

TRUE PROGRESS

IS IT AIDED BY WATCHING THE ASTRAL LIGHT?

by William Q Judge

PERHAPS those who have engaged in discussions about whether it is more advisable to become acquainted with the Astral Plane and to see therein than to study the metaphysics and ethics of theosophy, may be aided by the experience of a fellow student. For several years I studied about and experimented on the Astral Light to the end that I might, if possible, develop the power to look therein and see those marvelous pictures of that place which tempt the observer. But although in some degrees success followed my efforts so far as seeing these strange things was concerned, I found no increase of knowledge as to the manner in which the pictures were made visible, nor as to the sources from which they arose. A great many facts were in my possession, but the more I accumulated the farther away from perception seemed the law governing them. I turned to a teacher and he said:

"Beware of the illusions of matter."

"But," said I, "is this matter into which I gaze?"

"Yes; and of grosser sort than that which composes your body; full of illusions, swarming with beings inimical to progress, and crowded with the thoughts of all the wicked who have lived."

"How," replied I, "am I to know aught about it unless I investigate it?"

"It will be time enough to do that when you shall have been equipped properly for the exploration. He who ventures into a strange country unprovided with needful supplies, without a compass and unfamiliar with the habits of the people, is in danger. Examine and see."

Left thus to myself, I sought those who had dabbled in the Astral Light, who were accustomed to seeing the pictures therein every day, and asked them to explain. Not one had any theory, any philosophical basis. All were confused and at variance each with the other. Nearly all, too, were in hopeless ignorance as to other and vital questions. None were self-contained or dispassionate; moved by contrary winds of desire, each one appeared abnormal; for, while in possession of the power to see or hear in the Astral Light, there were unregulated in all other departments of their being. Still more, they seemed to be in a degree intoxicated with the strangeness of

the power, for it placed them in that respect above other persons, yet in practical affairs left them without any ability.

Examining more closely, I found that all these "seers" were but half-seers-and hardly even that. One could hear astral sounds but could not see astral sights; another saw pictures, but no sound or smell was there; still others saw symbols only, and each derided the special power of the other. Turning even to the great Emanuel Swedenborg, I found a seer of wonderful power, but whose constitution made him see in the Astral world a series of pictures which were solely an extension of his own inherited beliefs. And although he had had a few visions of actual everyday affairs occurring at a distance, there were so few as only to be remarkable.

One danger warned against by the teacher was then plainly evident. It was the danger of becoming confused and clouded in mind by the recurrence of pictures which had no salutary effect so far as experience went. So again I sought the teacher and asked:

"Has the Astral Light no power to teach, and, if not, why is it thus? And are there other dangers than what I have discovered?"

"No power whatever has the astral plane, in itself, to teach you. It contains the impressions made by men in their ignorance and folly. Unable to arouse the true thoughts, they continue to infect that light with the virus of their unguided lives. And you, or any other seer, looking therein will warp and distort all that you find there. It will present to you pictures that partake largely of your own constitutional habits, weaknesses, and peculiarities. Thus you only see a distorted or exaggerated copy of yourself. It will never teach you the reason of things, for it knows them not.

"But stranger dangers than any you have met are there when one goes further on. The dweller of the threshold is there, made up of all the evil that man has done. None can escape its approach, and he who is not prepared is in danger of death, of despair, or of moral ruin. Devote yourself, therefore, to spiritual aspiration and to true devotion, which will be a means for you to learn the causes that operate in nature, how they work, and what each one works upon."

I then devoted myself as he had directed, and discovered that a philosophical basis, once acquired, showed clearly how to arrive at *dispassion* and made *exercise* therein easy. It even enables me to clear up the thousand doubts that assail those others who are peering into the Astral Light. This too is the old practice enjoined by the ancient schools from which our knowledge about the Astral Light is derived. They compelled the disciple to abjure all occult practices until such time as he had laid a sure foundation of logic, philosophy, and ethics; and only then was he permitted to go further in that strange country from which many an unprepared explorer has returned bereft of truth and sometimes despoiled of reason. Further, I

know that the Masters of the Theosophical Society have written these words: "Let the Theosophical Society flourish through moral worth and philosophy, and give up the pursuit of phenomena." Shall we be greater than They, and ignorantly set the pace upon the path that leads to ruin? BRYAN KINNAVAN, *Path*, July, 1890

SHALL WE TEACH CLAIRVOYANCE?

