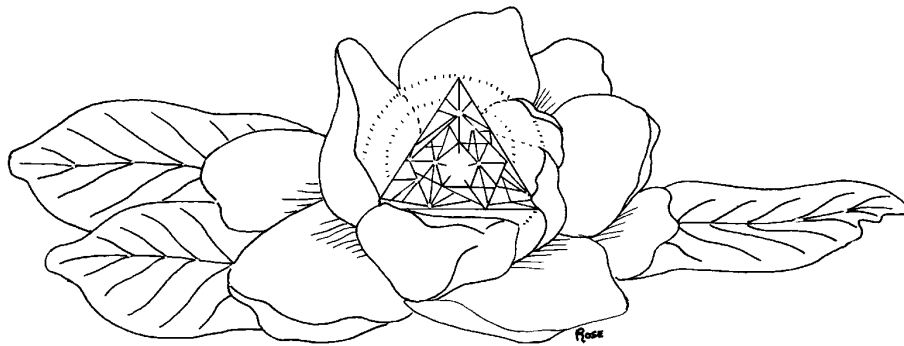


ThoughtLine

April 2004



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Individual, Group and Intergroup Discipleship

The following is the second part of a talk given at a conference at Meditation Mount in October of 2003 by Jeriel Smith. For part One, see the March 2004 issue of Thoughtline.

The Aquarian Transition to Group Discipleship

The last of the books that the Tibetan wrote for his own Disciples was *The Rays and The Initiations*, the fifth volume of the monumental *A Treatise on the Seven Rays*. The emphasis on group work throughout DK's writings on the subject of discipleship both reflects and actuates a momentous shift, that he describes there, in the way that the Masters of the Wisdom will work with their disciples during the incoming Aquarian Age:

“The entire technique of training disciples for initiation, and of absorbing them into the various Ashrams which constitute the great Ashram of the Lord of the World, has been altered. The Masters are no longer concerned with an individual, here and there, who endeavors to go forward on the Path, who evidences capacity and who is apparently ready for what has been called ‘the evocation of the initiate consciousness.’ *It is becoming obvious to the Hierarchy that with the arrival of the Aquarian Age, group preparation, group initiation and group acceptance, must and will supercede the older methods.* These older methods, built around the direct relationship between a Master and a disciple, reached their highest point of usefulness early in the Piscean Age.”¹

I call your particular attention to the Tibetan's phrase “*must and will supercede the older methods*” as it makes clear that the Hierarchy's shift in approach from individual toward group discipleship is both necessary and inevitable. It is reasonable to assume that the qualities and activities of the individual spiritual disciple that are described throughout the Tibetan's writings will, in the Aquarian Age, apply equally to the emerging group disciples. This was already evident as AAB penned *Esoteric Psychology I*, the first volume of *A Treatise on the Seven Rays*, in which DK, describing what he called “The Law of Group Life,” stated about those being born for discipleship at the time:

“Brotherhood is a group quality. The young people who are now coming in will come into life equipped with a much deeper sense of the group, and with their group awareness much more fully developed than is now the case. They will solve their problems . . . by asking themselves when situations arise of a difficult nature: Will this action of mine tend to the group good? Will the group be hurt or suffer if I do thus and so? Will this benefit the group and produce group progress, group integration, and group unity? Action which fails to measure up to the group requirements will then automatically be discarded. In the deciding of problems, the individual and the unit will slowly learn to subordinate the personal good and the personal pleasure to group conditions and group requirements.”²

When the Tibetan speaks of “young people coming in” his reference is not merely to the under-50 set in his discipleship group—he is talking about the souls of servers being incarnated at the time. Consider:

¹ *The Rays and The Initiations*, at page 239 (*italics added*).

² *Esoteric Psychology, Volume I*, at pages 302-03.

this book was first published in 1936; how many here today, or in our serving groups, were born in the 15 years just before and after 1936? Those are the years of the collaboration between DK and AAB. He is talking, my friends, about us!

So I believe we should be paying attention.

Obviously, working with others is more complex than working alone. So, why should a disciple join a group? The first answer, of course, is that soul contact—the first and most essential discipline of the aspirant, the one that leads to discipleship—naturally stimulates group consciousness. This is because the soul itself, the divine entity right now incarnating through your personality and mine—is above and beyond the Great Illusion of separation and experiences itself as one with its divine siblings and our Divine Father.

