in fact, to face our revealed spiritual nature, we recall that the things of the Spirit are spiritually discerned. One taste of this "manna from heaven" is likely to leave a distaste for the mundane things of this familiar and commonplace world. But -- and herein lies the practical aspect of following after wisdom and turning to and watching the Heights -- those same mundane things are transfigured along with us, and, instead of our serving them, they fall into right relation with us and begin to serve us. We busy ourselves with the tasks at hand, and glory that a few applications of spiritual insight enable us to see that things we have been most familiar with take on qualities they seem formerly to have lacked. Here beauty reigns; sermons come from stones; behold, all things are made new.

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PLOTINUS AS A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

By R. A. Applegate, Jr.

Chapter IV, UNIFICATION (Continued from last month.)

Besides the negative road of progressive purgation, there is also a positive road which must be followed simultaneously. It is the continuation of that contemplation which is the last phase of dialectic. The soul must contemplate Divine Mind until it has become Divine Mind. It sprang from Divine Mind, and it must return to this immediate source before it can return to its ultimate one. When this has been achieved, the soul will gradually come to see that which its Prior sees. It is precisely at this point that Plotinus meets the objection that his philosophy is incompatible with his mysticism, because in his ontology he makes the One unknowable, whereas in the vision the soul sees and knows. Strictly speaking, Plotinus says, we do not see the One and we do not know It: rather, Divine Mind in us sees and knows. This may seem to be caviling at terms, but it is not. The distinction must be made, he says, between the human intellect, which is peculiar to each individual, and Divine Mind, which we all possess in common "as transcending ourselves." The former can never grasp the One; whereas the latter abides in continuous contemplation of It. When we have made ourselves over into the likeness of Divine Mind, we too, according to Plotinus, will see; or, more accurately, it will be done through us. ("Divine Mind in us must mount to its origins.") As Paul said, "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God (which is in man)".

The vision itself is indescribable. In it the seer and the Seen become one, so that it is no longer proper to speak of vision, but only of unification. "For in this seeing we neither see nor distinguish nor are there two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It." Strictly speaking, this oneness is not something that is attained. The One does not come and make Itself present to the soul, nor does the soul draw nigh to the One and assimilate itself to It. The One is, according to Plotinus, omnipresent and "is not sundered from the power It has uttered." Thus the soul's vision is simply its realization of that which has been true from all eternity, its oneness with the One. In this realization, the consciousness of all else fades into nothingness. The soul realizes that it is one with omnipotence, and that, since this is true, no evil can possibly befall it, and it need not strive to do or to become anything. Thus the soul is at perfect peace. "Here is the soul's peace, outside of evil, refuge taken in the place clean of wrong." Here also the soul attains true self-knowledge; for, in seeing itself as one with the Highest, it sees itself as it really is. The experience is indescribable, because as long as it lasts, the soul is one with God; whereas, when it has passed the soul is on a different plane entirely, returned again to the earthly. The vision, however, is full of rewards which endure after it itself has passed. The soul has been filled with God; and if it but remember, it carries the image of the Highest within it. Thus the soul brings forth righteousness, beauty, and all moral good. The soul has been so filled with these that they come forth spontaneously, and the soul no longer has to strive to live up to a moral code. It has been filled with God, and God is Love; therefore it cannot help loving. Also it has an increased awareness of life. Even in coming near to the One, it realizes that There is the Source of its life; and in this knowing it is refreshed. When it enters the Throne Room, it is become Life itself and Light, identical with God.

The soul does not retain the vision because the whole being has not yet escaped from the earthly sphere. There will come the time, however, of unbroken vision. Then the soul will be entirely and eternally conscious of its oneness with the Highest. It will have become the One. It will have returned to the Fatherland, and its journeying will be over.

The whole ascent to the vision of the One is a process of returning. The soul returns to the Source whence it sprang. ("There is the Fatherland, and There the Father.") In another sense, however, the soul has never left the One, for It is omnipresent. This seeming contradiction requires an explanation, which is best given by a brief resume of Plotinus' system. The soul's descent is caused by self-will, by the desire for self-possession. This it is "that has brought the souls to forget the father, God, and, though members of the Divine and entirely of that world, to ignore as one themselves and It." The soul before this descent was completely one with the All-Soul, which, though an emanation of the Highest, abides continually in the Highest. However, the soul is not capable of self-possession, because the One is all the power there is ("one all-power reaching out to infinity"). It is as though the soul imagined that there was a power other than the One. This imagination took form and manifested outwardly as the descent of the soul. The soul's desire for self-possession cut it off from the Good. It imagined that there was a power other than the Good and this imagination became for it the reality. "They (the souls) came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine." Yet it always remained where it was, one with the Highest. ("We are not cut off; we are not separate.") The difference was that now it was no longer conscious of that oneness. This is why the soul's return is spoken of as its awakening and why evil is said to have no reality. The soul comes awake to the fact that it is not separated -- there is no separation, because the One is omnipresence -- and it determines to return to the consciousness of that oneness which it formerly had.