A NOTE OF WARNING

MY attention has been arrested by the address delivered in the Adyar course by Dr. Daly and reported in the September *Theosophist*. It is entitled "Clairvoyance."

Coming out in the Adyar course, it has a certain flavor of authority which will appeal to many members of the Society and may cause them to adopt the suggestions for practice given in the latter part of the address. Yet at the same time it is very true that the Theosophical Society is not responsible for the utterances of members in their private capacity.

The fact that clairvoyance is a power sought after by many persons cannot be disputed, but the questions, Is it well to try to develop clairvoyance? and Shall we teach it? have not yet been definitely decided. Hence I may be permitted to give my views upon them.

At the outset I desire to declare my personal attitude on these questions and my beliefs as to facts. In using the term "clairvoyance" I intend to include in it all clear perception on that plane.

1. I have for many years been convinced by proofs furnished by others and from personal experience that clairvoyance is a power belonging to man's s inner nature; and also that it is possessed by the animal kingdom.

2. This faculty is either inherited or educed by practice.

3. Those who have it by birth are generally physically diseased or nervously deranged. The cases where clairvoyance is shown by a perfectly healthy and well-balanced person are rare.

4. The records of spiritualism for over forty years in America conclusively prove that clairvoyance cannot be safely sought after by persons who have no competent guide; that its pursuit has done harm; and that almost every medium to whom one puts the question "Am I able to develop clairvoyance?" will reply "Yes."

5. There are no competent guides in this pursuit to be found here or in Europe who are willing to teach one how to acquire it without danger.

6. The qualifications such a guide should possess render the finding of one difficult if not impossible. They are: the power to look within and see clearly the whole inner nature of the student; a complete knowledge of all the planes upon which clairvoyance acts, including knowledge of the source, the meaning, and the effect of all that is perceived by the clairvoyant; and last, but not least, the power to stop at will the exercise of the power. Evidently these requirements call for an adept.

Who are the teachers of clairvoyance, and those who advise that it be practiced? In the main, the first are mediums, and any investigator knows how little they know. Every one of them differs from every other in his powers. The majority have only one sort of clairvoyance; here and there are some who combine, at most, three classes of the faculty. Not a single one is able to mentally see behind the image or idea perceived, and cannot say in a given case whether the image seen is the object itself or the result of a thought from another mind. For in these planes of perception the thoughts of men become as objective as material objects are to our human eyes. It is true that a clairvoyant can tell you that what is being thus perceived is not apprehended by the physical eye, but beyond that he cannot go. Of this I have had hundreds of examples. In 99 out of 100 instances the seer mistook the thought from another mind for a clairvoyant perception of a living person or physical object.

The seers of whom I speak see always according to their inner tendency, which is governed by subtle laws of heredity which are wholly unknown to scientific men and much more to mediums and seers. One will only reach the symbolic plane; another that which is known to occultists as the positive side of sound; another to the negative or positive aspects of the epidermis and its emanations; and so on through innumerable layer after layer of clairvoyance and octave after octave of vibrations. They all know but the little they have experienced, and for any other person to seek to develop the power is dangerous. The philosophy of it all, the laws that cause the image to appear and disappear, are *terra incognita*.

The occult septenary scheme in nature with all its modifications produces multiple effects, and no mere clairvoyant is able to see the truth that underlies the simplest instance of clairvoyant perception. If a man moves from one chair to another, immediately hundreds of possibilities arise for the clairvoyant eye, and he alone who is a highly trained and philosophical seer - an adept, in short - can combine them all so as to arrive at true clear-perception. In the simple act described almost all the centres of force in the moving being go into operation, and each one produces its own peculiar effect in the astral light. At once the motion made and thoughts

aroused elicit their own sound, color, motion in ether, amount of etheric light, symbolic picture, disturbance of elemental forces, and so on through the great catalogue. Did but one wink his eye, the same effects follow in due order. And the seer can perceive but that which attunes itself to his own development and personal peculiarities, all limited in force and degree.

What, may I ask, do clairvoyants know of the law of prevention or encrustation which is acting always with many people? Nothing, absolutely nothing. How do they explain those cases where, try as they will, they cannot see anything whatever regarding certain things? Judging from human nature and the sordidness of many schools of clairvoyance, are we not safe in affirming that if there were any real or reliable clairvoyance about us now-a-days among those who offer to teach it or take pay for it, long ago fortunes would have been made by them, banks despoiled, lost articles found, and friends more often reunited? Admitting that there have been sporadic instances of success on these lines, does not the exception prove that true clairvoyance is not understood or likely to be?