In one sense, working in group formation does “benefit” the member disciples by their companionship in service and the sharing of the burden of responsibility for group endeavor. In the sense of progress upon the Path, group discipleship is an exponentially more difficult challenge, as it necessarily involves the integration of diverse individual disciples into a cohesive unit, capable of responding in unison to the Hierarchy’s call to serve Humanity. As souls, and as accepted disciples, that is a call we cannot and must not resist—indeed, our presence at this Conference demonstrates that we have embraced this spiritual challenge.

Group work has always been an integral part of the Tibetan’s teaching on discipleship and a primary means of carrying forth his own Hierarchical assignment. Thus, he tells us that: “Groups of disciples are groups of free and independent souls who submerge their personal interests in service and who seek that inner linking which will fuse the group into an instrument for the service of humanity and of the Hierarchy.”³ This is a clear indication that self-forgetfulness is an essential practice for groups as well as the individual disciples who comprise them. As an esoteric spiritual discipline, self-forgetfulness is a particular aspect of spiritual detachment—and should not be mistaken for the “wrong kind of indifference” that DK had in mind when he observed that:

“If I were asked to specify the outstanding fault of the majority of groups of disciples at this time, I would say that it is the expression of the wrong kind of indifference, leading to an almost immovable pre-occupation with their personal ideas and undertakings. These militate against the group integration and tend to block the work.”⁴

Later in the same work, DK takes up the trials visited upon their discipleship groups by those whose self-preoccupations are combined with an undue self-confidence and assertiveness:

“Disciples need to see to it that they do not hinder by any form of self-assertion, or by the imposition of their own ideas or by any authoritarianism, based on past procedure. Ponder on this. The disciple who is sure that he is always right and who is confident that his interpretation of what is needed is infallibly correct and that others must be moulded into cooperation with his planned procedures can greatly hinder the good work. The

³ *Discipleship In the New Age, Volume I*, at page 49.

⁴ *Discipleship In the New Age, Volume I*, at pages 82-83.

task of the modern disciple is to sense need and then to meet it and this, again, is part of the new emerging technique of invocation and evocation.”⁵

The difficulties faced by disciples working in group formation are not, however, different in any fundamental way from those that always must be overcome in their individual efforts. The process is a profound struggle, as described in Rule Seven for the practice of White Magic:

“First, it is the battered earth-weary aspirant who has to struggle with desire, with glamour, with ambition and with his sensitive emotional body. He thinks the battle is stupendous but from the wider angle it is relatively small—yet all that he can stand.

“Later, it is the experienced probationary disciple who wrestles in the vale of illusion, and deals not alone with his own nature but with the forces of that vale also, recognizing its dual nature. Then, the disciple comes forth to battle and faces with courage (and often with clear vision) the forces arrayed against him. They involve not only those in his own nature and in those aspects of the astral plane to which he naturally re-acts, but also involve the forces of illusion arrayed against the group of disciples to which he belongs. Let all disciples take note of this and have it in mind in these difficult and strenuous days. Such disciples are in conscious contact at times with their soul forces and for them there is no defeat nor turning back. They are the tried warriors, scarred and tired, yet knowing that triumphant victory lies ahead, for the soul is omnipotent. Accepted disciples, who battle all the above numerated factors, plus the black forces arrayed against the Elder Brothers, can call upon the spiritual energies of their group and at rare and indicated moments upon the Master under whom they work.”⁶

In this context, let us consider as an example one of the illusions that commonly afflict spiritual groups such as our own—criticism of one another and intolerance of our individual limitations. Self-criticism, already one of the most difficult impediments to individual discipleship, very easily (and therefore often) proliferates amongst the members of a group disciple. Unless the group is able to overcome the tendency for such interpersonal criticisms, they can grow exponentially, especially with the addition of new group members. Left unchecked, it can metastasize like a cancer, effectively debilitating the afflicted group and crippling its service efforts. Attempts to resolve the problem by repression seldom succeed and often make things worse instead of better. As repression is itself a form of criticism, a vicious circle can be created within an aspiring group which makes a hydra head of each individual’s personal shortcomings. I choose the image of a hydra because the solution to group crippling criticism is the same technique that Hercules employs to destroy the hydra in his eighth labor—it must be held up to the light, in this case, to the light of the group soul and the group love that is the soul’s defining characteristic.⁷ It is an interesting coincidence that this is the Labor undertaken under the influence of the testing energies of Scorpio, the Zodiacal sign in which our MGNA Conference is being held this weekend. There is no doubt that such testing is encountered, again and yet again, by disciples and their groups.

⁵ *Discipleship In the New Age, Volume I*, at pages 681-82.

⁶ *A Treatise on White Magic*, at page 231.

⁷ See, *The Labours of Hercules*, Alice A. Bailey, at pages 67-73.