Thus the whole process is one of consciousness and is performed in consciousness. The soul imagined itself cut off from the One. That imagination became for it the reality and manifested as so-called evils. (The soul created the visible world and matter.) Finally the soul awakens to the fact that there is no satisfaction to be found in this indulgence of its imagination and that the thing imagined is not the reality. It, therefore, determines to win its way back to the consciousness of unity that it had before it tried to indulge its own powers. To do this it purges itself of all evil (i. e., of all belief of evil), which is accretion; it engages in dialectic to strengthen its conviction that the Good is the real, that behind the seeming plurality there is a Unity; it turns its attention towards the Good until at last it sees, and in this seeing it is conscious once more of its oneness with its Source. This is the beatific vision. It is not the ultimate goal, because it is transitory, but it is itself full of rewards. In the mystic experience the soul realizes its oneness with God, and the consciousness of all else fades away into the nothingness whence it issued. The experience, however, is of short duration and rare occurrence. The whole self has not yet been brought over. At this stage, though, the soul, if it but remember the vision, is continuously conscious of itself as Divine Mind. Here it is "in the likeness of the Supreme." The soul must press on past this stake until the experience of the vision is its constant state of consciousness. Then it will be permanently, perfectly conscious of its oneness with the Highest, and its journey will be over. It will have returned to its Source, and all will be rest. It will then be one with the Good; yet it will never have left the Good. The whole journey will have been one of consciousness, and the separation will have been a delusion.

This in brief is the system of Plotinus. It is not all stated explicitly, but it is implicit. It is the only explanation which binds together the seeming contradictory statements that the philosopher makes -- that the Good is omnipresence and yet that the soul descends; that evil has no reality and yet that the soul must purify itself; that the soul is never separated from the Good and yet that it attains oneness with the Good.

There is a wide difference of opinion as to the origin of the "doctrine of ecstasy" in Plotinus. Both Dean Inge and Paul Elmer More trace it to oriental influence; whereas Wittaker rejecting the idea of eastern influence claims that Plotinus derived the doctrine from such passages in Plato as *Timaeus* 71 and *Phaedo* 245. It is possible that Plotinus was influenced by both these sources. He had traveled as far east as Persia, and the eastern philosophies were also known in Alexandria. He makes no mention of any eastern teacher in the *Enneads*, but that is not proof that he was not influenced by the eastern philosophy either directly or through Ammonius. In Plato, on the other hand, the germinal idea of the appeal to a faculty which transcends reason is contained in the passages mentioned above. "No man, when in his wits, attains prophetic truth or inspiration; but when he receives the inspired word in sleep, or he is demented by some distemper or possession". "The madness of love is the greatest of heaven's blessings, and the proof shall be one which the wise will receive, and the willing disbelieve." In the first of these passages the inspiration is connected with sleep or with a derangement of the mental faculties, but such is not the case with Plotinus. For the latter, the vision comes when he is wide awake, and there is nothing said to indicate that the reason is not clear throughout the experience. The reason must, in fact, be quieted before the vision can be attained, which is proof of itself that the mind is not deranged. In that case it would be far from quiet. Thus, if Plotinus did derive the doctrine in part from Plato, he changed it thoroughly as a result of his own experience or from some other influence. The origin of the doctrine, however, is of relatively little importance. The mystic experience has been described in such similar words by all the mystics, even where no literary dependence is possible, that there can be no doubt that it is an actual experience. Plotinus is thus in the *Enneads* describing a real experience and not a theoretic attainment.

As already pointed out, the mystic experience finds its justification in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the other main points of Neoplatonism, which are mostly by way of explaining the attainment of the experience, may also be found in the Gospels. A brief comparison of these points with the message of the Nazarene should help us in evaluating the former. If we admit the divinity of Jesus Christ, and, for me, there can be no other explanation of His life, then we must admit the truth of His words; and in so doing, we must admit the truth of any philosophical point that agrees with those words.

There are, it seems to me, six main points to the Neoplatonic philosophy: first, that God is omnipresent and omnipotent, and, hence, that evil can have no reality; second, that there is an eye of the soul which is capable of seeing the Highest; third, that the soul must first purify itself before it can hope to make any progress in spiritual attainment; fourth, that God should be the end of all aspiration and the purpose of every action; fifth, that it is Divine Mind in us which knows the Supreme, and, sixth, that every soul is capable of coming into continuous, conscious oneness with the Father. The last of these points has already been discussed. Concerning the first it is necessary to say a few words here.