But what shall theosophists do? Stop all attempts at clairvoyance. And why? Because it leads them slowly but surely - almost beyond recall—into an interior and exterior passive state where the will is gradually overpowered and they are at last in the power of the demons who lurk around the threshold of our consciousness. Above all, follow no advice to "sit for development." Madness lies that way. The feathery touches which come upon the skin while trying these experiments are said by mediums to be the gentle touches of "the spirits." But they are not. They are caused by the ethereal fluids from within us making their way out through the skin and thus producing the illusion of a touch. When enough has gone out, then the victim is getting gradually negative, the future prey for spooks and will-o'-the-wisp images.

"But *what*," they say, "shall we pursue and study?" Study the philosophy of life, leave the decorations that line the road of spiritual development for future lives, and—practice altruism.

WILLIAM Q. JUDGE, *Path*, December, 1890

The devotional reading is from
THE YOGA APHORISMS OF PATANJALI
by William Q. Judge
Book III, Aphorisms 5 to 20, p 38 – 45

THE YOGA APHORISMS OF PATANJALI

An Interpretation by WILLIAM Q. JUDGE

BOOK III, Aphorisms 5 to 20, p 38 - 45

5. By rendering *Sanyama*—or the operation of fixed attention, contemplation, and meditation—natural and easy, an accurate discerning power is developed.

This "discerning power" is a distinct faculty which this practice alone develops, and is not possessed by ordinary persons who have not pursued concentration.

6. *Sanyama* is to be used in proceeding step by step in overcoming all modifications of the mind, from the more apparent to those the most subtle.

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[See note to Aphorism 2, Book I.] The student is to know that after he has overcome the afflictions and obstructions described in the preceding books, there are other modifications of a recondite character suffered by the mind, which are to be got rid of by means of Sanyama. When he has reached that stage the difficulties will reveal themselves to him.

7. The three practices—attention, contemplation, and meditation—are more efficacious for the attainment of that kind of meditation called, "that in which there is distinct cognition," than the first five means heretofore described as "not killing, veracity, not stealing, continence, and not coveting."

See *Aphorism 17, Book I.*

8. Attention, contemplation, and meditation are anterior to and not immediately productive of that kind of meditation in which the distinct cognition of the object is lost, which

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is called meditation without a seed.

9. There are two trains of self-reproductive thought, the first of which results from the mind being modified and shifted by the object or subject contemplated; the second, when it is passing from that modification and is becoming engaged only with the truth itself; at the moment when the first is subdued and the mind is just becoming intent, it is concerned in both of those two trains of self-reproductive thought, and this state is technically called *Nirodha*.

10. In that state of meditation which has been called *Nirodha*, the mind has an uniform flow.

11. When the mind has overcome and fully controlled its natural inclination to consider diverse objects,

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and begins to become intent upon a single one, meditation is said to be reached.

12. When the mind, after becoming fixed upon a single object, has ceased to be concerned in any thought about the condition, qualities, or relations of the thing thought of, but is absolutely fastened upon the object itself, it is then said to be intent upon a single point—a state technically called *Ekagrata*.

13. The three major classes of perception regarding the characteristic property, distinctive mark or use, and possible changes of use or relation, of any object or organ of the body contemplated by the mind, have been sufficiently explained by the foregoing exposition of the

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manner in which the mind is modified.

It is very difficult to put this aphorism into English. The three words translated as "characteristic property, distinctive mark or use, and possible change of use" are Dharma, Lakshana, and Avastha, and may be thus illustrated: Dharma, as, say, the clay of which a jar is composed, Lakshana, the idea of a jar thus constituted, and Avastha, the consideration that the jar alters every moment, in that it becomes old, or is otherwise affected.

14. The properties of an object presented to the mind are: first, those which have been considered and dismissed from view; second, those under consideration; and third, that which is incapable of denomination because it is not special, but common to all matter.

The third class above spoken of has reference to a tenet of the philosophy which holds that all objects may and will be finally "resolved into nature" or one basic substance; hence gold may be considered as mere matter,

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and therefore not different—not to be separately denominated in final analysis—from earth.

15. The alterations in the order of the three-fold mental modifications before described, indicate to the ascetic the variety of changes which a characteristic property is to undergo when contemplated.

16. A knowledge of past and future events comes to an ascetic from his performing *Sanyama* in respect to the three-fold mental modifications just explained.

See Aphorism 4, where "Sanyama" is explained as the use or operation of attention, contemplation, and meditation in respect to a single object.