On the other hand, just as it is the responsibility of every individual disciple to be aware of their self-limitations, and to confront them directly—group disciples must be able to openly assess one another's limitations. A balance must always be struck between the two extremes of being critical in a destructive way and being honest in a constructive way. This demonstrates why the path of Discipleship is sometimes called a “razor-edged path.” It is a path, remember, that we have accepted—and the discipline (and skill) to balance the pairs of opposites is a necessity to individual *and* group servers. And keep in mind that every test is a spiritual opportunity and thus should be welcomed and embraced, like a group brother or sister, for better or worse.

It is most important for disciples at each level of discipleship integration—from individual, to group to inter-group—to refrain from criticizing their co-workers' motives in their shared service. It is each disciple's responsibility to keep their own motives focused on serving others, and this is our best insulation against becoming englamoured or discouraged. When we begin to question one another's sincerity of purpose, we begin to unravel the fabric of good will that holds the group disciple together through good times and bad. Just as the individual disciple must guard against imposing personal ideas and priorities upon their group—the group disciple must guard against imposing its own agenda and methods upon inter-group disciples of which it becomes a part through shared service. Let us keep this in mind as we approach the subject of:

The Promise and Necessity of Intergroup Discipleship

One discipleship test now looming large along the razor-edged path is the movement towards a greater integration of the efforts of discipleship groups with their counterparts around the world. The popular term for such endeavors to create groups of discipleship groups is the intergroup work. It is a natural extension of the movement toward inclusiveness and cooperation already long in progress, and it portends the advent of what might well be described as “intergroup discipleship.”

In his “Talks to Disciples” the Tibetan gives the following very clear indication that the movement into group discipleship, already under way as we enter the Aquarian Age, is only an intermediate stage in a process that will continue to expand toward its logically inclusive conclusion:

“Individual approach must be merged into group approach, and the approach of groups will someday be superceded by the organized approach of humanity as a whole. This third stage can (like the two previous ones) be divided into the following activities, which require to be mentally grasped by the group:

“That certain realizations become possible. These are two in number:

- a. *“Realization one:* That entrance upon the Path of Approach is possible for individuals, for groups, and for humanity as a whole, as a unit.
- b. *“Realization two:* That energies, not usually or normally contacted, can be touched, grasped and utilized at the time of these Approaches, *provided that*

they are contacted in group formation. Thus the individual, the group and humanity are enriched and vitalized.”⁸

It is worth noting that this is more than a simple statement of the fact and necessity for disciples to work in group formation—it is a clarion call for discipleship groups to actively work toward an “organized approach of humanity as a whole.” Thus, DK here reveals two developments of great significance to our present and future service: first, that the ongoing shift from individual to group discipleship will continue until the entirety of Humanity effectively becomes a “group disciple” and, second, that today’s group disciples should not be reluctant to organize their efforts toward that end. The importance and scope of this call does not mean that disciples today should immediately set out to make a group disciple of all Humanity within our lifetime. Progress must be made in smaller steps, and intergroup discipleship is a significant stage toward that result—which will come into full fruition near the close of the incoming Aquarian Age. In the meanwhile, the Masters have indicated to their disciples that their work is not to make a mass movement of esotericism; rather, it is to reveal the reality God Immanent and promote in human consciousness awareness of the common ground to be established in the fields of religion, culture and politics. Thus, our next step is to progress into intergroup discipleship work.

This spiritual imperative presents a challenge to which the Mount “group disciple” has been called, and is being called. We simply must respond; and the truth is we have been responding.

The reference in MGI’s Purpose Statement to a “worldwide group given to unanimous and simultaneous meditation” upon the Laws and Principles of the Kingdom of God is certainly not to a single group with members scattered around the world—it refers to a planetary network of group disciples who meditate TOGETHER as a service to Humanity.

Meditation Mount has cooperative group efforts ongoing with two such intergroups, one local and one international. For more than three decades, the Mount has been a part of a group endeavor, the Los Angeles InterGroup, whose constituent groups annually present the Three Linked Meditation Festivals of Spring at a number of locations throughout Southern California. These Festivals, though the spiritual high points that set the tone for each annual cycle, are three of twelve arcs in that progression, the other nine being the monthly CMMs, held at the time of each full moon (solar-earth-lunar alignments).