The commonly accepted Christian doctrine concerning evil is that it is a real phenomenon: that the soul of man, having free will, has the power to act contrarily to the Divine intention; and that this is the source of evil. It has also been suggested that there are super-human spiritual powers, which are also capable of thwarting God's will. However, Jesus Christ never said anything like this. Jesus did not say that man had the power to act contrarily to God's will; He said instead that He of himself could do nothing: or, in other words, that He had no power -- that there was no power -- that was not the Power of God. He further commanded that we should not judge according to the appearances of the physical world, but that we should judge righteous (true) judgment. He did not go about seeing the presence of evil in the world; rather He saw everywhere the omnipotence and omnipresence of God; and that seeing resulted in the healing (which is always the returning to normalcy) of all who came to Him for help, and trusted on Him. Jesus commanded that we should resist not evil; by this He did not mean that we were to let ourselves be walked over; rather he meant that evil has no reality except the reality that we give it by believing in our separation from God: that by resisting evil, we were only making it more real to our consciousness, and thus sinking further into deception. If, instead of resisting evil, we knew it for nothing, it would pass out of our consciousness and, hence, out of our lives, as it did out of His. "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me."

The four other main points of Neoplatonism can also be found in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Concerning the eye of the soul, He instructed: "The light of the body is the eye." "Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." "Lift up your eyes, and look upon the fields; for they are white already to harvest." Following Jesus, the Apostle John said (what seems to me to be alike a summing of Christianity and of Neoplatonism), "Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

The need for purgation and for complete dedication to the Highest, Jesus also taught. He said that whosoever would be His disciple must first deny himself, and that only the pure in heart would ever see God. He said further that all aspiration should be directed towards God: that the first and great commandment was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." He would not accept anything less than complete dedication to God, with everything else secondary. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

The last point of Neoplatonism: that, in reality, we never come to know God, but that the Divine in us knows Him and sees Him, when ourselves, so to speak have been put out of the way, finds its echo in the words of Jesus Christ, "No man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God." To this, Paul added, "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." Thus the main points of Neoplatonism find their confirmation in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ; and, by this standard, Plotinus stands acquitted of most of the charges that have been brought against him. This is not to say that everything that is in the Gospels is in the Enneads, or in any way to make Neoplatonism the equal of Christianity. It is to say though that most of the errors of Plotinus' system are those of omission rather than of commission.

Augustine said that he found everything in the Enneads that he found in the Gospels except the incarnation. "That 'the Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us,' this I found not there." This is over-fulsome praise from a man who was converted to Neoplatonism before he was converted to Christianity, but it remains the best criticism of the Plotinian philosophy that I have found. The unparalleled service which Jesus Christ rendered mankind, of course, finds no place in the Enneads, because Plotinus was not a Christian. But neither do the Enneads have the tremendous force and power of the Gospels. Most important of all, however, Neoplatonism makes little mention of that ministry on which Christianity places so much emphasis. There is nothing in the Enneads resembling the Golden Rule or the truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive. There is no emphasis on the simple kind act, the cup of cold water; nor is there the statement, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." There is not even the stern call to duty, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

This defect is all the more surprising in the light of the emphasis which Plotinus places on love as the guiding principle of the ascent. This love is primarily for the Good. It is "an activity of the Soul desiring the Good." But it is also an intense feeling of oneness with all creation. It is, as Dean Inge says, "unity in duality, the reconciliation of those opposites known in experience." It is caused by the unity of all the individual souls in the All-Soul. Thus it is primarily concerned with the good of the beloved rather than with the possession of it, and thus it is close to the Christian concept of love which would rather give than receive.

The defect in Plotinus' system may be due, in part, to the fact that he preferred to teach by word of mouth and wrote only under the exhortations of his pupils. Thus his lectures may have contained that emphasis on ministry which we miss so much in his writings. About this it is not possible to say. As has already been pointed out, Plotinus does insist that the civic virtues must form an integral part of the ascent, but he does not place too much emphasis upon them. Perhaps in his lectures he was more explicit. This view would be supported by the strenuous life which he himself lived. Such a life must have been a matter of principle with him; for he was certainly not constrained to perform the multiple services which he did (acting as guardian and arbitrator as well as teacher and counselor), and he was not the kind of man to engage in any activity which he considered detrimental to his own soul's attainment. Nevertheless, the defect remains in his system as we have it.