If, to Meditation Mount, the Los Angeles InterGroup is local, the World Service Intergroup is international. This past June, for the week of the Gemini Festival of Humanity, a 10-disciple delegation from the Mount traveled to Findhorn, Scotland, to join 160 co-disciples, from 49 groups who serve humanity from home bases in 17 countries. Building upon the foundation of seven years of such Conclaves, held in countries around the world, this year was a significant culmination in these groups’ effort to push ahead into a new level of cooperation upon a planet-wide field of service. As a result of this culmination—and as all culminations are beginnings—

⁸ *Discipleship In the New Age, Volume II*, at pages 55-56 (*italics* in original). The “following activities” and “the Approaches” to which reference is made—and that follow upon the two basic realizations quoted above—are the reciprocal approaches of Humanity and the Hierarchy undertaken at the time of each full moon; and it is there that the Tibetan gives his instructions regarding the week long rhythms utilized to maximize the effectiveness of that energetic exchange.

a call has gone out for discipleship groups to join this effort to model and explore the challenge or manifesting an intergroup disciple.

If the transition from individual to group discipleship squared the complexities of mastering the attendant spiritual disciplines, then the transition into intergroup discipleship will square them again, as distance acts as a multiplier to the challenges of disparate languages, cultures and societies. But, as the accepted disciple has experienced, we are not given great tasks without the tools of their accomplishment—and what historical group of servers has ever been gifted with anything like the computer and the internet. In fact, a side “benefit” of those tools is that English has become *the* international language. Though almost everyone at the Findhorn gathering spoke English, the wonder and magnificence of our rich diversity was exemplified when, at the Gemini Festival, a series of group disciples each sounded The Great Invocation in their native language. Imagine it—in a world torn by deadly conflicts and a war in the Holy Land between the three great Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity—twenty different languages, iterating a single world prayer given to world servers by the Master DK, at a planetary conference where everyone could also converse in English.

I spoke earlier of the need for disciples to avoid criticism and must sound that note again here. It is most important for disciples at each level of discipleship integration—from individual, to group to inter-group—to refrain from criticizing their co-workers’ motives in their shared service. It is each disciple’s responsibility to keep their own motives focused on serving others, and this is our best insulation against becoming enamoured or discouraged. When we begin to question one another’s sincerity of purpose, we begin to unravel the fabric of good will that holds the group disciple together through good times and bad. However, just as individuals must look upon their personal limitations with detachment and objectivity, members of group and intergroup disciples must look upon one another’s limitations, but purely from the perspective of improving their group’s effectiveness as a collective disciple and never for advantage over another. Likewise, just as the individual disciple must guard against imposing personal ideas and priorities upon their group, the group disciple must guard against imposing its goals and methods on intergroup disciples with which it chooses to work.

As to the practicality of the “world wide web”—it is probably the primary inter-group tool that has enabled 9 of 13 intergroup service endeavors initiated in Scotland four short months ago to be actively moving forward into manifestation as a service to humanity.

Many of these group disciples also have websites through which they communicate not only to their membership, and to their intergroup co-workers, but to the public at large—again, on a planetary basis and with the speed and ubiquity of radio waves. And all of these resources are on the physical plane demonstrating that pulses of energy that cannot be assayed by any of our 5 physical senses without mechanical amplification are, with the right equipment (a radio, TV, computer, cell phone) a virtually limitless source of information and means of communication. As fast and easy as it is today to call home and say you will be on time for dinner, it is now literally that fast and easy to send a simultaneous and instantaneous e-mail to all 160 individual disciples who attended the Findhorn WSI Conclave, and thus to their 49 group disciples as well.

Tuning In To Radio Free Hierarchy

Then why do we need a world-wide group to Meditate? Because, for one thing, there is knowledge and energy and inspiration that is greater than any thoughtform that can be uttered, posted or e-mailed—and we also have the right equipment with which to access and employ it, the human brain! Although the form is ancient by the standards of modern technology, it is constantly improving, and the rate of improvement is speeding up all the time. One of the things that is causing it to speed up, I believe, is the impact of trained, disciplined meditators acting as receptors for the “broadcast” on the mental plane of “Radio Free Hierarchy”—transmitting glimpses of The Plan and spiritual inspiration to sustain a weary server, 24/7/365. One or more of The Masters meditatively broadcasts The Plan 24-hours a day, with all of the Hierarchy joining in special monthly broadcasts when the earth is directly aligned between the sun and moon. We tune in, as a group, and as a network of groups at our monthly CMMs, where we invite the public to join our group and experience the simplicity of soul-alignment silent meditation.

And—for those venturesome souls willing to tune in at whatever time the alignment is at its most exact point—there is a clarity and intensity of signal that is like the difference between my vinyl LPs that I still have from college days, and the same song played on a CD. It is available to any *disciple* who has, through patience, persistence and “spiritual perspiration” established a firm rhythm in the practice of a certain kind of meditation. That is where the discipline comes in, my friends, in establishing a firm, reliable rhythm to your meditation practice.