Plotinus, nevertheless, is right in making God the end of all aspiration and the purpose of every effort. Modern philanthropy has tended to place too much emphasis on the second great commandment and to neglect the first, and has thus often deteriorated into an unselfish materialism. Selflessness is the Christian ideal, but it should always be a God-centered selflessness. Materialistic selflessness beautiful as it is, is not the highest virtue. It is a paradox that the greatest service that any one can do for another is to love the Lord his God with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind, and all his strength; but it is true, because, if a man loves God, he will give his attention to God and become like to God. He will thus ipso facto become a light to those who are still walking in darkness; and this is the greatest service that any man can render. Moreover, the mystic who loves God cannot help loving his fellow man, because in every man he sees the manifestation of God. In Plotinus we miss the command to go, preach, teach, and heal; and he is negative in this; but not so negative as he has sometimes been made out to be. The fault is partly in the modern tendency to equate physical well-being with the highest good of the soul.

Dean Inge has pointed out that Neoplatonism early entered the Christian Church and has been intimately connected with it ever since. There was a school of Christian Platonists, including Origen and Clement, in Alexandria in the third century; and Neoplatonism carried on by Gregory of Nyssa and others, remained an integral part of the Eastern Church. It was introduced into the Latin Church by Augustine and found kindred spirits in Boethius, Scotus Erigena and Meister Eckhart. St. Thomas Aquinas was influenced by Plotinus, as was Dante. This association of Neoplatonism and Christianity is only natural, because, as I hope I have pointed out, they are basically similar.

I cannot agree, however, that Christianity needs Neoplatonism in order to survive. Christianity needs no external support and no external defense. The Truth is always its own defense and can never be killed. Christianity has survived for two thousand years, not because it has had the support of any particular philosophy, but because it has been vital to the needs of people; and it is just as vital today as it was when the disciples first spread the message to a waiting world. It has been covered over with form, ritual, and ceremony; but it has not been damaged or destroyed. The same world-shaking message is still there for those who will receive it, and it will remain as long as there are souls who are hungering after Truth.

Christianity does not need Neoplatonism in order to survive, but Neoplatonism can be a welcomed support to the true Christian doctrine. Plotinus is not the perfect spiritual guide. Only Jesus Christ is that. But Plotinus with his firm conviction that "it is possible to go free of love for the body; to be clean-living; ... to know the Highest and to aim at the other world," can be a blessed and helpful friend on the way. Companionship with him, we can catch the contagion of his faith and dedication. Following in the path which he traces, we can accomplish what he did; and become, as he was, a light to those around us. We must know how to follow, but being Christians, we cannot err from the path.

"Glance up, glance up often, O Man. So shalt thou find thyself in unhinderable step with the Victorious Highest. Author of the Integrity that sends the stars on their sublime marches; Father of him who gave his life to set mankind into rhythm with life everlasting; who gave his life to quicken our recognition of the Responsive Divinity overlooking the stars above the signal stars; the Responsive Divinity quiescent like a sleeping giant within the breast of everyone of us; who gave his life to call our attention to our own deeply held Acquaintance with the Secrets of the finished Universe, to the 'light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' Let us write to the Angel of our neighbor's presence: Ye are above the wheel of matter and the net-work of mind. Ye are the light of the world -- free, flawless, immortal."

The End

Alphabet of
DAILY MEDITATIONS
For Every Week Day of the Month

JULY 1947

1. I will ABIDE in Thy tabernacle.
2. BECAUSE I live, ye shall live also.
3. We shall all be CHANGED.
4. This DAY is a DAY of Good.
5. Let thy promise be ESTABLISHED.
* * *
7. Do not I FILL heaven and earth?
8. Your faith GROWETH.
9. The HAND of God is upon us.
10. IMMEDIATELY, I was IN the Spirit.
11. Why dost thou JUDGE thy brother?
12. I have KEPT the ways of the Lord.
* * *
14. LAUNCH out into the deep.
15. With what MEASURE ye METE, it shall be MEASURED to you.
16. Serve in NEWNESS of spirit.
17. What is your OCCUPATION?
18. The God of PEACE be with you.
19. It is the Spirit that QUICKENETH.
* * *
21. Let us REASON together.
22. I will be SANCTIFIED in you.
23. What I see, that will I TELL THEE.
24. Be not UNWISE, but UNDERSTANDING.
25. See VISIONS of Peace.
26. Blessed is he that WAITETH.
* * *
28. My YOKE is easy.
29. Where is thy ZEAL?
30. With us is the Lord our God.
31. God maketh my heart soft.
* * *

Please join us in DAILY MEDITATION. New understanding can be gained from the practice.