Esotericists say that “All Meditation is Group Meditation.” To which I would add, as one who has worked with the Los Angeles InterGroup for 25 years and whose “home group” (Open Lotus Circle) was founded for the sole purpose of practicing and promoting amongst disciples exact time full moon meditations—ALL MEDITATION FOR HUMANITY IS, BY ITS VERY NATURE, INTER-GROUP MEDITATION.

The Mount itself, as expressed through its MGNA, GCM, Seed Group and CMM programs, has always been a worldwide group. Given its genesis in the work of Roberto Assagioli and several of his co-disciples, these pioneers, our spiritual forebears and a group disciple in their own time, founded not only Meditation Mount in Ojai (e.g., Florence Garrigue; Francis Moore), but sister groups as well in several countries—thus, the Mount has always been an inter-group endeavor. These “ancestral” group disciples, in their time, created and distributed MGNA and GCM materials in their native languages, much of it written by Michal Eastcott of the Sundial House Group in England. A triangle of co-servers from the New Sundial House Group were at Findhorn, as was a delegation almost as large as MGI’s from “the now generation” in Italy, Poggio del Fuoco (which means “Hill of Fire” in Italiano. Out of our connecting, server-to-server, group-to-group, at Findhorn has come a new resolve amongst those three groups to renew and re-invigorate a tradition built upon our common foundations and purposes.

The intergroup discipleship practiced by the US, UK, IT triangle is of the least complicated kind, and is akin to the many intergroup projects that have blossomed from the spiritual soil so richly fertilized in Scotland this past summer. There are no “incidents of membership” in that endeavor beyond the common purpose, cooperative approaches and reciprocal love and inspiration inherent in the experience of serving humanity together and yet independently.

WSI, by comparison, has decided to constitute its collective “self” as a group disciple and to that end has created a Website on which there is posted a group description and a direct “link” to each “member”

group's website. In the interest of protecting autonomy, a reciprocal "link" back to the WSI site is at each group's option. This illustrates an intergroup discipline that I believe corresponds to the responsibility of the individual to their group co-workers to respect one another's autonomy and not seek to impose a single set of beliefs and practices that are required, let alone a uniformity of form or substance that would lead to the bane of discipleship for ages: Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy must not be allowed to creep into the shared service of group disciples, because it is deadly to intergroup work. The only thing I have observed to be more deadly is authoritarianism—which is not at all rare, especially among spiritual groups, some of which are thriving and have numbers and wealth (and TV and radio station networks) beyond the scope of that presently available to the group disciples who have been and are being drawn to participate in the WSI venture into intergroup discipleship. But, if I am not mistaken, one of the 9 project groups already in motion is working on that very problem. Another "project" that I know is already fully functioning is a network of exact time meditators, of which I am a member and the coordinator is Tom Carney, my co-disciple of many years, a Director of MGI and the facilitator/speaker at our concluding session tomorrow morning. Thus, as a disciple, because I choose to commit to a group endeavor in which we have all been a part, I am already a *de facto* part of the intergroup disciple called WSI.

However, on the subjective planes, where the Hierarchy broadcasts The Plan to all meditative receivers who have the interest and the discipline to tune in on them on a rhythmic basis, I was already a part of the world wide group disciple before WSI was ever formed, even before I was an active part of the Mount group disciple—and I would continue to be so, subjectively, even if I had no such group affiliations in the organizational sense, or if the ones I have with them now were to be severed. The same is true for MGI whether or not it continues as a "member group" of LAIG, or becomes a member group of WSI. We are already co-disciples on so many levels that, so long as any disciple—individual, group or intergroup—remains a disciple in meditative receptivity to the Hierarchy, then we remain linked and meet one another on the rainbow bridge of consciousness whether or not we tip our hats when we pass.

I hope you find that as interesting and as significant as I do—and if so I would like you to explain it to me over dinner this evening.

In the meanwhile, I have been speaking all too long already and I am now looking forward to hearing from you, as we explore in group discussion some of these discipleship themes. The purpose of this talk was to provide some information and perspective—give us something to talk about—our personalities need that. But first, as we want our discussion to be one among soul infused personalities, Glenda is going to lead us in a meditation that promises to refresh our spirits, invigorate our aspirations and inspire our imaginations. Let us follow Glenda, then, up to the etheric levels where group and intergroup disciples hang out in the silence together to listen in on this afternoon's broadcast of The Plan on Radio Free Hierarchy. I've been phoning in a request to play self-forgetfulness, just for us.

Jeriel Smith, Scorpio, 2003